



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

February 7, 2021

Offering the Gospel to All

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

If you asked Jesus what he did while on earth, I believe he would say, “preached and healed.” Those were his missions. He had good news to share and a longing to convince his listeners of the truth of this gospel of love and freedom. He was moved because he saw them like sheep without a shepherd. The Gospels are nothing other than documentation of Jesus’ efforts to preach the gospel.

Paul shared Christ’s ardor. He was entrusted with preaching to the Gentiles the truth of the Gospel, and he did all he could to convince them of his message.

He says he became all things to all, to save at least some. He worked hard during the day so he could pay his own way and offer his message for free. He adapted himself to his audience—their customs and ways of thinking—so they wouldn’t take offense at him, closing their hearts to his message.

How many missionaries have used this same approach? Just think of the French Jesuits Sts. Jean de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues of the Great Lakes region, St. Junípero Serra in the West, or Mother Cabrini serving European immigrants on the East Coast. They learned new languages, ate new foods, and adopted new traditions to insert themselves into these cultures and share the gospel. They took a page out of Paul’s book, becoming all things to all to save at least some.

We are modern-day apostles and missionaries. Let’s take a page out of Paul’s book, and offer this gospel of hope and love to so many souls in need. +

Sunday Readings

Job 7:1–4, 6–7

Is not life on earth a drudgery, / its days like those of a hireling?

1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23

If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me.

Mark 1:29–39

[Jesus said,] “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.”

Paul adapted himself to his audience’s customs and ways of thinking so they wouldn’t take offense at him.

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus sends his disciples out to all nations....We too were part of all those people of two thousand years ago. Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message and his presence. Instead, he always embraced life as he saw it.

—Canonization of Fr. Junípero Serra, September 23, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- When you look around, what needs for the gospel of love do you see?
- Which of these needs can you fill as Jesus’ apostle?

In the Divine Potter's Hands

By Johan van Parys

My father was a great storyteller. Every night he read from the Bible. He had the talent to depict biblical scenes in such a way that we could see them unfold in our minds' eyes.

I clearly remember the night he read the creation story to us. Though I loved all the other stories, I was mostly intrigued by the creation of Adam. I visualized God collecting the clay before lovingly molding Adam and blowing life into him. This image of God as primordial potter molded and shaped *me* as well.

There is something wholesome, something sacred, about pottery. Pottery is about clay, and clay is about soil—in Adam's case, primordial soil.

Pottery, of course, is not only about clay; it also bears the imprint of the potter's hands. A potter takes the clay and judges its quality and its consistency. She carefully places a lump of clay on the potter's wheel and starts spinning it. She works the clay with her skillful hands as the undefined mass of clay takes shape, never giving up on the clay, starting over until she is pleased with the result.

As every cup bears the imprint of its maker's hands, so each member of the human race bears the imprint of the Divine Potter's hands. But unlike a cup, which can't be changed once it's fired, humans can be reshaped. God shaped humans in his own image, and he continues to mold and remold us.



In the sacred liturgy, we're molded and remolded by God; this is our time to worship and God's time to shape.

During the celebration of the liturgy, God molds us into the Body of Christ. The liturgy is the divine hands, and we are the clay. Sunday after Sunday, we're shaped and reshaped. In liturgy upon liturgy, God focuses and refocuses us on what is right. During our ongoing catechesis, we have the opportunity to learn more about what God has in mind for us as it is revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition. The goal, of course, is to go into the world and do what is right in the eyes of God.

Any potter knows it's difficult to

create the perfect shape and that it takes a long time to get it just right. Similarly, becoming a good Christian isn't an easy task. It takes a lifelong commitment to celebrate the liturgy and to engage in learning so we can live a truly Christian life. However, thanks to God's persistence and unflinching commitment to keep shaping and reshaping us, one day we'll be molded into perfect shape as members of the Body of Christ. +

Unlike a cup, which can't be changed once it is fired, humans can be reshaped.

PRAYER

*Lord, you hear the cry of the poor.
Hear my cry for inner peace and happiness.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 8–13

Monday, Weekday:

Gn 1:1–19 / Mk 6:53–56

Tuesday, Weekday:

Gn 1:20–2:4a / Mk 7:1–13

Wednesday, St. Scholastica:

Gn 2:4b–9, 15–17 / Mk 7:14–23

Thursday, Weekday:

Gn 2:18–25 / Mk 7:24–30

Friday, Weekday:

Gn 3:1–8 / Mk 7:31–37

Saturday, Weekday:

Gn 3:9–24 / Mk 8:1–10

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the **Word** 

February 7, 2021

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Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
February 14, 2021

The Courage to Heal

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Leprosy was a highly contagious skin disease that led to certain death for anyone who caught it in Jesus' time. For good reason the Jewish law demanded that a leper live set apart and cry out as he walked along to keep everyone at a safe distance. Imagine the pitiful scene of everyone discreetly but purposefully moving away at the sound of someone shouting, "Unclean, unclean!"

Yet the leper doesn't shout to keep Jesus away. He walks right up to our Lord and confesses his faith in Jesus' power to heal him of this incurable bacteria. He humbly admits his contagious illness and places himself before Jesus. And unlike anyone else might do, Jesus doesn't run

away, he walks toward him. He does the unthinkable. He touches him!

We need not be ashamed of our deadly sin that eats away at our heart and cripples our ability to love. Go to Jesus, expose it to him, and let his loving touch transform you.

The terrible disease of leprosy was still a major problem well into the nineteenth century when St. Damian, a Belgian missionary, went to the Hawaiian Island of Molokai to serve as parish priest to all the lepers quarantined on that island. Not fearing to touch them, he cared for them for many years until, as expected, he contracted the disease and died of it.

This is what it means to be a Christian! Be like Jesus. Be not afraid of your wounds or those of others, no matter how repellent, and give of yourself to care for them. +

Sunday Readings

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

The individual shall cry out, "Unclean, unclean!"

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1

Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Mark 1:40–45

"If you wish, you can make me clean."
...[Jesus] said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean."

*We need not be ashamed
of our deadly sin
that eats away at our heart
and cripples our ability
to love.*

A Word from Pope Francis

[Jesus says] he is the real instrument of the Father's mercy, who goes to encounter everyone, bringing consolation and salvation, and, in doing so, he manifests God's justice. The blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf regain their dignity and are no longer excluded because of their disease.

—General Audience, September 7, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How at peace am I with my own wounds, sins, and imperfections?
- Am I mature enough to seek help and also help others through their suffering?

Light Within the Darkness

By Kathleen M. Basi

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

We live in a pretty messed-up world: Countries pursue weapons that could wipe out everything. Mothers turn guns on their children. We justify derision, bigotry, and violence in the name of God. Young people objectify themselves and their peers because they lack good models of how to give and receive love.

The problems aren't hard to identify. What's hard is figuring out what to do about them. They're so big, so sprawling, and so tightly woven. Where do I even begin? What's the right plan of action? How can lowly little me, with my couple hundred social-networking friends, interrupt the momentum of this juggernaut?

My impotence makes me angry. I'm jaded by the partisan bickering that ensures nothing ever gets solved. I'm tempted to throw up my hands and write off the future—and my responsibility to it—altogether. What do my actions matter, anyway, amid so much brokenness, so much willful ignorance?

But when I spend all my energy on anger, I cease to recognize the beauty, the potential for good, that exists alongside



and is sometimes intertwined with the bad. The voices shouting vitriol, anger, narcissism, and greed drown out the whisper of the divine.

I bury myself in self-righteous judgment until, without realizing it, I become part of the problem instead of the solution. I go looking for a safe, insulated enclave, someplace the problems can't reach me, where I'm absolved of the duty to act where, when, and how I'm able.

The opportunity to act does exist, but it's usually uncomfortable. It's easier to stand back and complain than to dig in, get my hands dirty, and risk learning—through abject failure or mediocre success—how small I really

am. I think this is why St. Paul tells us to contemplate what is true and pure: What I focus on determines my reality. If I wrap my worldview in anger, I leave no room for kindness and compassion. But if I fix my sights on all that is good and holy, I'm fortified against the bitterness and disillusionment that might otherwise cripple me as I fight the unwinnable battle against the effects of sin. After all, let's face it—as Henri Nouwen observed, the world will always be dark. My efforts aren't going to change that.

Fortunately, God doesn't look at the bottom line when measuring my job performance. As St. Teresa of Calcutta famously said, "My job is not to succeed, but to be faithful to my mission." +

If I wrap my worldview in anger, I leave no room for kindness and compassion.

**PRAYER**

Lord, your love transcends the boundaries of the human condition. Open my eyes to see your face in all people.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 15–20

Monday, Weekday:
Gn 4:1-15, 25 / Mk 8:11–13

Tuesday, Weekday:
Gn 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10 / Mk 8:14–21

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12–18 /
2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32

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Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (B)
February 21, 2021

Navigating the Desert

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Like Noah being prepared to navigate the Flood, so the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert. Why was he sent there? Did he need to learn something he didn't know? Did he lack something he needed? Jesus as God didn't lack anything, of course, but he needed time to pray, reflect, and prepare for his mission. He also wanted to set an example to follow. Another Scripture says he went into the desert to be tempted by the devil. That time of spiritual combat was helpful for him.

We also need to go through trials and crises to grow both in our spiritual lives and human maturity. We each have had our desert where we are challenged to our core and stretched beyond our limits. Perhaps it was a crisis such as a health, employment, or relational issue. But it doesn't always have to be such a dramatic event. It can be as simple and constant as the prolonged embracing of daily challenges in a manner that leads to life. We probably look back and see these as some of our best times—if we truly encountered ourselves and our Lord.

The key is in peaceful acceptance, looking for what good can be learned from these inconveniences. In every cross there is a resurrection; in every storm a rainbow assures us of God's presence and victory. It tells us that clouds and storms will not lead to total death, but rather to a purified rebirth, growth, and newfound life and strength. He has promised us this. +

Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8–15

[God said,] "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

1 Peter 3:18–22

[Baptism] is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience.

Mark 1:12–15

[Jesus said,] "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

In every cross there is a resurrection; in every storm a rainbow assures us of God's presence and victory.

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength... He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

—Extraordinary Moment of Prayer for the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 27, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What important lessons have I learned from a challenge in my life?
- Can I share that lesson with a friend or family member?

Becoming the Paschal Mystery

By Johan van Parys

Have you ever wondered where Lent comes from? The word *Lent* comes from the Middle English word *lente*, which means “spring.” Just as new life abounds in spring, during Lent we prepare to celebrate new life at Easter.

The origin of Lent can be traced back to a period of intense fasting and praying in preparation for adult baptism. In some Christian communities this period lasted anywhere from a few days or a few weeks to the symbolic forty days. Our current forty-day Lenten fast refers back to the forty days of Jesus and the forty years of Israel’s people spent in the desert.

It was determined that Easter Vigil would be the best time to celebrate baptism, and forty days of preparation before Easter became a custom. Currently the period of preparation for Easter known as Lent is recognized by the entire community; it used to be recognized only by catechumens planning to be baptized during the Easter Vigil.

Lent also became the time for great penance by those who belonged to the Order of Penitents as the precursor to the sacrament of reconciliation, which was created to allow people to repent for grave sins. The bishop admitted sinners to the Order of Penitents during a special rite that included the use of ashes. A remnant of this rite is found in our Ash Wednesday service.

Members of the Order of Penitents were excluded from the sacraments and



expected to dedicate their lives to prayer and penance. Once a year, on Holy Thursday, the bishop welcomed those who were ready to be readmitted to the Church and the sacraments. Penitents would intensify their prayer and penance during the days leading up to Easter.

Today, these two movements toward the sacraments of initiation and reconciliation characterize the season of Lent. Lent is indeed the time of final preparation for those who will join the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil. Those who are already members are called to reconcile with God and the Church so they can celebrate Easter in a worthy manner.

In addition, Lent offers three disciplines as part of the preparation for initiation and reconciliation: fasting, praying, and giving of alms (charity or care for others). Prayer allows us to reconnect with God. Without this relationship, our Church membership is a mere exercise in following rules and regulations. Penance helps us reconnect with ourselves as an exercise in removing everything that clouds our vision. Giving alms enables us to reconnect with others as an exercise in sharing.

May the celebration of this great season of Lent be a time of sincere penance, prayer, and sharing so that, in a renewed spirit, we may become the paschal mystery we celebrate. +

***Lent was recognized
only by catechumens
planning to be baptized
during the Easter Vigil.***



***Lord, strengthen my resolve to be
faithful to your covenant of love
and be more compassionate and
generous toward all people.***

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day
of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 22–27

Monday, The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent (B)
February 28, 2021

Let Go and Let God

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

A Vatican mural by Raphael Sanzio, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, depicts the promised Isaac, the son of Abraham’s old age, kneeling humbly on an altar. He was the answer to a prayer, a commitment by God that, through this child, Abraham would have descendants as numerous as the stars. Yet God was asking him to sacrifice that hope and promise. And Abraham, although surely not understanding, was willing to obey the Father. It represents the supreme test of faith. Abraham is called “our Father in Faith” for a reason.

Abraham is looking up to God, not focused on the creatures, even as much as he loved his son. We also need to be looking up to God in order to rightly value the things below.

Abraham understands that no godly gift should take God’s place in the human heart—even something as precious as his God-given child. When dealing with all the good things God gives us, even those he has promised and those we love most, we must be willing to submit to his plans. God doesn’t always make sense to us and we are painfully aware that his ways are not always our ways.

Isaac is a young boy, but certainly big enough to put up a fight as his elderly father’s plans become evident. Yet we see Isaac kneeling in acceptance of the sacrifice God requests. Although he wants to understand, he doesn’t make the reason an absolute. Isaac foreshadows the trusting lamb led to slaughter, the ram whose head will be caught in a crown of thorns, and the Son who will not be spared by the heavenly Father. +

Abraham understands that no godly gift should take God’s place in the human heart.

A Word from Pope Francis

We learn from Abraham to pray with faith, to dialogue, to argue, but always ready to receive the word of God and to put it into practice. We learn to talk with God as a child with his father: to listen to him, respond, argue, but transparent, as a child with his father.

—General Audience, June 3, 2020



Sunday Readings

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18

I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore.

Romans 8:31b–34

He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Mark 9:2–10

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Are we willing to lay peacefully within God’s plan, even if it means sacrifice? Do we trust his plans more than our own?
- Is anything more important than God’s loving plan for us?

Build a Strong Foundation

By Kathleen M. Basi

In the absence of clarity, the only way to hold the course is to stay in touch with the One who sees the big picture. Prayer is the foundation of a lived faith.

Sometimes I think past generations had an easier time following God. The Israelites had the finger of the Almighty carving commandments in stone. The early Church had flesh-and-blood encounters with the Son of God. We, on the other hand, have to make do by asking, “What would Jesus do?”

It seems like an easy question until you start trying to answer it. After all, Jesus never told us how to address terrorism, prenatal testing, or the hookup culture. Even perennial problems like poverty require us to distinguish between collective (governmental) and personal responsibility. As we consider the future, how do we discern a Christian response to sticky moral quandaries?

The answer is as deceptively simple as the question. The answer is prayer. But prayer is more than a shopping list tacked to a rosary or Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. Asking God for what we need is good and holy, but prayer is a two-way street; we also have to listen. Listening requires quiet, and the paradigms that govern modern life leave little room for quiet. Lack of stimulus makes us nervous—we can’t exercise without earbuds streaming music. We can’t eat in restaurants without a widescreen TV in every corner. Smartphones ensure that the web is at our fingertips at all times.



In many ways, this is a blessing; however, it also means God has to shout to be heard. And although God certainly can shout, it’s not his preferred mode of communication.

God doesn’t inscribe messages on billboards; he speaks softly to pilgrim hearts (see 1 Kings 19:12)—those who seek to hear his voice in everything they encounter, who take time to “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:11). And therein lies the first challenge—to set aside the background noise that fills modern life.

It may not feel like it, but the moral conundrums of generations past were as much a muddle to the people living through them as ours are now. Their

problems look simple because we have the advantage of hindsight. The future will always be shrouded in uncertainty. Confidence comes when we humbly admit we don’t have the answers. It comes when we remove distraction and allow our hearts and minds to be molded into a clearer reflection of God.

If we reflect God, we can trust that we have direction in our stumbling—even if we can’t see the endpoint. +

*Prayer is more than
a shopping list tacked to
a rosary or Chaplet of the
Divine Mercy.*

**PRAYER**

*Lord, you watch over me
and love me as your child.
Help me to see all people as
your children and treat them with
gentleness, love, and respect.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day
of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 1–6

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 1:10, 16–20 / Mt 23:1–12

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31

Friday, Lenten Weekday: Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a,
17b–28a / Mt 21:33–43, 45–46

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32

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