



Daily Bread

*Homiletic starters
and scriptural
reflection points for
each day of the month*

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The Lectionary provides a kind of spiritual script for the universal church that keeps us, literally, all on the same page as we journey through the liturgical seasons. These short reflections, written by four authors who meet weekly to share the readings, are intended to help daily preachers and others who pray from the assigned scriptures each day to orient themselves to the Living Word addressed to the church in the world. Authors are identified by their initials, with short bios provided on the last page.

May 2005

SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

Mon. May 2: Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26-16:4

As St. Paul travels from city to city, churches are growing in faith and numbers, but all is not well. The disciples are often prevented from preaching. Yet St. Paul seeks passage to Macedonia after a vision implores him to preach the good news there. On the Sabbath, he seeks a quiet place. Instead, he is called to proclaim the good news to a gathering of women, including Lydia. The Lord opens her heart to St. Paul's words, and she offers the hospitality of her home. He has traveled long distances. A brief respite here is a great gift, for he will soon be imprisoned. He may not have found his quiet place of prayer initially that day, but receives an invitation to the home of "a believer in the Lord" — a place of peace for all. PR

Tues., May 3: First Corinthians 15:1-8; John 14:6-14

We cannot read St. Paul's words without feeling his frustration. He asserts a fundamental principle of our faith: Christ died, was buried and was raised on the third day. St. Paul calls upon scriptures, tradition and his own eyewitness account, yet there is doubt among the Corinthians. St. Paul's impassioned effort is clearly understood by any parent or teacher whose repeated efforts have been met with rejection or blank stares. While he asks the Corinthians who are denying the resurrection of Christ if they have believed in vain, he may be questioning his own ability to touch their imaginations. He does not falter, however. He begins again, reminds them of the Gospel he has preached and urges them to hold fast. It is clearly a message he heeds himself. PR

Wed., May 4: Acts 17:15, 22-18:1; John 16:12-15

Again, St. Paul finds himself in a difficult spot. Waiting for Timothy and Silas in Athens, he becomes disgusted by the idolatry. His debates in the public square prompt Epicurean and Stoic philosophers to question him. Soon St. Paul finds himself at the Areopagus, explaining the "strange notions" they have heard. His earlier disgust softened, St. Paul gently speaks to the Athenians not of an Unknown God or multiple gods, but of "The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth." He does not belittle their beliefs; rather, he glorifies the God of creation, a notion pleasing to the Greeks. He challenges the idea of a god dwelling in a sanctuary built by human hands and offers the God who is "not far from any one of us." How odd that we travel great distances in our continued search for God. PR

Thurs., May 5: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

Feast of the Ascension

We are a task-oriented people. We like to make lists and check off accomplishments. The 11 disciples (Judas has defected) are given their action items: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." It seems natural to want to get to work, especially since the disciples have received a preview of the final coming of the Son of Man. It also seems natural to doubt and to hang on. Even though Jesus tells them, "I am with you always, until the end of the age," it will be different. While there is much work to do, slow down this holy day. Go up to the mountain and savor this day. Don't push Jesus aside in the haste to do his will. PR

Fri., May 6: Acts 18:9-18; John 16:20-23

St. Paul faces a series of conflicts — Aquila and Priscilla coming to Corinth because of Claudius' orders for all the Jews to leave Rome; St. Paul's patience with the Jews wearing thin because of their opposition, and his subsequent turning to the Gentiles, the Jews banding together and taking St. Paul to the tribunal; Gallio's refusal to take sides in the case against St. Paul; and the angered Jews seizing Sosthenes and beating him in full view of the tribunal. It seems odd that St. Paul remains in the midst of such chaos for so long. It is even more baffling that he is able to teach the word of God effectively here. But that is exactly where the Lord has asked him to be, offering encouragement and assuring safety. The Lord says he has many people in that city, but clearly there is call for at least one more. PR



Sat., May 7: Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23-28

St. Paul leaves Corinth and brings strength to the disciples. Aquila and Priscilla, likewise, bring strength to the numbers of those proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. In Ephesus, they meet Apollo, an authority on scripture and an eloquent speaker. They explain “the Way” to him more fully. Apollo then goes to Achaia, is welcomed by the disciples and continues to preach. We begin this week’s readings with St. Paul opening hearts to the Lord. We see how he faces hardship and doubt, but is not silenced. Now he strengthens the disciples in spirit and number. We are privileged to be his companions. PR

SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER

Mon. May 9: Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33

Jesus speaks of troubled times when the disciples will abandon him and scatter without even the comfort of each other. In this reading, they are rather cocky — like young soldiers going off to their first battle or teenagers leaving home for the first time. Jesus is trying to break through that bravado and give them words to remember when he is gone and they are panicked and despairing. “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.” Is this not a timeless message? During this last week of Easter we pray in a special way for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our world. Whatever the headlines or the crises in community or family, Jesus is Lord. We are called to be faithful and to pray for each other and our world. PBS

Tues., May 10: Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11a

This week’s readings include farewell speeches filled with concern for those left behind and grief at the prospect of parting forever. St. Paul is saying goodbye after three years of working within the church at Ephesus. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his own death. For many young people and those who love them, the month of May is a time of parting and transition. Graduation is one of those times when we speak the truth about what is dearest to us. Commencement addresses and the speeches of valedictorians are earnest and urgent. In these farewell addresses of Jesus and St. Paul, we hear what they most earnestly and urgently want us to hold in our hearts. (Today we may remember Blessed Damien of Moloka’i, who willingly parted from all those he loved to live out his life with the lepers who were isolated and otherwise abandoned. Blessed Damien, pray for us.) PBS

Wed., May 11: Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11b-19

We hear more of the farewell speeches of St. Paul and Jesus. St. Paul is addressing the leaders of the church in Ephesus. (“Overseers” are equivalent to bishops.) He cautions them to be vigilant, particularly about outside heretics and those of their own congregation who would pervert the truth. St. Paul holds himself up as a model of what a leader should be: hardworking, taking nothing from the community, serving the weak. In the Gospel, Jesus prays for his disciples. He entrusts them to the great power of God, praying that they may be one, that they share in his own joy at being one with the Father, that they be protected from the Evil One and consecrated in the

truth so that they might be missionaries to the world. There is the urgency of last moments together before parting. Just as we read and reread the last letters of a loved one suddenly taken from us, so we should read these words, trusting that what Jesus wants for us is granted if we will only receive it. PBS

Thurs., May 12: Acts 22:30,23:6-11; John 17:20-26

St. Paul, imprisoned in Jerusalem, is visited by the Lord, who tells him to go to Rome. It is safe to say that most Western Christians have come to faith because St. Paul went to Rome. (The martyrs we remember today, Sts. Nereus and Achilleus of the first century and St. Pancras of the third, were converted to Christianity in Rome and died for their faith.) In the Gospel, Jesus, having prayed for himself and his disciples, now prays for all believers of the future. And what is his last prayer before he is arrested? “That they may be one as we are one.” Unity beyond time; beyond language, culture, race and nation; beyond denomination. Today we join our prayers to the prayer of Jesus, “Make us one.” PBS

Fri., May 13: Acts 25:13b-21; John 21:15-19

St. Paul’s trial in Jerusalem points to the ancient conflict between church and state. The Romans did not want to make judgments in matters of religion. The religious leaders did not want blood on their hands. St. Paul manipulates the situation to do as his Lord told him and go to Rome. In the Gospel we hear the tender dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Jesus leads Peter to profess his love three times, thereby repenting for his threefold denial. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, passes on this role to Peter, and with it, death by crucifixion, referenced in the last line, “you will stretch out your hands.” Neither the vagaries of nation states, nor imprisonment of the innocent, nor violent death will prevent the will of God from being accomplished. PBS

Sat., May 14: Acts 1:15-17,20-26; John 15:9-17

The Feast of St. Matthias is a reminder to us that Jesus did not leave a set of bylaws on how the church was to solve personnel problems. In the case of St. Matthias, they brought the problem to the assembled 120 disciples, proposed two candidates, prayed and then let God decide by casting lots. While we are conscious of our choice for God, Jesus also reminds us, “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” To do what? To bear fruit. To get on with the work of the kingdom. PBS

SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Mon., May 16: Sirach 1:1-10; Mark 9:14-29

A man brings his son to Jesus to be healed. The boy is possessed by a violent demon (possibly epilepsy, as understood at the time). Jesus uses this occasion to teach the necessity of faith to our prayer. The faith of the boy’s father, though imperfect, is humble and honest — “I do believe; help my unbelief!” — therefore it is sufficient for Jesus to work the healing miracle. The prayer of the boy’s father should be our prayer.



But our faith in Jesus must not be faith in a mere granter of wishes, but faith in him as he is: the crucified and risen Lord, the perfect revelation of the wisdom of God and the perfect fulfillment of God's plan for us. MEW

Tues., May 17: Sirach 2:1-11; Mark 9:30-37

Jesus speaks clearly to his disciples about his imminent suffering and death, but they do not understand and are afraid to ask. It is unthinkable that God's Anointed One should suffer the shameful death of a criminal. We are like the disciples in that we are afraid to inquire too closely into that aspect of it. Much better to skip over the hard part and get right to the glory: Who will be the greatest in the good times that are coming? Jesus' response is to turn them toward a little child. Like all the "little ones," whether young in years or young in the spiritual life, our focus must be on those who need us to slow down to their shorter steps, to help them and allow them to help us in the journey toward Jerusalem. MEW

Wed., May 18: Sirach 4:11-19; Mark 9:38-40

What clear and simple reasoning Jesus employs with his disciples in this brief passage! As is often the case in the Gospel, the disciples are complaining about the circumstances under which they must work. This time, it's because some "strangers" actually had the nerve to do good in Jesus' name without carrying the proper credentials (without being one of the "inner circle" that traveled with Jesus).

Today, two thousand years later, how often do we still drag our feet when it comes to joining those who are not in complete union with us in praying and working to heal the ills of humankind? How often we reject the unity that is possible because of the disunity that still exists. MEW

Thurs., May 19: Sirach 5:1-8; Mark 9:41-50

Today's Gospel is filled with words that are hard to hear, even allowing for the dramatic figures of speech we often find in the words spoken by Jesus. When we think of "scandal," we may find ourselves smugly thinking of "them." Isn't scandal always caused by "them" — those priests accused of abuse, those divorced Catholics who remarry? "Shame on them," I say. Do I not secretly congratulate myself on not being one of "those people"? Instead I must ask myself hard, probing questions. How has my lifestyle, my self-promotion and my self-indulgence caused scandal to "little ones," not necessarily to children but to anyone who is led away from the Light by what they see me do and hear me say?

Fri., May 20: Sirach 6:5-17; Mark 10:1-12

Today's Gospel reading is often cited with respect to the indissolubility of Christian marriage, yet at an even deeper level it refers to Jesus' mission on earth. He has come to announce a new creation, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, founded on the love and fidelity of God. The loving, total commitment of husband and wife is a commitment so profound and so permanent that it is possible only with divine grace. It is meant to reflect and bear witness to the faithful love God has for us. The first reading, from the Book of Sirach, complements the Gospel by addressing the nature of friendship and

the importance of fidelity and honor to its success. When we commit to another, we must give our pledge in honesty and live it out with fidelity. Our goal is to be faithful as God is faithful. MEW

Sat., May 21: Sirach 17:1-15; Mark 10:13-16

When the disciples try to prevent some children from "bothering" Jesus, he welcomes them instead. He says they exemplify the essential quality a person must have in order to enter the Kingdom of God: They are "pure in heart." That is, they keep it simple; they focus on the most important thing. When children receive a gift from a trusted adult, they accept it and are excited to open it up and see how it works. They are not suspicious, demanding to know "Will I like this?" even before they have tried it. So must we accept the utter simplicity of the requirements for those who would enter the Kingdom: that we allow God to love us, that we love God and that love all our fellow humans unconditionally. Simple? Yes. Easy? Now, that's another question! MEW

EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Monday, May 23: Sirach 17:20-24; Mark 10:17-27

"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Here, on the day after our celebration of God as Trinity, Jesus' words on wealth should be especially disconcerting. God is relational. God calls us to live in right relationship with one another, no one hoarding the good things while others do without. But how like the rich young man are we who live in such an affluent culture! What are we to do with this message? The temptation to walk away crestfallen — and shaking our heads in bewilderment, too — is strong. For we are not merely rich, rather, we are mired in a system of extravagant, wasteful living. It leaves many poor and downtrodden, we know. But where does one begin to extricate oneself from such a sticky web, from one's very way of life? Perhaps noticing that Jesus looks at us and loves us, even so — and then resolving to do today one thing to live more simply. Undo today one strand of the web. ECW

Tuesday, May 24: Sirach 35:1-12; Mark 10:28-31

Picking up on what Jesus has said about how riches can hinder authentic discipleship, Peter points out that he and the others have given up everything to follow Jesus. Jesus assures Peter solemnly, stressing the point with hyperbole — they will be rewarded a hundred times over for all they have given up. Indeed, the true disciple exchanges a meager, ordinary life for one that is full, overflowing. But in the same breath Jesus warns more vaguely that persecutions will come, as well. And so they continue to follow him toward Jerusalem, starry eyes wide open. ECW

Wed., May 25: Sirach 36:1, 4-5a, 10-17; Mark 10:32-45

Three saints' memorials fall on this date — the Venerable Bede, Pope St. Gregory VII and mystic St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi.

Mark's Jesus continues to lead the way into Jerusalem, the



disciples following, amazed and afraid. A third time, Jesus predicts his Passion. He takes the Twelve aside and now describes with startling clarity what is about to happen: He is to be handed over, condemned, mocked, scourged, spat upon and put to death, but after three days he will rise. As if by remote control, the drama momentarily shifts to a comedic scene as the oblivious Sons of Thunder make a silly and childish request of Jesus. Jesus doesn't chide them, but explains again that the first shall be last. "Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all." ECW

Thursday, May 26: Sirach 42:15-25; Mark 10:46-52
St. Philip Neri, memorial.

As Jesus presses on toward his destiny, he passes through Jericho, and we hear today Mark's wonderful little vignette about the blind man Bartimaeus. The story features a man who lacks wholeness, and yet the son of Timaeus has remarkable insight. He recognizes Jesus' true identity (and thus far in Mark, Peter is the only human being to do so), addressing Jesus with the messianic title "Son of David." The blind man also displays extraordinary tenacity (persistently calling out to Jesus, despite being rebuked) and zeal (as he springs up, flinging his former way of life aside). His humble, straightforward request is heartening: "Master, I want to see." May we all, in confidence and humility, come before the Master in our longing for wholeness. ECW

Friday, May 27: Sirach 44:1, 9-13; Mark 11:11-26

At the end of the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great sent a band of some 40 monks to evangelize England. Leading them was one from Gregory's own monastery, Augustine. Tales of the barbarous Anglo-Saxons and the treacherous waters of the English Channel initially thwarted this mission. But Gregory insisted, so Augustine persevered and thus brought Western monasticism to the island kingdom, setting up his see in Canterbury, what would become the ecclesiastical capital of that land.

In contrast to the reluctant Augustine, whom we remember today, Mark's Jesus enters Jerusalem sure of his mission. The Gospel highlights Jesus' authority as he withers the fig tree to its roots and then astonishes all with a dramatic teaching on prayer: Filthy lucre spills everywhere; livestock and humanity both run for cover; the plot to kill Jesus thickens. The power of true faith and the need to adopt an attitude of forgiveness are also themes in this passage. ECW

Saturday, May 28: Sirach 51:12-20; Mark 11:27-33

Jesus' authority is the explicit focus of today's Gospel as the chief priests, scribes and elders ask him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?" They are probably referring especially to the recent incident in the Temple. This time Jesus' shrewdness is the proof of his authority, and he deftly counters their questioning with a question of his own that leaves them publicly befuddled.

We are sure of the source of Jesus' authority. He is the Son of God, the One sent to be the Savior of the world. But we might

reflect today upon a related question. How have we experienced the authority of Jesus in our lives? How have we witnessed to others about Jesus' authority in our lives and what that means to us? ECW

NINTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Mon. May 30: Tobit 1:1, 2; 2:1-9; Mark 12:1-12
Memorial Day

In today's Gospel, we have the parable of the vineyard. An owner sends several servants to collect what is due him. One after another, the servants are seized, beaten or killed. After repeated assaults upon the servants, the man sends his beloved son. He, too, is seized and killed. On this Memorial Day, we recall all the beloved sons (and daughters) sent forth by fathers to collect their due or defend their lands and the price they have paid. We must pause and consider the many servants we have put in harm's way and our own beloved we have sacrificed. We must pray for those who feel threatened by the master, the servant and the son, and who turn violent against them. We must above all reflect on the Father who calls them all his children and weeps for them all. PR

Tues., May 31: Zephaniah 3:14-18
or Romans 12:9-16; Luke 1:39-56

Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Elizabeth

Today we reflect on the lowly handmaid whom all ages will call Blessed. Each time we hear Mary's glorious "Yes" to God we cannot help but consider our willingness to fulfill God's plan for our own lives. John, still in his mother's womb, acknowledges his Lord and seemingly leaps with anticipation to begin his own mission. Just as the infant leaps in the womb, we must be willing to take a leap of faith. We must offer a resounding "Yes" and cast aside our fears and misgivings. We have heard God's call. Imagine the feeling of receiving Elizabeth's greeting: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." PR

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