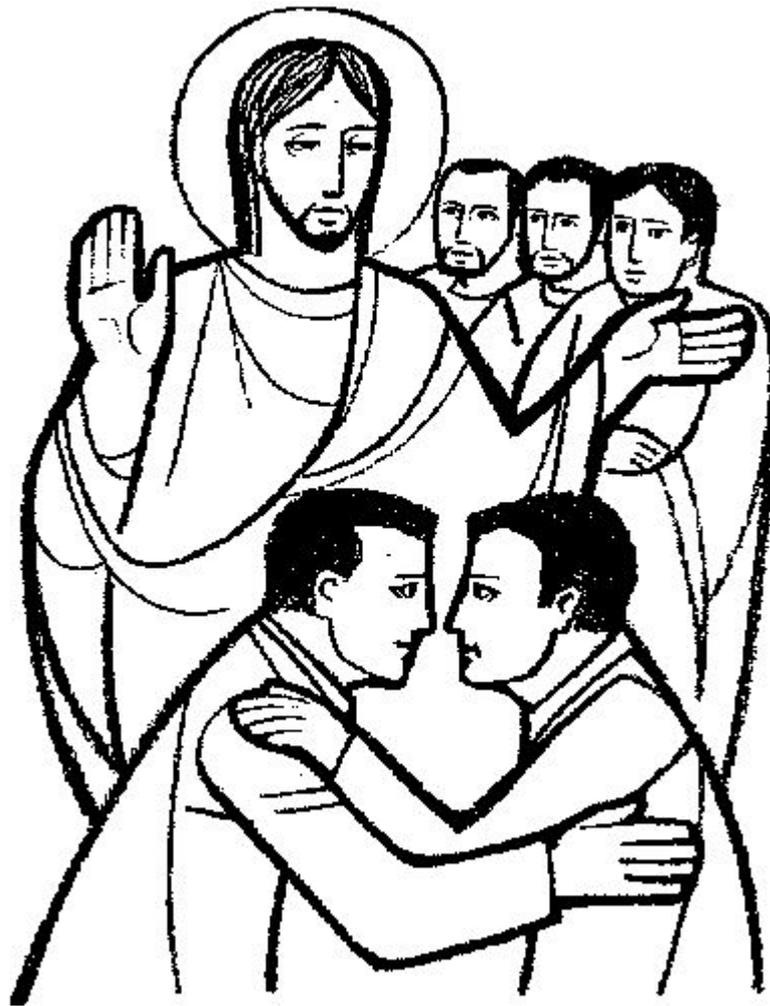


Sunday Readings

the Year of Luke



*"Do to others as you would have them do to you."
(Lk.6:31)*

7th Sunday Ordinary Time
Sunday 24th 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:** 7th 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

7th Sunday Ordinary Time

24th February 2019

show mercy

introduction

Jesus clarifies to his disciples that commitment to GOD's ordering and values requires us to "*love our enemies*". Jesus suggests the way of doing good means blessing and praying for our opponents. Jesus ends this instruction by saying: "*Treat others as you would like others to treat you – for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (cf. Mt.7:13).

first reading: 1 Samuel 26 : 2, 7 - 9, 12 - 13, 22 - 23

[David spares Saul's life
a second time]

So Saul rose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph.(2) . . . , So David and Abishai went to the army by night; there Saul lay sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him. (7) Abishai said to David, "GOD has given your enemy into your hand today; now therefore let me pin him to the ground with one stroke of the spear; I will not strike him twice."(8) So David took the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jar, and they went away.(9) . . . , No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them. (12) Then David went over to the other side, and stood on top of a hill far away, with a great distance between them(13) . . . , David replied, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and get it.(22) The LORD rewards everyone for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD gave you into my hand today, but I would not raise my hand against the LORD's anointed.(23)

David, from being a nobody, is on his way to becoming the successor to King Saul. The story of having the defenceless Saul at his mercy, yet sparing the life of GOD's anointed, romanticises David's worthiness for rule. By this decision, David is shown to respect GOD's ordering and purpose. Saul represented the movement among the Israelites towards consolidating the monarchy. Apart from the constant threat of the Philistines, this is part of the social reality that makes Israelite tribal existence precarious. David represents the free tribal leader. Saul represents the established power. The narrative deals with the issue of social conflict, but personalises and filters the story from David's perspective.

The narrative tells of the powerful king, Saul, from whom the LORD's spirit has departed and is seen as vulnerable. But David refuses to take advantage of the

situation to commit an act of violence. Instead, to show Saul's vulnerability, he takes the king's spear and drinking water (1 S.26:12). David had the ability to act without restraint. But he stopped short of so acting. David did not dispose of Saul because the latter is the LORD's anointed. David may have contempt for the person of the king, but he respects the office – no doubt with an eye on soon occupying the office himself. The narrative shows that David acting in an unusual way. Normally a person will not treat an enemy so. The story anticipates the transfer of royal power from Saul to David. The story-teller knows what the tribe knows; that David will act properly. The narrative shows the working of tribal truth. Saul had better credentials for the royal house than David, but David's gesture shows the power of the LORD is not found in the administered ways of Saul, but in the surprising actions of David. It takes political events time to catch up to the literary reality presented in this story.

response: *Psalm 103 (102) : 1 – 4, 8, 10, 12 – 13*³ [Thanksgiving for GOD's goodness]

*Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.(1)
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits - (2)
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,(3)
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,(4) . . .
The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.(8) . . .
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.(10)
As far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.(12)
As a father has compassion
for his children, so the LORD has compassion
for those who fear him.(13)*

The psalmist celebrates a new orientation by reminding *the Self* of the fact that all of life must be finally referred to the LORD's goodness. The term rendered, "*all his benefits*" might be translated as, '*payoffs*'. It refers to the rewards and punishments GOD reliably gives. The basis of praise is the list that summarises GOD's typical actions. The list reveals the Israelite memory of the

³ [Ps.103] The speaker in this hymn begins by praising GOD for personal benefits (vv.1-5), then moves on to GOD's mercy toward all the people (vv.6-18). Even sin cannot destroy that mercy (vv.11-13), for the eternal GOD is well aware of the people's human fragility (vv.14-18). The psalmist invites the heavenly beings to join in praise (vv.19-22).

LORD overcoming every kind of disorientation in the past. GOD forgives; heals; redeems; crowns; and satisfies. *Verse 8* is derived from Moses' words in *the Book of Exodus* - that the LORD is faithful (cf *Ex.34:6-7*). It reaffirms the characteristics of the LORD mentioned in *verse 4*. And the LORD's way of working and standard of judging, is not like any human standard.

Lasting anger would be the human expectation of the LORD – but it doesn't come. The term that is rendered '*repay*' (v.10) is the same word as, '*acts kindly*' (v.2). So the *pay-offs of the LORD* are not demanding but are stunningly generous. The LORD shatters all human expectations and does not treat failing weak humanity as we might anticipate. GOD shows the generosity and concern of a caring parent. The ground for newness is not found in the needs of the Israelites, but in *the will of the divine loving One!* The speaker ends by calling all creation; Earth creatures and heavenly angels; who are needed to adequately assert who this unutterable GOD is. The speaker isn't concerned with specific memories. The concern is that the person of the LORD should be rendered adequately and faithfully. Key to this discernment of the LORD, is GOD's '*steadfast love*'.

second reading: 1 Corinthians 15 : 45 – 49 [the man from earth & the man from heaven]

Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being;" the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.(45) But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.(46) The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (47) As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.(48) Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.(49)

The apostle Paul talks about the present age. Would-be disciples "*wear the likeness of humankind of the Earth*" so they will "*wear the likeness of the humankind from Heaven.*" In other words, people who live trustingly, in the spirit of Jesus, will live compassionately towards their neighbours. Their transformation will follow. That's GOD's promise according to Paul.

Paul's letters are responses to situations in his communities. His listeners/readers were people living in the sophisticated city of Corinth. Most likely the notion of resurrection was foreign to them as Greeks. For them the immortality of the soul would have been a great deal more understandable. But Paul was an Israelite with strong roots in the apocalyptic tradition; and it was in that framework that he viewed and wished the Corinthians to see the newness of Jesus.

According to Paul, Jesus is the one who has come from heaven to break through the great human affliction of death. *The first Adam* was the recipient of breath which resulted in 'a living soul' (v.45), *this last Adam (Jesus)* is a life-giver.⁴ Would-be disciples of Jesus are liberated from being people of the dust. The first Adam continued to be un-liberated from the power of death. For the Corinthians, attainment of authentic existence is not the recovery of something innate in human nature. It is a possibility opened up by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Although to some extent humankind begins to participate even here on Earth, in the new way of being, they do not completely do so until the completion of time. Paul writes this passage to emphasise the, 'not yet' that marks Christian existence. He counters a Corinthian belief that through a disciple's understanding of *divinely revealed knowledge* and through *the sacraments*, they already fully enjoy this new life. Paul dampens down such expectations as premature. He reminds the Corinthians that only in the reigning of GOD at the end of time, will disciples bear the image and share the life of 'the last Adam'.

gospel reading: Luke 6 : 27 – 38

[About love for enemies, and judging others]

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,(27) bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.(28) If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.(29) Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.(30) Do to others as you would have them do to you.(31) If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.(32) If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.(33) If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.(34) But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.(35) Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.(36) Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;(37) give, and it will be given to you. A good measure,

⁴ [v.45] *The first man, Adam*: The analogy is introduced by a citation from *Gn.2:7*. Paul alters the text slightly, adding the adjective first, and translating the Hebrew *adam* twice, so as to give it its value both as a common noun (*man*) and as a proper name (*Adam*). *1 Co.15:45b* then specifies similarities and differences between the two Adams. *The last Adam*, Christ (cf *1 Co.15:21-22*) has become a . . . spirit (*pneuma*), a life-principle transcendent with respect to the natural soul (*psyche*) of the first Adam. Further, he is not just alive, but life-giving, a source of life for others.

pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."(38)

According to the gospel, transformations are not easy or serene or bloodless. No one suggest that *the human One from heaven (Jesus)* did not have to groan and strain to be compassionate. Jesus' teaching about, blessing and curse, established the need for disciples to commit themselves to a new order and values. The teaching that follows, provides practical details about how disciples are to live out this new order. The lives of would-be disciples are a continual attempt to transcend the values that are regarded as absolute in conventional society.

For the followers of Jesus, life-values are inverted. Wisdom, power, riches and glory are at a discount. These are to be replaced with the practice of kindness, mercy and righteousness. That is the way of Jesus and those who adopt his way are the wave of GOD's future (vv.36-38).⁵ The life of would-be disciples must be characterised by a robust and sensitive quality of being a power-for-life-giving, that does not play on the feelings, or exploit the experience of others. Jesus sums this up in his final command (v.36). Compassion is the only way to break a spiral of violence which had crushed people in Jesus' time and which crushes people in modern society. A disciple following Jesus' teachings on compassion will have the courage to step outside that spiral and question it.

items for sharing:

- *David is in transition from a nobody to the successor to Saul. The story romanticises David's worthiness to make good decisions that retain respect for GOD's ordering and purpose. Comment on **Samuel 26 : 2, 7 – 9, 12 – 13, 22 – 23***
- *Paul speaks about humankind bearing the stamp of compassion in the Spirit of Jesus. This transformation is GOD's promise to us according to the apostle – but when? Comment on **1 Corinthians 15 : 45 – 49***
- *Transformations are neither serene nor easy – noone ever suggested that the human One from heaven did not have to groan and strain to be compassionate. Comment on **Luke 6 : 27 – 38***

⁵ There is a saying of Jesus which is not in the gospels but which we know through St.Paul, who must have heard it from someone, who had heard Jesus say it. *"It is better to give than to receive."* It is also good to know how to receive! There are some who know how to give - but not to receive! And there are some who don't know how to give or to receive - they only know how to buy and sell.

prayer:

*Compassionate GOD and Father,
you are kind to the ungrateful,
merciful even to the wicked.
Pour out your love upon us,
that with good and generous hearts
we may keep from judging others
and learn your way of compassion.
We make our prayer
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:

The danger for us is to regard a love which turns the other cheek and cares for those who hate and curse, could be judged as passive. Yet the love Jesus speaks, is compassion. We must come to understand that people who hate are in great need. They are often the ones with broken and divided hearts reflected in broken and divided lives, their own and others. The would-be disciple of Christ is thus challenged to show compassion to all, never judging nor condemning, but always forgiving.

This isn't the line of least resistance. It is a line which will often merit scorn but it is the only way to break the violence which crushes our modern world. The disciple, following Jesus' teaching on compassion, will have the courage to step outside the violence of the present time, with the consciousness that another better world is possible. Such a disciple is free to question the present way things are ordered.

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