

# the Sunday Readings



**to hope and act with Creation**  
(cf. Romans 8 : 19 – 25)

**22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time**  
the Season of Creation begins

# 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

## the Season of Creation begins

### *to hope and act with Creation*<sup>1</sup>

#### introduction

The Season of Creation 2024, which begins today, has the theme: *'Hope and act with Creation'*.<sup>2</sup> The season extends from 1<sup>st</sup> September (the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation) to 4<sup>th</sup> October (the feast of St. Francis of Assisi). The latter date marks the beginning of the Second session of the Synod on Synodality in Rome.<sup>3</sup> The designated Lectionary readings for the five Sundays of the season, can be read with 'ecological eyes'. With the world's current environment crisis there's a pastoral need to address the crisis in prayer. Sunday worship is the common way we Catholics come to know and experience God's will.

This Sunday's Scriptures call the human family to challenge the injustices creating the ecological crises threatening life on Earth, by proclaiming the prophetic Word of God for these times. God's Word in this Sunday's Scriptures encourages us not to lose hope in the face of this complex crisis. God is faithful and is working to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf.

The lectionary readings for the Sundays of Ordinary Time in September/October (22<sup>nd</sup>–26<sup>th</sup> Sundays for 2024) sit awkwardly with a growing ecumenical movement to substitute during **the Season of Creation**, Sunday readings with creation themes.<sup>4</sup> The challenge, in accepting the readings of Ordinary Time is to regard these readings with *'ecological eyes'* and to accept the gentle and prayerful challenge this presents for *'our conversion to care for our common home'*.<sup>5</sup>

In today's gospel, disciples had begun to free themselves from the religious precepts beloved by the Scribes and Pharisees, who take the opportunity to put Jesus outside what they considered the tradition of his people. Jesus responds by relying on tradition; the authentic tradition that's represented by the prophet

<sup>1</sup> Cover image: Logo for Season of Creation – 2024.

<sup>2</sup> The 2024 theme is inspired by the text of St. Paul's letter to the Romans which acknowledges that Creation is groaning in pain (*Rm.8:19-25*). It identifies the pain as pain brought on by human selfishness and unsustainable ways of living on Earth. And it calls the whole family of Creation to work together actively in hope, to bring about the realm of God's Justice, for which Creation awaits with eager longing (cf *Rm.8.19*).

<sup>3</sup> Wednesday October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024

<sup>4</sup> Today is the first Sunday of the Season of Creation. The Season of Creation is a time of prayer and action stretching from 1<sup>st</sup> September, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, to 4<sup>th</sup> October, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. It's a time in which we acknowledge that tipping-points have been reached that are threatening the lives of the most vulnerable and putting the lives of future generations in jeopardy. As people of faith, we are called to stand up against climate injustices in prophetic ways. For our human family there's only one complex and integrated socio-cultural ecological crisis, requiring prayer, an ecological conversion, and action in all the inter-related dimensions of human life for the healing of the vast Web of Life. Everything is connected.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, we should always be looking at the Sunday texts with such 'eyes', especially to understand the Father's will during a time such as the current growing environmental crisis.

Isaiah. Jesus puts himself in the great prophetic line which states that the Lord wants conversion of our hearts, more than words and purely formal attitudes.

**first reading: Deuteronomy 4: 1–2, 6–8**<sup>6</sup>

[ Moses commands obedience ]

*So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.(1) You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you. (2) . . . You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"(6) For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him?(7) And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?(8)*

Faithfulness means integrating commandment with daily obedience. Some would prefer God to be near but without the demands of Torah obedience. For others, Torah-keeping as the source of life but they emphasise its harsh conditional demands. The author doesn't separate the God who is very close, from the demands of Torah-keeping.

Israelite faith centres around the relation between the mystery of the Lord and the concrete daily practice of obedience. The laws and customs Moses taught, are the commands of the unseen God encountered at Sinai/Horeb. For the Israelites, God's voice had been heard (vv.1-2), but no form of Divine Being had been sighted. For them the unseen God is a heard in commandment. The Lord God is not heard, but God's commandment is heard! It is in commandment that the nearness of God is experienced. The commandment is the people's call to obedience. It's linked to the promise of land. The promise is of a specific, identifiable piece of ground.<sup>7</sup> Obedience to commandment secures such a place. Commandment is an ingredient of the special relation of the Israelites to the Lord so that land is secured by covenant-keeping.<sup>8</sup> The Israelites relate to the Lord: a God who is close-at-hand and hears their call (v.7a); a God whom they can address with confidence as, 'Thou' (v.7b). This confidence, re-shapes their lives as a community (v.8). They possess *the Torah*. The Torah is, *a gift of grace*, that comes with *the Thou*. The God with whom the people are on such intimate terms, *the Lord*, is a demanding, uncompromising *Thou*, who will be heard and obeyed.

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

7 cf. Dt.3:28

8 Commandment defines the Israelites as a people. It is the medium by which God is present – yet not seen. Commandment-keeping is also understood as wisdom (v.6). Wise actions can be appreciated by everyone.

**response: Psalm 15 : 1 – 5**<sup>9</sup>

[ Who shall dwell in God's sanctuary? ]

*O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?  
 Who may dwell on Your holy hill?(1)  
 Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,  
 and speak the truth from their heart;(2)  
 who do not slander with their tongue,  
 and do no evil to their friends,  
 nor take up a reproach against their neighbours;(3)  
 in whose eyes the wicked are despised,  
 but who honour those who fear the LORD;  
 who stand by their oath even to their hurt;(4)  
 who do not lend money at interest,  
 and do not take a bribe against the innocent.  
 Those who do these things shall never be moved.(5)*

The speaker affirms, that unless people mirror God's faithfulness in their lives, they cannot worship properly. The speaker regards the Torah-keeper; that is, the genuinely obedient person; as one who is permitted to enter, 'the Lord's house' or 'mountain' (v.1). The language of 'entering the house', is used in other Psalms to describe worship.<sup>10</sup> It includes the understanding that when a person genuinely worships the Lord, their heart is always oriented around the practise of worship, even when they are doing other things.

The response of true worshippers is framed in the remaining verses (vv.2-5). Their actions are biased in favour of community relationships. Their worthiness depends on their just and compassionate dealing with neighbour, as for example; not charging interest on a loan.<sup>11</sup> It's not outward show, but changed and re-directed lives which are the essence of genuine worship. Torah-keeping, or obedience, is the necessary qualification for access to the Lord. It may sound offensive to suggest that only righteous, or obedient people, may enter. The spirituality of the speaker reflects a community where life is secure. In such a community, access to the Lord is measured in terms of what is known and found reliable. In a properly functioning world, such an understanding is credible. In that situation, what matters is how people obey (or disobey)!

**second reading: James 1 : 17 – 18, 21 – 22, 27**

[ hearing and doing the Word ]

*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.(17) In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the Word of Truth, so that we would become a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.(18) . . . Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness and welcome with meekness the implanted Word that has the power to save your souls.(21) But be doers of the Word and*

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 15 records a scrutiny at the entrance to the temple court (Cf. Ps.24:3-6; Is.33:14b-16). The Israelite wishing to be admitted had to ask the temple official what conduct was appropriate to God's precincts. The emphasis of the scrutiny is on virtues relating to the treatment of one's neighbour.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ps.23:6

<sup>11</sup> [v.5] *who don't lend money at interest:* – lending money in the Old Testament was often seen as assistance to the poor in their distress, not as an investment; making money off the poor by charging interest was forbidden (Ex.22:24; Lv.25:36-37; Dt.23:20).

*not merely hearers who deceive themselves.(22) . . . Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.(27)*

For James, Christian discipleship means living with integrity. A disciple's faith and actions must be coherent. The writer points out that faith in God is made visible by deeds of compassion and honour. The author addresses a Christian community where belief in Jesus, meant a heightening of Israelite values rather than a divorce from Judaism.<sup>12</sup>

Hearing and welcoming the message of the Truth that has been, 'implanted' (v.21), means would-be disciples receive God's call, by welcoming God's Word. The purity of their practise, is shown by their love of those in need and by the integrity they show in their dealings in daily life. For example, the performance of liturgy (say Baptism, or hearing the Word) must lead to a life of radical, moral obedience. Mere rituals are no substitute for such obedience. 'Doing the Word' announces that God has given would-be disciples new life, in and through, Christ (v.22).<sup>13</sup>

Life for disciples involves 'hearing' and 'doing'. Life in Jesus' community is a steady, on-going experience of the coherence between theory and practise. Those, whose lives are guided by Christ,<sup>14</sup> and who keep at the daily Christian task, will be happy and blessed by God, according to James (v.25). True religion is expressed in good deeds; such as visiting the bereaved and avoiding the moral defilement that exists outside the Christian community (v.27).<sup>15</sup> The faith of Jesus' disciples involves a way of life which can and must be practised: that's "doing the Word".

**gospel reading: Mark 7 : 1 – 8, 14 – 15, 21 – 23**

[ the tradition of the Elders ]

*Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him,(1) they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.(2) (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;(3) and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.(4) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"(5) He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;(6) in vain do they worship me, teaching*

12 The apostle James became a hero and role-model of the Israelite Christians. These Christians shared Israelite reverence for Torah-keeping and differed from the traditional Israelites only over their faith in Jesus as the Christ.

13 To be quick to hear the gospel is to accept it readily and to act in conformity with it, removing from one's soul whatever is opposed to it, so that it may take root and effect salvation (*Jm.1:19-21*). To listen to the gospel message but not practice it is failure to improve oneself (*Jm.1:22-24*). Only conformity of life to the perfect law of true freedom brings happiness (*Jm.1:25*).

14 *The Christ* = is the *Perfect Law* (the *Law of Liberty*).

15 [ v.27 ] '*care for orphans and widows*': – in the Old Testament, orphans and widows are classical examples of the defenseless and oppressed.

*human precepts as doctrines.’(7) You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”(8) . . .*

Jesus makes the point that keeping endless laws for their own sake, actually has the opposite effect to that intended. The qualities which impart purity or impurity to a person's life, come from within. Simple ordinary people are attracted by Jesus' message. Opposition and rejection is beginning to increase. The Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem saw Jesus as a threat to their power and influence (vv.1-5).

The power of God's Word, challenges the powers which seem to have a strangle-hold on human structures and life. These so-called '*powers*' represent the old order. The religious structures of the Pharisees are included in the scrutiny of this challenge. They, like Jesus, imply that their power is, '*of God*!' Jesus responds to the Pharisees' criticism, by attacking the tradition by which they interpret the Torah.<sup>16</sup> Quoting Isaiah Jesus gives examples of religious leaders who manipulate the Torah so that people escape one of the most basic of human obligations – the care for aged parents.<sup>17</sup>

In the reigning of God, to love others and to care for them, is to liberate them at the deepest level; to enable them to become more fully human. Laws and regulations are relevant to the extent that they facilitate this humanising task. They protect the weak and create structures in which healthy relationships can flourish. Anything less than this; an inflexible legalism which not only fails to achieve this goal of humanising; can actually become an evil and destructive force in peoples' lives. The Pharisees' restrictive attitude is the case at issue.

*Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand:(14) there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”(15) . . . For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,(21) adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.(22) All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.”(23)*

Against the Pharisees' narrow, legalistic, and external practices of piety in matters of purification, external worship, and observance of commandments, Jesus sets in opposition, the true moral intent of the divine law. But he goes beyond simply contrasting the Law and Pharisaic interpretation of it. In *verses* 14-15 he sets aside the law itself, in respect to clean and unclean food. He opens the way for unity between Israelite and Gentile in the kingdom of God, intimated by his departure for pagan territory beyond Galilee.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus asserted that God's living Torah is concerned not with ritual or ceremonial cleanness, but with ethical behaviour (vv.14-15,21-23). What counts in God's reigning according to Mark, is the way that people relate to one another.

<sup>16</sup> The issue is ritual cleanliness, rather than hygiene. It links with other questions of ritual, earlier in the gospel. Questions about *keeping Torah* and *doing the will of God*; about *fasting* (cf. Mk.2:18-22) and *keeping the Sabbath* (cf. Mk.2:23 – 3:6).

<sup>17</sup> Is.29:13 Cf. Mk.7:10-13

<sup>18</sup> For a similar contrast see Mk.2:1-3:6; 3:20-35; 6:1-6.

Cleanliness and purity, refer to relationships that are free from the uncleanness of violence, oppression, abuse and manipulation. To be clean and pure is to be honest and caring and self-giving. For Mark, it is relationships between people that matter. In the reigning of God, relationships between people are grounded in the love and concern shown for the other person.

for sharing:<sup>19</sup>

- *God is very near and not honoured by multiplying 'do's and 'don't's'; but by the way those who believe in God, put their hearts into their service. Comment on Deuteronomy 4 : 1 – 2, 6 – 8*
- *Neither human wisdom, nor generous good nature, nor still less, formalism of any kind, can satisfy the demands of the Christian life. It is our response to God's call – the welcoming of God's Word shown by love of those in need and integrity in one's daily life. Comment on James 1 : 17 – 18, 21 – 22, 27*
- *Jesus, well-founded in the tradition of the Prophets, denounces hypocrisy and demands a change of heart as the only way we can be truly holy. Comment on Mark 7 : 1 – 8, 14 – 15, 21 – 23*

prayer<sup>20</sup>

*Father of light,  
Giver of every good and perfect gift,  
bring to fruition the Word of Truth  
sown in our hearts by Your Son,  
that we may rightly  
understand Your commandments,  
live Your law of love,  
and so offer You worship  
that is pure and undefiled.  
Grant this through*

19 *Lectio Divina*: reading God's Word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us through reflection. The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet place, a passage of Scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. We suggest using all or part of the gospel readings of the up-coming Sunday. We let the Holy Spirit lead us to understand the words and allow our heart to speak to God in words inspired by the Scripture passage, or by the thoughts that have come to us while reflecting on it. Then we let go of ideas and words and allow ourselves to rest in the presence of God in simple and wordless contemplation. (See paragraph 153 The Joy of the Gospel – Pope Francis).

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 leaflet 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'*.

20 The prayer that concludes the *Lectio Divina* is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

*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<sup>21</sup>

*Today's gospel focuses on the first essential step that must be taken: an acknowledgement of the sources of the ecological crises. Scribes and Pharisees want to know why Jesus' disciples don't follow the customs of their elders, but eat their meals with unclean hands. In anger Jesus summons the crowd tells them (and us) clearly: 'Hear me, all of you and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come from within are what defile – from within the people – from their hearts.*

*This is important in facing the ecological crises today. James Gustave Speth, an environmental lawyer and advocate, known for his important work at the UN and in co-founding and leading the Natural Resources Defence Council in the United States, said in an interview on the BBC in 2013: "I used to think the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems – but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy. And to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that." . . . .*

*What kind of spiritual and cultural transformation can help us respond effectively to our contemporary climate crises? In the Laudato Si Action Platform, launched at the Vatican in 2021, the Catholic community identified seven practical goals. One of them is foundational and is important for our reflection and prayer here and into the future: Ecological Spirituality.*

*The goal of Ecological Spirituality aims to recover a religious vision of Creation and urges more contact with Nature in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy and gratitude. Actions could include Creation-centered liturgical celebrations, retreats and formation programmes, praying in Nature.*

*How can we help each other grow in what Pope Francis calls, "integral ecological conversion?" Can we trust that God is with us in these times, working to save us and our planet? How are we being invited as individuals and as communities, to share in this saving work? What is God inviting us to do?*

-----0000000-----

<sup>21</sup> the review: – 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.