



“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17
Good News Bible



Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year B: Year of Mark



INTRODUCTION

These weekly outlines combine the Liturgy's Sunday Gospel readings with the *lectio divina* approach to Holy Scripture.

Lectio divina is a dynamic, life-oriented approach to reading Holy Scriptures encouraged by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. It provides a framework for a faithful and respectful reading of the Bible that is sincere and authentic.

Lectio divina is a blessing for the entire Church as it opens up the rich truths of Scripture for every Christian. Through it believers are invited to read, understand and deepen their appreciation of the Scriptures and to seek guidance for their lives in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Our real goal is to meet our Lord as we read his Word and allow him to transform our lives to be more like him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

All the information necessary for you to have a meaningful encounter with God's Word is included in this booklet. These outlines can be used individually or in groups.

The following pages introduce the four steps of *lectio divina* with some extra tips for using these outlines in groups.



ABOUT LECTIO DIVINA

History

Lectio divina dates back to the early Church Fathers around 300 AD. The four steps were first recorded by a monk, Guigo Cartujo, in 1173. These steps Lectio (Reading), Meditatio (Meditation), Oratio (Prayer) and Contemplatio (Contemplation) remain central today although methods differ.

Overview

In essence *lectio divina* is a simple way to meet with the Lord through reflection and prayer based on Holy Scripture. It is not a study method. Background knowledge can be helpful but is not essential.

Used in groups a structure is necessary but for individuals the steps need not be followed rigidly. Our aim is meeting God, not just completing the steps themselves. So when the Lord impresses something on us we need to stop and wait. We can always come back to the steps another time. We don't want to lose what God is saying to us.

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1 LECTIO – READING

Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows and cannot be rushed. So begin with a prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to 'lead you into all the truth' (John 16:13).

Read the passage slowly and carefully. Avoid being tempted to look at the Lectio comments or any of the other steps at this stage.

Have a notebook and pencil ready. Underline, or make a note of, any words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down any questions that occur to you. Read the passage several times and read it aloud. Give yourself time to understand and appreciate what is being said.

Now read the Lectio comments and reflect on the ways they are similar or different to your first thoughts.

2 MEDITATIO – MEDITATION

Meditation deepens our appreciation of the passage and helps us to explore its riches. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living...' So approach Scripture in faith expecting God to speak to you. He may reveal something of himself to you. He might highlight an attitude or behaviour of yours that needs to change. He might show you a promise to encourage and strengthen you.

Here are some suggested approaches you may find helpful.

Use your imagination. Picture the passage; put yourself into the scene and become part of the story. See things through the eyes of the other characters, listen to what they say, watch their reactions, imagine how they feel. Keep coming back to Jesus. Get to know him; delight yourself and become fascinated by him, his words, his actions, the way he responds – everything about him.

Ask questions. Use your own questions and the questions given to think more deeply about the passage and what God wants to say to you. Ask Jesus why he did and said what he did. Try to understand his reasons and intentions. Allow time to be quiet, to listen and hear his answer.

Let the Word be a mirror for you. As we read the Bible it shows us more of what the Christian life looks like and where ours needs to change. We see how God's Word applies to our daily life, as an individual, and as part of our community and society. We will find promises and encouragement, challenges and demands. If we are willing God will nurture and free us to be more fully human and fully alive.

3 ORATIO – PRAYER

Prayer opens up a conversation between God and us. In the Psalms we see how the writers pour out their feelings to God, often mixing hopes and fears side by side. God values our honesty. We can't hide anything from him anyway. Using the words of the responsorial psalm can help us but we can also use our own words to have a heart-to-heart conversation with a very special friend.

Through prayer we make our response to the light God's Word has shed on how we are living our lives. Now we can bring what is happening in our own life and in our community before God. We speak and listen, listen and reflect – it is a conversation with God.

4 CONTEMPLATIO – CONTEMPLATION

To help us interpret the Gospel reading the Liturgy provides two further Scripture readings. Reflecting on these can both enrich our understanding of the text and bring into focus a response we may need to make to the Lord.

Contemplation gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with God. Be still before God and invite him in. Few words, if any, are necessary here. Enjoy time in his presence. Just be with him and let him love you. Let him refresh your soul.

Review

After you have finished your time of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation you may want to jot down in a notebook any experiences or thoughts that particularly impressed you. You may find it helpful to look back at these later.

USING THESE OUTLINES IN GROUPS

When *lectio divina* is used in a group a little preparation is needed.

1 LECTIO:

Try one or more of the following ways of reading the passage. See what works best for your particular group.

Individual reading. To start with give everyone time to read through the passage silently.

Proclamation of the Word. One person reads (proclaims) the Word. This is the traditional manner of reading in the liturgical celebration.

Two readers. Two people read the text aloud alternately.

Each person reads a verse. This is a way of involving each participant, inviting each to read from his own Bible, so that the reading is attentive and dynamic.

Audio version. If you have access to a recorded version of the text you could also use that. You may notice different words are stressed.

With different characters. Approach the text somewhat like a drama, in which one person is the narrator/reader, another takes the part of Jesus, a third takes another character. This can be the most dynamic or engaging method and helps us to identify just what the different characters in the passage are saying.

2 MEDITATIO:

- In the group setting, it is important that everyone is given time to participate, to share what the Lord has been saying to them. While the Lord speaks through his Word, he also speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. So as we listen to others we need to open our hearts to hear the Lord's voice speaking through them.
- It is important that everyone in the group understands that this sharing is to build one another up and enrich our experience. It is not necessary that everyone agrees about what is shared. You need to be careful to avoid this time turning into a debate or argument. The Lord knows us each as individuals so will have different things to say to us personally at this specific point in our lives.
- You can start with a simple question like "What catches your attention in this passage?" and use the printed questions. The aim is to help everyone feel comfortable to speak and share how the text has inspired them. Gently keep the group focused on the text and what God is saying.

3 ORATIO:

We suggest you give people time for personal silent prayer before God. You can also give opportunity for people to pray out loud in their own words and use verses from the responsorial prayer. The aim should be to help each person make a personal response to the Lord during this time.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Contemplation by its very nature is an individual exercise and silence is necessary. If you have room it may be helpful to suggest people move so they have their own 'personal space'.

**The Scripture references for the Psalms follow the Hebrew numbering used in many recent Bibles including the Jerusalem Bible but some Bibles use different numbering. If Psalm 23 The Good Shepherd is numbered as Psalm 22 in your Bible, please refer to your church lectionary for all the correct Psalm references for your Bible.*

REMAIN FAITHFUL

Mark 13:33-37

³³ Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It will be like a man who goes away from home on a trip and leaves his servants in charge, after giving to each one his own work to do and after telling the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵ Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming—it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. ³⁷ What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!"

*Other Readings: Isaiah 63:16-17, 64:1, 3-8; *Psalm 80:1-2, 14-15, 17-18;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9*

LECTIO:

We start our preparation for this great season of Advent not with Jesus' birth but by looking forward, to our Lord's Second Coming.

In the preceding verses of Mark 13, Jesus teaches important truths about what will happen before he returns to earth at the end of history. While we are given some clues about what will unfold, it is clear that Jesus wants to divert our attention from fruitless and divisive speculation about dates, towards faithful service.

So Jesus concludes this teaching on his Second Coming with these few verses focusing on the need to stay alert and remain faithful to the task he has given us to do. Jesus uses the parable of a master leaving his servants to do their duties while he goes on a journey to help us understand this point. No one knows exactly when the master will return.

**See note at the end of the Introduction on the previous page.*

MEDITATIO:

- What is the main message of today's parable? Is it that Jesus expects to find us doing the work he asked us to do when he returns?
- In the parable each of the servants had been given 'his own work to do' (verse 34). What 'work' has Jesus given to all Christians to do? What things has he given you to do personally?
- Consider what can happen when debating with other Christians about when Jesus will return. Compare this to our responsibility towards our fellow servants in Jesus' parable. Which is more constructive?
- Mark 13 reminds us this world will one day come to an end. Are we spending too much time investing in temporary things?

ORATIO:

Praise God – one day Jesus will return again in great power and glory and the end of history lies under his direct control.

Pray for those who haven't accepted God's forgiveness yet. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal Jesus to them and they will respond to his grace and mercy.

Ask God to give you the grace and strength you need to serve him and do his will. Pray that God will keep you from becoming weary or discouraged.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The two additional readings from today's liturgy come from Isaiah and Corinthians. The first, from Isaiah 63 and 64 is a passionate plea of confession to restore a broken relationship with God. Despite knowing God's special love and faithfulness, the children of Israel repeatedly went astray. We can all identify with them at different times in our lives. The reason Jesus came to earth was to provide a way back. Repentance restores our relationship with God. Praise God!

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 offers us such encouragement. It reminds us we're not left alone to try and live the Christian life on our own. We can draw on the spiritual riches we have been given in Christ. Jesus is at work in our lives to help us remain faithful until the day he returns again.

THE GOOD NEWS GIFT

Mark 1:1-8

¹This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²It began as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“God said, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you.’

³Someone is shouting in the desert,

‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

⁴So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. “Turn away from your sins and be baptized,” he told the people, “and God will forgive your sins.”

⁵Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁶John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁷He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-14

1 LECTIO:

Mark wastes no time with introductions. In the very first sentence he sets out the main focus – Jesus Christ. He boldly declares that Jesus is the Son of God - the Good News ‘euangelion’, the word from which we get ‘Gospel’.

Mark then sets the scene for the story that is about to unfold. The main characters are God and his son Jesus, John the Baptist and the people of Judea and Jerusalem. He reminds us this story had its beginning within the Godhead. Hundreds of years earlier God revealed insights about what would take place through the Old Testament prophets. Mark only mentions Isaiah, but it is plain from the words we find in verse 2 that he is also drawing on Malachi 3:1 as well as Isaiah 40:3 for the rest of the prophecy in verse 3.

From the heavenly court the narrator jumps straight down to earth and the dusty Judean desert. He reveals a man called John preaching ‘a baptism of repentance’. John’s ministry is very successful. People flock into the desert to hear him preach. Many respond and demonstrate their sincere repentance by being publicly baptised in the river Jordan.

Exciting though this is Mark wants to get the focus back to the main subject - Jesus. So the second part of John’s message returns to the fulfilment of the prophetic words. John clearly proclaims that he is only preparing the way for someone else. Someone who has not yet come into public life. Someone who is far greater than even John. Someone who will bring a greater baptism. Someone who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Think about all the reasons Jesus is Good News. Why not start making a list? During this advent season every time you see or hear something connected with Christmas spend a moment reflecting on one of these reasons.
- What is so compelling about John’s ministry that people abandon city life, however briefly, to spend time with John in the desert?

3 ORATIO:

Ask Jesus to give you the Holy Spirit to guide you in your life each day. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you follow Jesus more closely.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

The other readings this Sunday invite us to wait patiently for the second coming of Jesus. In the first reading the comforting words of God in Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 tell the people of Jerusalem their sins are forgiven. The second reading, which is from 2 Peter 3:8-14, urges us to live more hopeful lives as we wait for the second coming of Jesus.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶God sent his messenger, a man named John, ⁷who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light...

¹⁹The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to John to ask him, "Who are you?"

²⁰John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: "I am not the Messiah."

²¹"Who are you, then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," John answered.

"Are you the Prophet?" they asked.

"No," he replied.

²²"Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

"I am 'the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!'"

²⁴The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, ²⁵then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?"

²⁶John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. ²⁷He is coming after me, but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."

²⁸All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Other Readings: Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11; Luke 1:46-55, 53-54; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

LECTIO:

This week we look at the beginning of the Gospel of John. Verses 6-8, which introduce John the Baptist, are actually a short note inserted into the prologue of this Gospel (John 1:1-18). This is a hymn about Jesus seen as the Word (logos).

John the Baptist is described as a 'messenger' of God sent 'to tell people about the light so that all should hear the message and believe'. The Gospel writer makes it clear that John is not the light. Jesus is the light.

In verses 19-28 we hear of an encounter between John and some messengers

from the Pharisees, Jewish religious authorities. It would appear that rumours had been circulating that John was the Prophet, Elijah or even the Messiah. So the Pharisees dispatched some priests and Levites to find out who John really was and why he was baptising people.

John answers clearly that he is none of these people. He quotes from a prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 to explain his role which is to prepare the way for the Lord. John himself is preaching in the desert. So he too is 'a voice' shouting in the desert just as Isaiah describes.

Yet while John makes it clear he is not the Messiah he makes the very intriguing comment in verses 26-27 'among you stands the one you do not know... but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals'. Nothing further is recorded at this point and the narrative moves on. We are not told what the messengers reported back to the Pharisees.



MEDITATIO:

- Jesus is described as being 'the Light'. In our noisy, over busy world consider how Jesus can be 'the Light' for people today.
- John the Baptist was sent by God to 'tell about' Jesus. The Greek word for 'tell about' is 'witnessing', so John was a witness. How necessary is witnessing in our modern world? What can you say or do to witness to Jesus?



ORATIO:

Mary's song of praise rings out at the very heart of our reading (Luke 1:46-55). Try making her song your own joyful prayer, pausing at the end of each verse for your own moment of thanksgiving.



CONTEMPLATIO:

'Among you stands the one you do not know'. Contemplate this phrase for a minute or two. Ask God to speak to you about it. You may feel prompted to pray for specific people, or yourself, that you may know Jesus more deeply.

In today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 we have the wonderful proclamation about the Messiah being filled with the Spirit of God and bringing good news and freedom. Who does he sound like to you?

Paul counsels us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 on how to be good disciples. Applying these principles will help us be better witnesses to Jesus.

GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. ²⁷He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

²⁹Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. ³¹You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, ³³and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"

³⁴Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.

³⁶Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷For there is nothing that God cannot do."

³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Other Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14,16; Psalm 89:1-4, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27

LECTIO:

God's messenger in this week's reading is the angel Gabriel. His dramatic conversation with a young woman from Nazareth, Mary, leaps out from the beginning of Luke's Gospel.

Understandably Mary is initially afraid and troubled by this encounter. Gabriel announces that she will become pregnant and give birth to the Son of God. From her question in verse 34, Mary appears to understand that this will happen soon – before her planned marriage to her fiancé, Joseph.

Gabriel explains that this pregnancy will be no ordinary one. It will be a miraculous event, achieved by God's presence in her life. As a sign that nothing is impossible for God, the angel tells her that her cousin Elizabeth, who has been barren for many years, is now six months pregnant.

Mary realises God is calling her for a special purpose. Her response says it all, 'I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said'. She puts her trust completely in God.

MEDITATIO:

- God has a unique calling for Mary and uses an angel to speak to her. What ways does God usually speak to us? When did you last hear from God and what action did you take?
- Mary believes God's promise to her and trusts God to make it happen. What lessons can we learn from her response?
- Accepting God's message has a profound effect on Mary's life. How has God's message to you changed your life?
- Some people find it hard to accept the gospel account of the virgin birth. How does verse 37 help us respond to this?

ORATIO:

In today's Psalm 89:1-4 we find a wonderful song of praise about God's love and faithfulness. Think about how God demonstrates his love to you. Think about how God has shown you his faithfulness during your life. The promise of verse 4 speaks about Jesus but is also true for everyone who accepts him as Lord. Respond to God in thanks and ask God to deepen your faith and trust in him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The other two readings today throw light on Gabriel's announcement. In 2 Samuel 7 the promises God made to David, through Nathan the prophet hundreds of years earlier, are fulfilled in the son promised to Mary.

The second reading comes from the very last verses of Paul's Letter to the Romans. It is a prayer of praise to God for revealing the Good News and being the Lord of human history. Make these words your own hymn of praise to glorify God.

A SAVIOUR IS BORN FOR US

Luke 2:1-14

¹At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. ³Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

⁴Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. ⁵He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, ⁶and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. ⁷She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

⁸There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, ¹⁰but the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. ¹¹This very day in David’s town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! ¹²And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

Other Readings: Isaiah 9:1-7; Psalm 96:1-3, 11-13; Titus 2:11-14

LECTIO:

The story of Jesus’ birth is described in two scenes. In the first scene, verses 1-7, Luke explains how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem, in the south of Palestine when Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth, in the north.

Joseph was required to attend a census. As a descendant of King David that meant returning to Bethlehem. It is here that Mary gives birth to Jesus. God’s promise that he would send the Messiah, a descendant of King David, is fulfilled. Even the place of Jesus’ birth was foretold by the prophets.

In scene two, verses 8-14, we hear how the news of Jesus’ birth reaches the outside world. Shepherds are the surprised recipients of the amazing news. God sends an angel to reveal the birth and real identity of this baby. The baby is born

in a lowly stable, with the animals, because there was nowhere else for Mary and Joseph to stay.

It’s almost as if the angels can’t contain their excitement at the birth of this child. For then suddenly a great army of angels join the first angel and sing their praise to God.

Our Scripture reading finishes here, but the story continues. The shepherds believe the news the angel tells them and go to Bethlehem to see for themselves. They find Jesus and tell Mary and Joseph everything the angel told them. They are the very first people to announce that Jesus is the long-awaited Saviour.

MEDITATIO:

- Today is one of the most joyful in the entire Christian calendar. Join with millions around the world in adoration of Jesus.
- Marvel that God the Father should send his Son into the world in this way.
- Marvel too that Jesus was prepared to leave the glory of heaven to be born as a baby in an animals’ stable.
- Reflect on the amazing love the Father and Son have for us to be prepared to do this.
- Consider Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. What does this mean for you?

ORATIO:

Why not echo the words of the angelic army on that very first Christmas day: ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven’? Repeat this great proclamation of praise several times.

Thank God for sending Jesus as your Saviour. Remember those who can still find no room for Jesus

CONTEMPLATIO:

To aid our understanding of today’s gospel reading, the liturgy offers us Isaiah 9:1-7 and Titus 2:11-14. Both speak about salvation.

Spend a few minutes contemplating the four titles given to our Saviour in Isaiah 9:6: ‘Wonderful Counsellor’, ‘Mighty God’, ‘Eternal Father’, ‘Prince of Peace’.

The passage in Titus shows us clearly that God revealed his grace so that mankind could be free from sin and wickedness. Sin enslaves us but Jesus sets us free. So now, by grace, we can receive salvation and live a life pleasing to God.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Luke 2:22-40

²²The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, ²³as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to the Lord." ²⁴They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord.

²⁵At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him ²⁶and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. ²⁷Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:

²⁹"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in peace.

³⁰With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:

³²A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles
and bring glory to your people Israel."

³³The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. ³⁴Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against ³⁵and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart." ³⁶⁻³⁷There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now 84 years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. ³⁸That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

³⁹When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their home town of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him.

Other Readings: Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3; Psalm 105:1-6, 8-9; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

1 LECTIO:

Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him, as their first born son, to God in accordance with the Law of Moses. While at the Temple

they encounter two prophets, Simeon and Anna. The Holy Spirit promised Simeon that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. The Spirit leads him to the Temple so this promise can be fulfilled. This encounter takes on far greater significance when Simeon prophesies over Jesus. Firstly he echoes what the angel told the shepherds, that Jesus is the Saviour, or Messiah, prepared by God for all people. Simeon makes it clear that salvation is now available for the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. He also tells us the way people respond to Jesus will lead either to their salvation or their destruction.

Anna meets them shortly afterwards. We are simply told that she gives thanks to God and then tells everyone who is looking for the Messiah about Jesus.

Lastly we learn that Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth. Here Jesus grows up. He is full of wisdom and God's blessing is on him.



MEDITATIO:

- What can we learn from Simeon and Anna and their relationship with God?
- Consider the description of Jesus as 'a light'. What does this mean for you and for people you know?
- What does this passage teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit revealing things to us and guiding us?



ORATIO:

Ask God to deepen your faith in him. Repeat the first verse from Psalm 105 throughout the day.

'Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his greatness;
tell the nations what he has done.'



CONTEMPLATIO:

God keeps his promises. He is completely trustworthy. Faith in God, in seemingly impossible circumstances, is the theme for our other readings. In Genesis 15: 1-6 we hear about Abram and Sarai who believe God's promise despite their old age and years of barrenness. They are blessed with a son Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3). Hebrews 11 lists many great examples of faith. Our reading focuses on three specific steps of faith and obedience in Abraham's life. God's answers won't necessarily come quickly or easily. But in testing times we can draw strength from these words so we keep trusting God.

FAITHFUL SERVANT

Luke 2:16-21

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. ¹⁸ All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. ¹⁹ Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. ²⁰ The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

²¹ A week later, when the time came for the baby to be circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name which the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

Other Readings: Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:1-2, 4-5, 7; Galatians 4:4-7

LECTIO:

We continue to meditate on our Saviour's birth and today the Catholic church particularly remembers the role Mary played in God's salvation plan.

On Christmas Day we read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-14). The angel has given some very surprised shepherds some incredible news – that very day a baby has been born in Bethlehem who is God's chosen one, the Saviour, the Christ. The proof that this remarkable news is true will be when they find this special baby – in the most unlikely of places - an animal's feeding trough, a manger!

The shepherds hurry to Bethlehem and when they see the baby in the feeding trough they know what the angel has told them is true. They tell Mary and Joseph what the angel said to them about the identity of their new born son. Not surprisingly, it seems as though the shepherds couldn't contain their excitement and tell others about their encounter with the angels and the birth of this special baby (verse 18). We are not told whether others came to check out the shepherd's story for themselves, so perhaps most just thought they were making it up. The shepherds themselves however are utterly convinced and leave praising God for sending the Christ.

For Mary and Joseph the report from the shepherds gives them confirmation of their individual angelic visits nine months earlier (Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25). The spotlight moves briefly to Mary alone who treasured these things and thought about them deeply.

The text concludes with Mary and Joseph taking their son to be circumcised on the eighth day as required by the Jewish law (Leviticus 12:3). They name him Jesus as they were each told by the angel (Matthew 1:21, Luke 1:31). In doing this Joseph identifies himself as Jesus' legal father.

MEDITATIO:

- God chose Mary (and Joseph) for a unique calling. Read Luke 1:26-56 and consider the qualities Mary shows in response to God's call. What can we learn from this?
- 'I am the Lord's servant...' This was Mary's response to the news that God had chosen her. Meditate on these words and consider how God wants us to serve him.
- Mary treasured the promises God had made to her. Take some time to think about the promises God has made to you. These may be general promises, made to all Christians, and specific ones for you.

ORATIO:

Psalm 128 commends us to fear and obey God. This fear is not about being terrified but rather a respect and holy awe for who God is. Bring some of the large and small decisions you have to make to God so he can lead you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you act on what God tells you.

Spend some time praying for members of your family today.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Think about these verses in the letter to the Galatians 4:4-7. What do they mean to you?

'But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons and daughters. To show that you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who cries out, "Father, my Father." So then, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter. And since that is what you, God will give you all that he has for his heirs.'

A KING FOR EVERYONE

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

⁵ “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel.’ ”

⁷ So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: “Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹⁻¹⁰ And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹¹ They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

¹² Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Other Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

1 LECTIO:

Today’s narrative focuses on Jesus, Herod, and ‘some men who studied the stars,’ or Magi, after the term in the Greek text. The fact that these men came from a distant country was another indication of the worldwide significance of Jesus’ birth.

The Magi follow a new star that had appeared in the sky and arrive in Jerusalem, the seat of power for the Jews in Israel. They must have been disappointed not to find the new king here.

As they make their enquiries about this new king, people are upset. Every Jew knew that Herod would deal ruthlessly with any threat to his rule.

Herod is anxious about the Magi’s search too. He takes advice from the religious leaders. The scriptures pointed towards the Messiah, a descendant of King David, being born in David’s home town, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2).

Herod invites the Magi to a secret meeting so he can learn more about the threat and tells them to report back to him after they have found the young child.

Once the Magi set out on the last stage of their journey, the star guides them again. They are full of joy. The star leads them right to Jesus, where they kneel down, worship him and present their gifts.

God knows Herod’s true intentions so warns the Magi not to return to Herod but to go home by another route.

2 MEDITATIO:

- How did you find Jesus? What helped guide you to him? Did God use other people that you didn’t expect?
- In what ways is Jesus your leader and guide?
- Think about the different ways you can worship Jesus. What ‘gifts’ can you offer him today?

3 ORATIO:

God made use of the Magi’s study of the stars to lead them to Jesus. Look back at the ways God led you to Jesus and how he has guided you through your life. Thank him for each step. Now ask God about the year ahead. What priorities does he want you to set? Lay your plans and hopes before him in prayer. Ask him to guide you to do what pleases him.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

The liturgy comments upon the mystery of the incarnation in Isaiah 60:1-6 and Ephesians 3:2-6. Spend some time reflecting on these texts and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you.

MEET JESUS AND TELL OTHERS

John 1:35-42

³⁵The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, ³⁶when he saw Jesus walking by. “There is the Lamb of God!” he said.

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, “What are you looking for?”

They answered, “Where do you live, Rabbi?” (This word means “Teacher.”)

³⁹“Come and see,” he answered. (It was then about four o’clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him.

⁴⁰One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹At once he found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” (This word means “Christ.”) ⁴²Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas.” (This is the same as Peter and means “a rock.”)

*Other Readings: 1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19; Psalm 40:1, 3, 6-9;
1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20*

1 LECTIO:

The Gospels are not biographies of Jesus, nor do they tell us everything about him. The evangelists wrote these accounts so we can meet and learn about the Jesus they knew. In today’s reading John relates how Jesus met his first disciples.

First John the Baptist describes Jesus as ‘the Lamb of God’ to two of his disciples.

They are clearly interested to see what he meant by this because they then follow after Jesus. Jesus speaks to them and invites them to see the place where he is staying. We are told that this encounter takes place at four o’clock in the afternoon. They then spend the rest of the day getting to know more about him and his teaching.

Andrew was clearly impressed because he loses no time in telling his brother Simon that they have found the Messiah. Andrew then takes Simon to meet Jesus.

Simon’s encounter with Jesus is dramatic. Jesus takes one look at him, tells him who he is and then gives him a new name—Cephas or Peter. In Jesus’ time, as today, a new name means a new identity. Peter was changed by his first meeting with Jesus and immediately left his job as a fisherman behind (Matthew 4:18-22). But it was to take years of growing, loving and serving Jesus before he really became the rock on which Jesus was able to build his church.

2 MEDITATIO:

- What can we learn from this passage about how people meet Jesus and become his disciples?
- John the Baptist and Andrew both knew who Jesus was and then introduced their friends to Jesus. How did you find Jesus? Was it through the help of other Christians? Can you describe it in a few words? Ask God to show you ways you can help your friends meet Jesus.
- Consider the description of Jesus as ‘the Lamb of God’. Meditate on the significance of this title. (See Exodus 12:1-14, Leviticus 16:5-10, 20-22, Isaiah 53:7)

3 ORATIO:

Lord, please help me to understand more fully what it means to be your disciple. Help me to deepen my relationship with you and help me to do all that you ask me to.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Each of us is called in a different way. The first reading from 1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19 explains how the prophet Samuel was called. God gave him a special role and the freedom to fulfil it.

We often hear that Jesus sets us free, but not free to do anything as Paul explains in the second reading 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20. In belonging to God we are called to be fully human and fully alive, revealing Jesus in our words and actions.

FISHERS OF MEN

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. ¹⁵“The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!”

¹⁶As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish with a net. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, “Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people.” ¹⁸At once they left their nets and went with him.

¹⁹He went a little farther on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. ²⁰As soon as Jesus saw them, he called them; they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus.

Other Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

LECTIO:

This week Mark tells us about the call of the first disciples. Although similar to last week’s reading, Mark’s shows Jesus calling four men. He also reveals the scope of Jesus’ plans for them: not only his disciples but also his co-workers.

In John’s narrative, Jesus calls the disciples to stay with him, to be his friends and listen to his teachings. In Mark’s we learn that Jesus plans to train them to do his work of teaching people God’s message for the world.

The four men obey his call and follow Jesus there and then. They leave their work as fishermen and, it seems, their families.

Jesus teaches these first disciples as they share their lives with him, as the rest of the gospels show us. Jesus teaches them about his relationship with the Father and his great love for people individually.

They had a great deal to learn from him about this new way of living with God, what Jesus called ‘the kingdom of God’. Three years later Jesus left them, trusting all his preparations would be a sufficient foundation for them to become ‘apostles’, ‘people who were sent’ on a mission.

MEDITATIO:

- What is the ‘Good News’ Jesus speaks about? What does it mean for you? Try and sum it up in a few words.
- What does it mean to follow Jesus and be his disciple today?
- Can you be a ‘fisher of men’? You don’t have to be a priest. You just have to introduce your friends to Jesus, as we heard last week.

ORATIO:

Pray today’s responsorial Psalm ‘Lord, make me know your ways’ (Psalm 25:4).

Ask God to show you how he wants you to be his disciple.

Ask him whether there is anything you need to ‘leave behind’ in your busy life so you can serve him more fully.

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week we are also invited to read the story of Jonah. This is the prophet’s second calling (Jonah 3) because the first time round he refused to obey God (Jonah 1-2). But God gives him another opportunity and the people listen to what he says. They repent, turn to God and change their way of living.

In the second reading Paul breathes urgency into his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:29-31). The time is short, he reminds them, let go of everything that holds you back from carrying out God’s plan. This sheds light on today’s Gospel reading where we see four people being called by Jesus for a special mission. Like the first disciples we need to be single minded as we follow Jesus. We need to be careful that other things in our lives do not hold us back from doing what God asks us to do.

TRUE AUTHORITY

Mark 1:21-28

²¹ Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.

²³ Just then a man with an evil spirit came into the synagogue and screamed, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are—you are God's holy messenger!"

²⁵ Jesus ordered the spirit, "Be quiet, and come out of the man!"

²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they started saying to one another, "What is this? Is it some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!"

²⁸ And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the province of Galilee.

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

LECTIO:

The evangelist Mark likes telling stories about Jesus to shed light on who he is. Usually each story contains one main message. Jesus has true authority; this is the message which comes out loud and clear from today's reading.

Jesus had come to Capernaum, an important city in the north of Palestine. As a good Jew he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath where he started teaching. The people in the synagogue were amazed. He spoke with an authority quite unlike the teachers of the law.

Then a man controlled by an evil spirit screams at Jesus, "Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are—you are God's holy messenger!" Jesus demonstrates his authority again. He commands the evil spirit to be quiet and to come out of the man. The evil spirit has to obey, but before leaving it shakes the man hard and screams again.

The people now regard Jesus even more highly. Not only does he teach with authority but even evil spirits obey him. News about what happened spreads quickly throughout the whole region.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider why the people noticed a difference when Jesus spoke.
- Can you think of a reason why the evil spirit said Jesus was 'God's Holy Messenger'? Was the intention to cause confusion and undermine Jesus' ministry? Why did Jesus command the evil spirit to be quiet? Jesus didn't deny what was said about him. But he did not want his identity to be revealed in this way.
- Consider how the man is treated by Jesus and the evil spirit. What does this tell us about how God treats people and how the devil treats people? In what way did the evil spirit's outburst backfire?

ORATIO:

Repeat the words of today's responsorial Psalm 95 verses 6-7

"Come, let us bow down and worship him;

let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

He is our God; we are the people he cares for,
the flock for which he provides.

Listen today to what he says:"

Thank God that he cares and provides for us. Ask him to help you hear his voice in the midst of life's busyness.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today we can contemplate who Jesus is. The first reading presents part of Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Moses promises that God will raise a prophet who will only tell them what God wants to say to them. Moses contrasts this prophet to the many magicians and false teachers who pretend to be God's messengers.

In the second reading, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul's concern is that we give ourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservation – just like Jesus. Paul comments that this can be difficult for married people because they also want to please their husband or wife.

HEALER AND PREACHER

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ Jesus and his disciples, including James and John, left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus arrived, he was told about her. ³¹ He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

³² After the sun had set and evening had come, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. ³³ All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. ³⁴ Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was.

³⁵ Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. ³⁶ But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

³⁸ But Jesus answered, "We must go on to the other villages around here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

³⁹ So he traveled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

Other Readings: Job 7:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 147:1-6; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

1 LECTIO:

Today's Gospel reading continues the story where we left it last week. After his authoritative preaching and the dramatic deliverance of a man with an evil spirit (Mark 1:21-28), Jesus went with his disciples to Simon Peter's house.

We are not told much about Peter's family but learn he is married because he has a mother-in-law. She is in bed with a fever. When Jesus is told this he takes her hand, helps her up and she is instantly healed.

News about what happened at the synagogue in the morning, and this healing, appears to have electrified the whole town. Imagine the excitement and impatience as people have to wait until evening, when the Sabbath rest ends. But as soon as they can, the whole town gathers in front of Peter's house. They bring with them all the sick and those who have demons. It must have been an incredible evening. Many people were healed and many set free from demons. Jesus stayed the night in Peter's home.

In the morning, while everybody was still asleep, Jesus left the house and went 'to a lonely place' to pray. Eventually Peter and his friends found him and told him that everyone was looking for him. But instead of returning, Jesus insists they move on to other towns and villages so he could preach to them too.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Why was it so important for Jesus to get alone to pray? What can we learn from Jesus' example about the priority he places on spending time alone with God?
- Peter wanted Jesus to capitalise on the 'success' of his ministry in Capernaum. But God had other plans. How can we ensure we please God rather than others, however well meaning they may be?

3 ORATIO:

Read Psalm 147 aloud as a prayer, alone or with friends. It sums up many of the good things about Jesus which we find in today's Gospel reading. It also reminds us that Jesus is the Lord.

Ask God to help you give the same priority to spending time with him as Jesus did.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

The liturgy tries to capture some of the suffering of sick people in the first reading, Job 7:1-4, 6-7. Jesus' healing of the sick shows that God is not insensitive to their suffering.

Jesus' mission to preach the gospel is echoed in 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23 by the Apostle Paul, where he speaks of his duty to keep preaching God's Word so as many people as possible might be saved.

BE CLEAN

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰ A man suffering from a dreaded skin disease came to Jesus, knelt down, and begged him for help. "If you want to," he said, "you can make me clean."

⁴¹ Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. "I do want to," he answered. "Be clean!" ⁴² At once the disease left the man, and he was clean. ⁴³ Then Jesus spoke sternly to him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ after saying to him, "Listen, don't tell anyone about this. But go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then in order to prove to everyone that you are cured, offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered."

⁴⁵ But the man went away and began to spread the news everywhere. Indeed, he talked so much that Jesus could not go into a town publicly. Instead, he stayed out in lonely places, and people came to him from everywhere.

*Other Readings: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11;
1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1*

1 LECTIO:

Leprosy is curable today. But in Jesus' day there was no medicine and no cure, leprosy brought with it a life sentence for the sufferer.

Anyone appearing to have leprosy was considered infectious and cast out from family, friends, home and work. They were obliged to live in isolated places and this social problem caused great suffering for the lepers and their families.

People with this serious skin disease could no longer participate in religious activities at the temple or synagogue because they were ritually unclean. Effectively you were dead to your family and society. Only the priest's declaration of freedom from disease opened the door back into the community.

We do not know whether Jesus went to this man on purpose; it would appear that they were alone when they met. The leper made a touching plea and an act of faith: 'You can heal me if you want'.

Jesus didn't hesitate. He touched him and said, 'Be clean.' Instantly the man was cured. As a pious Jew, Jesus told the man to do what the Law of Moses required in such circumstances, to go and see the priest (Leviticus 14:2-32). He also told him not to tell anyone about his healing.

But the leper could not contain himself, he disregarded what Jesus said and told everyone about his healing. As a result the crowds sought Jesus to such an extent that he could no longer enter a town publicly. He had to stay out in the countryside.

2 MEDITATIO:

- The man had faith, was miraculously healed but then disobeyed Jesus. Why do you think he did that?
- Jesus has a message for the leper and for us here – what do you think it is?
- Everything about the leper revealed him as an outcast. He even had to shout, 'Unclean' if other people were around. How do you respond to those who are considered 'outcasts' in your church or town?

3 ORATIO:

The leper wasn't afraid to ask for what seemed impossible. Faith moved him towards Jesus. Luke 1:37 says 'there is nothing that God cannot do'. Repeat this phrase to yourself several times. Ask God to increase your faith in him.

Jesus was moved with pity and it caused him to act. Ask God to show you how to respond to those in need.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

The first reading spells out the law about skin diseases (Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46). The future for those with 'a dreaded skin disease' was very bleak. Faith with action led this man to reach out to Jesus with a simple prayer. How do you put your faith into action?

In the second reading (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1) Paul encourages us to model ourselves on Jesus. This means thinking about others with different beliefs so they too can encounter Jesus.

POWER OVER SIN AND SICKNESS

Mark 2:1-12

¹A few days later Jesus went back to Capernaum, and the news spread that he was at home. ²So many people came together that there was no room left, not even out in front of the door. Jesus was preaching the message to them ³when four men arrived, carrying a paralyzed man to Jesus. ⁴Because of the crowd, however, they could not get the man to him. So they made a hole in the roof right above the place where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they let the man down, lying on his mat. ⁵Seeing how much faith they had, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ⁷How does he dare talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins!"

⁸At once Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he said to them, "Why do you think such things? ⁹Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk'? ¹⁰I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

¹²While they all watched, the man got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away. They were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

*Other Readings:: Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-22, 24-25; Psalm 41:1-4, 12-13;
2 Corinthians 1:18-22*

LECTIO:

Let's picture the scene Mark is describing. A paralysed man is carried by his friends to the house where Jesus is teaching. The man appears to be completely helpless and passive. If he can speak, we are not told that he made any plea for himself, unlike the leper we read about last week.

But his friends are very active indeed. They carry the paralytic on his stretcher and bring him to Jesus because they have great faith (verse 5). But first they must solve the problem of getting the man past the crowd to Jesus. They come up with a radical solution. They make a hole in the roof over Jesus' head and lower their friend down right in front of Jesus.

Jesus recognises their faith in him and the plea their action implies. They are making a very practical appeal for Jesus to physically heal their friend.

But first Jesus deals with a deeper problem – sin. Jesus addresses this problem with forgiveness. Then as a sign of his authority to forgive sin, Jesus heals the man of his paralysis as well.

At the end of this encounter Jesus refers to himself as the 'Son of Man'.

MEDITATIO:

- What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? What are the main lessons we need to learn for our life today?
- This event clearly demonstrates that Jesus has authority over sin and sickness. Consider what this means for you.
- Have there been times when you have felt helpless, unable to even ask God to help you? Perhaps you know someone who is 'spiritually paralysed' right now, who needs help getting to Jesus. Ask God to show you how you could help them.

ORATIO:

We may be among those who are troubled by sins which they have done earlier in their life. Catholic Christians know that they can be pardoned of their sins by confessing them to a priest. All of us have to repent and ask God to forgive our sins. We can use the words of Psalm 41 to help us:

"I said, 'I have sinned against you, Lord;
be merciful to me and heal me.'" (verse 4)

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today's liturgy includes two readings that are packed with promises about forgiveness and God's faithfulness. If you are struggling with past or current sins, Isaiah 43:18-25 offers the perfect solution. God urges his people not to dwell on past events but reminds them his forgiveness is based on his loving nature. When we repent his response is an unconditional 'I will not hold your sins against you'.

This is reinforced by the second reading 2 Corinthians 1:18-22. Through Jesus all God's promises are fulfilled with a resounding 'Yes!' Not maybe, sometimes or perhaps, but a cast iron 'Yes'.