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

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 regularly 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.

Daily Bread is now available in an email sent directly to your computer each morning. To receive this email, sign up at www.celebrationpublications.org/dailybread.

Anyone can receive it. Consider putting this email link in your parish bulletin or on your parish website.

CELEBRATION:
A Comprehensive Worship Resource
celebrationpublications.org

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 regularly 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.
missed from the pre-Vatican II church. (Only two students were actually born before 1963: a Korean nun and a Baptist who took the class to find out “what you Catholics believe.”) Their essays mentioned the same words over and over: dignity, beauty, majesty, awe, mystery. One student gave his essay a title that said it all: “What We Miss Shouldn’t Be Missing.” It’s a struggle to preserve what is true and lovely and let go of what holds us back, which threatens to become an idol. For the church and all the communities of the church: for wisdom and charity, we pray. P

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. When do you break the rules? When it is necessary to preserve life. Pastors are often faced with this question. Do we offer the bread of life to those who are spiritually hungry even if they are unable to live within the law? Jesus does not suggest flagrant violation of tradition, nor does he slavishly follow the rules. He follows the middle way and it is in the middle where we find Jesus. For those who are hungry and for those who long to feed them, we pray. PBS

Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

Peter Claver, priest
Looking around at them all, he then said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” The scribes and Pharisees are enraged when Jesus heals on the Sabbath. They refuse to acknowledge his action as the miracle it is and focus on the transgression of doing “work” on the day of rest. Jesus’ words to the suffering man could just as easily be addressed to his detractors. Instead of standing on ceremony, they simply need to stretch out their hands to those in need. If they looked at the man and his infirmity instead of looking at rules, they might see compassion and not contempt in what Jesus did. The Lord’s goodness toward others is not an affront to us. While rules and authority are important, love trumps all. For the grace to reach out to others in love and compassion, no matter the cost, we pray. PR

Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all. A pat on the back. A squeeze of the hand. A hug. A high-five. The power of touch is indisputable. Tactile sensation can help premature babies grow, accelerate recovery from illness, alleviate stress and calm people who are afraid. A simple gesture can mean so much to someone who is lonely, in pain, frightened. Outcasts, lepers and others shunned by society came to Jesus; he wasn’t afraid to get close to them and touch them. All some people need to be healthy and whole is someone else to recognize their worth, to reach out in compassion and understanding. We cannot be afraid to get close to those who need the healing touch of God. May our hands be like Christ’s hands reaching out in gentleness and love, we pray. PR

Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. In our limited human capacity, it is difficult for us to see the point of earthly suffering. Yes, intellectually we understand that suffering can be redemptive, joining us to the cross of Christ, but it’s hard to struggle, and it’s painful to witness the suffering of others. Luke mentions real conditions of need: the hungry, the thirsty, the outcast. God calls each of us to share our gifts with others and contribute to the well-being of a healthy society. It may seem that there is endless need, but there will be endless joy once we face the real economic and social conditions before us. On this day when we remember great loss and pain in the United States, may we have the grace to alleviate suffering where we can, we pray. PR

Do to others as you would have them do to you. As children we learn the Golden Rule. It’s a simple, effective standard for living well. It’s a call toward Christian living — not treating others as their actions seem to deserve, but as Jesus would treat them regardless of their transgressions. It’s a template for charity, for turning the other cheek, for peace, mercy and generosity. It’s putting ourselves in another person’s position and looking at them without judgment. Our words and actions must show our radical love and understanding of what it means to truly live as Christ. For the grace to see others as Jesus sees them, we pray. PR

John Chrysostom, bishop and doctor of the church
You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye. It’s less work to blame someone else than to change ourselves. When we dwell on others’ faults, we can let our own run rampant. Jesus tells us to think again before we judge another person without first rooting out the sin in ourselves. It’s much easier to bring others to God if they see God in us. Today’s saint, John Chrysostom (whose name means “golden tongue”), spoke with a clarity and truth that turned many hearts. Let’s follow his example. Through the intercession of St. John Chrysostom, may our words and our works reflect true Christian love and charity, we pray. PR

Triumph of the Holy Cross
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Jesus doesn’t come to condemn us — we may do that ourselves by turning from his saving grace — but he suffered, died, was buried and rose again so that we may rise with him. Today we celebrate the mystery and paradox of the cross and pray that we will continue to focus on its power to transform and save. We look especially to those who suffer in their earthly lives and reassure them that they will find glory in the resurrection. Let us join Jesus Christ, our redeemer, in exalting in the redemptive nature of the cross, we pray. PR
Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Cornelius, pope, and Cyprian, bishop, martyrs
Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you; but say the word and let my servant be healed. Today’s reading is the first of two healing stories presented this week in the Gospel. The emphasis of this account is on the amazing faith and utter humility of the Roman centurion who feels unworthy to ask Jesus for this favor himself, so sends Jewish elders to plead for him. He has absolute belief in the power even of Jesus’ words, and Jesus is astonished at his faith. This man’s statement has become a part of our liturgy so that his words are continually on our lips. Just as the servant returns to good health, we pray to be spiritually healed of any doubt. Lord, for faith, we pray. PC

The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Today’s reading details another instance of healing, but with a different emphasis, this time on Jesus’ tender care. Here the young man is not sick, but dead. Jesus notices the funeral procession and the grief of the mother and is “moved with pity” for her. Jesus learns the woman is a widow and this young man is her only son, the comfort of her old age. He tells her not to cry, touches the coffin and speaks the words of healing. The story doesn’t end with the young man’s return to life but with a touching scene that shows Jesus’ loving and tender nature: “and Jesus gave him to his mother.” Lord, for your tender love, we pray. PC

To what shall I compare the people of this generation? The comparison is not a good one. No matter what a prophet says or does, he is rejected. John was dismissed by many as being too extreme, too ascetic. Now Jesus is condemned by the same people because he is not ascetic enough. Plus, he hangs around with sinners! With these people there is no way to win because their minds are closed to any thought of change. We do the same thing today in many cases: We rationalize our rejection of what is right when it is a threat to our comfortable existence. We see suffering and know Jesus calls us to serve, but say no, not if it involves too much sacrifice, or is too dangerous, or too time-consuming. We notice injustice but turn away. Lord, teach us your ways, we pray. PC

Thurs., Sept. 19: 1 Tim 4:12-16; Luke 7:36-50
The others at table said to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Imagine the indignation of this “righteous” Pharisee who receives a lecture from Jesus, his guest, on forgiveness. The Pharisee has utter contempt for the “sinful woman” who has just anointed the feet of Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus tells her she has loved much and her sins are forgiven, much to the chagrin of the host who has loved little. Jesus teaches that love of God and neighbor is the essence of the Law and the prophets, and we are forgiven to the extent that we forgive others. Those at dinner are skeptical about Jesus’ ability to forgive sins, but Jesus says to the woman that her great love and her faith have saved her. Lord, to be less judgmental and more loving, we pray. PC

Fri., Sept. 20: 1 Tim 6:2c-12; Luke 8:1-3
Andrew Kim Tae-gon, priest, Paul Chong Ha-sang, and companions, martyrs
Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women … Mary, called Magdalene … Joanna … Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources. These women of Galilee accompany Jesus as he travels from village to village, even going to Jerusalem with him, where they witness his death and resurrection. Among those beneath the cross are these women. In his ministry, Jesus does not make any distinction between men and women, even disregarding the practice of not speaking to women individually in public. The first follower Jesus speaks to after his resurrection is Mary, who takes his message to the others. Our prayer is that this example of Jesus be lived out today in the church, and that women be given roles according to their abilities and calling. Lord, for your example of equality, we pray. PC

Matthew, apostle and evangelist
As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. Today’s Gospel reading recounts the call of Matthew, along with the controversy it caused. Since Matthew is a tax collector, even eating at table with him would cause ritual impurity for a Jew. Now Jesus is eating with several tax collectors and their associates — sinners! When Jesus is challenged about this seemingly inappropriate behavior, he quotes Hosea that God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Consequently, mercy is more important than ritual purity or even temple sacrifices. From this early incident, the conflict is clear between Jesus’ interpretation of scripture and the Pharisees’ long-held beliefs. Love, mercy, forgiveness and service will be essential themes in Jesus’ teaching and actions. Lord, for the strength to follow you, we pray. PC

Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Pius of Pietrelcina, priest
No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed. By its very nature, and in order to serve its purpose, light must be visible. What is the purpose of light? Light gives us warmth and illuminates our world. Light guides our way. Plants, animals and human beings depend on light to produce heat and food; most adapt to variations in the amount of light throughout the year. It only takes a thunderstorm and a loss of power to realize how much we crave — and need — light. Occasionally, however, the light will shine in the dark corners of the world we’d rather not see. Then it’s up to us to let God’s light shine in and through us. May our lives shine with the light of your love, O God. PC
Jesus offers us a glimpse of the unfathomable mystery that personal Lord and Savior, or the cosmic universal Christ? of the above, or none of them? God, or a piece of God? My personal Lord and Savior, or the cosmic universal Christ? Jesus offers us a glimpse of the unfathomable mystery that is God. We cannot sum him up any more than we can sum up the One who sent him. May our desire for concise answers about Jesus not interfere with our following. JL.

Sat., Sept. 28: Zech 2:5-9, 14-15a; Luke 9:43b-45 Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men. This is not the first time Jesus has told the disciples that he will suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes. The first time, Jesus said that anyone who wanted to follow him had to deny themselves and take up their cross. The reaction of the disciples then isn’t mentioned. This time, after the disciples are completely astounded when Jesus heals a boy with a demon, Jesus brings them down to earth with a second prediction of his suffering and death. The disciples do not comprehend what Jesus is trying to tell them and they’re reluctant to question him. Lord Jesus, be with us in our efforts to understand who you are and to follow where you lead. JL.

Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Sept. 30: Zech 8:1-8; Luke 9:46-50 Jerome, priest and doctor of the church Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company. The tension between order and charisma has been with us since the beginning. It’s a good tension that keeps the church in balance, but it can be frustrating, even heartbreaking: for the one who has been gifted with charisma, but is not recognized by order; for order as it struggles to preserve and protect; and for the communities who suffer for lack of inspired ministers, Many of our ancestors in the faith found themselves in the midst of this tension — Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, and the saint we celebrate today, Jerome. As we live within this tension now, we remember the response of Jesus: “Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you.” Lord Jesus, bless your church with wise and inspired leaders. PBS

Daily Bread Authors

Portia Clark earned a bachelor’s degree in English and theology and a master’s in English literature from Oklahoma State University.

Jeanne Lischer grew up in St. Louis and Ghana, West Africa, where her parents were missionaries. She is a graduate of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, was ordained in 1990 in the United Church of Christ and is currently the pastor for two rural congregations in Missouri.

Patricia Russell graduated from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Mich., with degrees in English and secondary education.

Paige Byrne Shortal earned a bachelor’s degree in theology at Saint Louis University and a master’s degree in pastoral studies at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis. Visit her website and contact her at www.paigebyrneshortal.com.