

Sunday Readings

the Year of Luke



And Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. . . ," when they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up and drove him out of the town . . . (Lk. 4:24,28)

4th Sunday Ordinary Time
Sunday 3rd February 2019

notes

1. The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

2. **Cover image:** 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C – image from Missionaries of Sacred Heart, Peru.

3. **Lectio Divina:** reading GOD’S WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us:

“In the presence of GOD, during a recollected reading of the text, it is good to ask, for example: ‘LORD, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? Why am I not interested in this?’ Or perhaps: ‘What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this Word that moves me? What attracts me? Why does it attract me?’”¹

The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this booklet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday.

There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don’t have to have the following order:

lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don’t know why) you may want to write it down.

meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD’S presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words.

oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it.

contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation.

This booklet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday’s liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ’s promise: *‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them’*.²

4. **Review of the Week** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.

1 From paragraph 153 *The Joy of the Gospel* (Evangelii Gaudium) – Pope Francis (2013)

2 Mt.18:20

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the day of fulfillment

Introduction

The early chapters of Luke tell of the beginning of Jesus' activity. At the very time when no newness seemed possible, the story of Jesus' birth represents hope. Then Jesus' invitation to his disciples begins the engagement of the world of despair with the possibilities of hope. Jesus is introduced as the one who makes the difference. The ground-work has been prepared by the teachings of John the Baptist.³ The movement gains momentum at a wedding feast at Cana.⁴ The evangelist John, hints that Jesus is beginning to move towards '*his hour*'.⁵ Today's gospel accelerates the movement from hope to engagement. In his home-town, Jesus proclaims a text from Isaiah,⁶ informing his audience that *the Year of Favour*, is being fulfilled even while they listen.

first reading: Jeremiah 1 : 4 – 5, 17 – 19

[the prophet's call and commission]

*Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, (4)
 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
 and before you were born I consecrated you;
 I appointed you a prophet to the nations. (5) . . .
 But you, gird up your loins; stand up
 and tell them everything that I command you.
 Do not break down before them, or I will break you before them. (17)
 And I for my part have made you today
 a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall,
 against the whole land - against the kings of Judah,
 its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. (18)
 They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you,
 for I am with you," says the LORD, "to deliver you." (19)*

The costs of being known, claimed and called as the people of GOD's '*Year of Favour*' - are spelled out in this reading. The LORD '*knew*' Jeremiah even before he was, "*formed . . . in the womb!*"⁷ The prophet's call is told in the form of a dialogue between the LORD and Jeremiah. The prophet was predestined from the womb to

3 The Baptist looks forward to, '*One mightier than he*', who will do the works of GOD in a decisive new way (cf. *Lk.3:15-16, 21-22*).

4 The gospel of the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary time (*Jn.2:1-12*), introduced Jesus' awareness of moving towards his '*hour*'. A Christian understanding of the new history sees Jesus as moving towards '*the hour*' of his death and resurrection.

5 *Jn.2:4*

6 *Lk.4:16-30* (cf. *Is.61:1-2*).

7 [v.5b] '*I knew you*' – *I loved you: I consecrated you: I appointed you a prophet.*

be, "*a prophet to the nations*" (v.5).⁸ That's a characteristic way by which the Scriptures emphasise the initiative of the LORD in the history of salvation. The call of Jeremiah follows the pattern of other calls in the Scriptures: there is first a statement by the LORD in which the individual is summoned to speak the prophetic word; there is a negative reaction by the individual – that stresses weakness or sin; and then an infusion of *the Spirit of GOD*, symbolised by the LORD's energising of the lips or mouth of the new prophet.

'*Consecration*' (v.5) refers to the separation of the prophet for a distinctive role in Israelite history. Jeremiah's call played an important role in Paul's understanding of his own missionary calling. Jeremiah's mission is not merely to the Israelites. It is, "*to the nations.*" Since the time of *Amos*, prophets had a strong sense of GOD being in control of all history and not just that of the Israelites. *Elijah* and *Elisha* are types of the prophet, with the emphasis on the LORD's salvation reaching out beyond the Israelites, rather than on judgement. The prophet submits to the LORD's initiative. That sub-mission symbolises the prophet's new ability to do the work of the LORD. It also symbolises the internal presence of GOD's Word in the prophet's life (cf. *Is.6:6-7* & *Ezk.3:1-3*) for the LORD touches Jeremiah's mouth (*Jr.1:9*). That doesn't mean that GOD has violated the prophet's freedom. Rather it means that the LORD has called an individual to make GOD's will his or her own.⁹

response: Psalm 72 (71) : 1 – 6, 15 – 17 [Prayer for guidance and support for the king]

In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.(1)

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;

incline your ear to me and save me.(2)

Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me,

for you are my rock and my fortress.(3)

Rescue me, O my GOD, from the hand of the wicked,

from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.(4)

For you, O LORD, are my hope,

my trust, O LORD, from my youth.(5)

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;

it was you who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you.(6) . . .

My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,

of your deeds of salvation all day long,

though their numbers is past my knowledge.(15)

8 [v.5c] '*The nations*': The pagan neighbours of Judah, as well as world powers – Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt.

9 A personal call from GOD always has an aura of mystery. But there can be no mystery about the reality that GOD embraces certain hopes for each of us.

*O GOD, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.(17)*

In the course of the speaker's lament there is a movement from petition (vv.1-4) to trust (vv.5-6,17) and then praise; for the LORD's justice (vv.14-16). Faith lives amid adversity. Praise isn't the celebration of the powerful and the well-to-do. Its the language of ones who know that their lives belong to the LORD and their future depends on GOD alone. The LORD's caring in the past convinces the psalmist that GOD won't abandon the trusting ones in the afflictions of both old age and jeering enemies.

The speaker represents the community's faith that the LORD's justice is in control (v.2). Throughout the psalm the speaker affirms that the LORD's power exists amidst opposition. Personal anguish in the face of affliction doesn't shake the speaker's conviction that there is moral coherence in the world – that there is a thread of justice running through the world that cannot be mocked, or violated, or unravelled. Like Jeremiah, the Psalmist believes in the reigning of GOD. The freedom of the LORD is that GOD will do GOD's own thing. There is a conviction that the LORD's will and tenacity will be worked out in the speaker's personal destiny and that there is no other source of power or control, that can secure the future and success of the lives of faithful Torah-keepers.

second reading: 1 Corinthians 12 : 31 – 13 : 13

[The gift of Love]

But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.(12:31) . . . , If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (13:1) And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.(2) If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.(3) Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant(4) or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;(5) it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.(6) It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.(7) Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.(8) For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;(9) but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.(10) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.(11) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in

part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.(12) And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.(13)

Paul carefully arranges the list the of gifts: neither tongues (on the lowest rung), nor prophecy, knowledge, or faith, nor even self-sacrifice has value (vv.1-3), unless informed by love. He teaches that love is based on his conviction that, "*I have been fully known.*" To be known, claimed and called by GOD means to be empowered to accomplish something new and beyond what we could expect or even imagine (cf. *Eph.3:20*). Paul discusses the gifts that might exist in any Christian community. His concern is with the *charismata* and the different contribution that each member makes to the community as a whole (cf. *1 Co.12:7*).¹⁰ The apostle writes with a practical purpose. A quarrelsome people need to know that their fervent religiosity isn't worth anything apart from the new relationship to one-another in love. There is diversity within '*the body*' but that diversity is based on the unity of the community and exists to promote unity. Paul often speaks of the variety of *charismata* in a context which emphasises the organic unity of the body.¹¹ The gifts are facets of the life-giving power that animates and unifies authentic disciples.

The hymn about *love (agape* in Greek) is similar in style to hymns in praise of wisdom and other virtues found in the wisdom writings. The apostle speaks about the divine *agape*, expressed in the loving actions of Christians. The exercise of the gifts and the practice of sacrifice, in themselves, do nothing for the doer. Its love that makes these actions meaningful. Without such love, other apparent gifts are merely empty and meaningless pretences. Just as members of *the community (the body)* do not have separate existences, they can be considered separately, because the gifts are accorded by GOD to each person and imply that they can be considered separately. So while they can be treated as if they were separate, it does not justify the receivers thinking individualistically and substituting self-affirmation for service. The conflicts at Corinth; the power struggles; and confusions; have been caused by a loveless spirituality. The antidote is not a further refining of the gifts, or a call for extra sacrifices, but the practise of a "*still more excellent way*" (*1 Co.12:31*). Love expresses itself in refusals to stoop to petty retaliation; demonstrates patience; shuns competitiveness; resists keeping a scorecard of wrongs; and remains hopeful. Love functions in the very heart of situations of real stress and conflict. The spiritual gifts belong to the present time (vv.7-13). They are appropriate for the transient and incomplete present – but

¹⁰ There had been fierce disputes in the Corinthian church over spiritual gifts. The apostle's words are addressed to a confused community.

¹¹ Cf. *Rm.12:3-8* and *Eph.4:1-16*

they will end. Love endures, as the characteristic of the permanent and fulfilled future. It is to be sought above all else. It makes the exercise of spiritual gifts a positive effort (1 Co.14:1).

gospel reading: Luke 4:21 – 30

[Jesus' ministry begins – rejection in Nazareth]

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."(21) All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (22) He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"(23) And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.(24) But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land;(25) yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.(26) There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."(27) When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.(28) They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.(29) But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.(30)

Fulfillment of the scripture that Jesus announces, involves the claim of GOD on Jesus' life: *"the Spirit of GOD is upon Me."* Jesus' home-town synagogue congregation expressed astonishment at his teaching. The assembly is perplexed because they knew Jesus' human origins (vv.21-24). Their astonishment turns to disapproval and hostility when Jesus dares to challenge them. Its the beginning of the journey from Nazareth towards Jerusalem that shapes Luke's account of Jesus' public ministry. Its also the beginning of the path to rejection that leads to the cross. The journey will take Jesus away from Nazareth. He will turn to Gentile territory.

The episodes that follow take place in Capernaum, where Jesus performs many miracles. His own townspeople would have liked to have him back (v.23) but he is unable to go back. His journey has begun. Jesus' turn towards the Gentiles after rejection by the Israelites (vv.25-27), is one of the main themes of Luke's gospel account. The Israelite prophets, *Elijah* and *Elisha* had already shown the unexpected-ness of GOD's ways by the touching the lives of non-Israelites.¹² Jesus tells his own townspeople, that despite their privileged place and status, the

12 Cf 1 K.17:1,8-16 & 18:1 & 2 K.5:1-14

'good news' will be told, 'to the ends of the Earth.' Outraged, they attempt to kill him – just as at the end of the evangelist's account, his own people will in fact kill him (Lk.23:23). In this instance he escapes (v.29). This foreshadows the end of Jesus' journey, when his own people will kill him, yet again, he will slip through their hands by his resurrection from the dead and his return to his Father.

items for sharing:

- *To be called by GOD to take part in his plan of salvation is not to be dragooned into service – it's a covenant and a sharing of tasks and responsibilities. Comment on **Jeremiah 1:4 – 5, 17 – 19***
- *Paul had to take people in Corinth to task over their behaviour at the Eucharist. At the LORD's Table there are no strangers or foreigners. Paul reminds the Corinthians and us, that we are all people forgiven, made welcome, and offered GOD's love in abundance. Comment on **1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13***
- *The real significance of the rejected prophet is that no matter how rebellious the people, GOD's covenant love endures unconditionally. Comment on **Luke 4:21 – 30***

prayer:

*GOD of salvation,
in your Prophet, Jesus the Christ,
you announce freedom
and summon us to conversion.
As we marvel at the grace and power of your Word,
enlighten us to see the beauty of the gospel
and strengthen us to embrace its demands.
Grant this through our LORD Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
GOD for ever and ever. Amen*

review of the week:

Inclusiveness is not yet complete. Patterns of exclusion still prevail in most places in our world. The policies and practices of present religious systems, political orderings, and economic arrangements, generate new waves of, 'strangers' every day. Increasingly, people are: extra; redundant; surplus; and dispensable. But the texts of the liturgy spell out GOD's claim on us. In our baptism into the community of Jesus' disciples, we are known, claimed and called by GOD. From our birth, we are GOD's possession.

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