



Daily Bread

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

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The Roman 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 five 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.

February 2017

Fourth Week in Ordinary Time (continued)

Wed., Feb. 1: Heb 12:4-7, 11-15; Mk 6:1-6

He was not able to perform any mighty deed there ... We limit Jesus by our willingness to buy into what he can do. If we doubt his power or motive, we create our own stumbling block. Our resistance is not unlike that which Jesus encountered returning home. Accepting Jesus as someone other than Mary's son would force his old neighbors out of their familiar roles. Acknowledging Jesus' potential to truly shake things up would necessitate accepting that they must expand their thinking. If we validate that Jesus is not just a carpenter, then we must also take another look at others we've conveniently labeled. This necessitates being more understanding and welcoming. Until we move out of our comfort zone, we'll always restrict who Jesus is and what he can do. *Help me to know you, Lord.* PR

Thurs., Feb. 2: Mal 3:1-4; Heb 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

Presentation of the Lord

"... a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel ..." Commonly called Candlemas, today's feast celebrates Christ, the Light of the World, entering the Temple of Jerusalem. Simeon and Anna, two devout and elderly believers, wait in patient expectation. Their tireless practice of prayer and fasting gives light to recognition. Time spent in contemplation affords them the ability to see the Messiah in these humble circumstances. Simeon's words shed light both on the child's importance and on the sacrifice to come. This proclamation illuminates our ability to see the Lord in unexpected and paradoxical ways. *May we meet the Christ Child in the poor, lowly and small.* PR

Fri., Feb. 3: Heb 13:1-8; Mk 6:14-29

Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. One of the simplest and most effective forms of evangelization is kindness. When we are pleasant, generous and attentive, we share the love of God in our lives and extend it to others. Christian hospitality recognizes the value of everyone we encounter as a precious child of God. Being too busy to greet others or inquire about their well-being devalues them and us. Haste makes us self-absorbed. We may be the only one to pause and validate that person's existence and dignity. Such moments make it hard to determine who the angel is. Both parties truly benefit from the grace of such encounters. *Lord, help me to greet others with your love and hospitality.* PR

Sat., Feb. 4: Heb 13:15-17; Mk 6:30-34

... and they had no opportunity even to eat. We're constantly bombarded with needs — some extremely urgent — but neglecting ourselves benefits no one. Jesus and the apostles make time to get away for some quiet time, even though their respite is brief. If we go nonstop without renewing, reflecting and praying about how and why we serve, our actions become robotic and empty. We may still reach out in duty, but we risk becoming gruff or resentful. That attitude serves no one. Our unmet basic needs distract us from fully engaging in genuine acts of love and compassion. There will always be those who seek our aid; we should be moved to respond like Jesus, but we must also show some care and respect for ourselves. Only then can our hearts guide our actions. *Thank you, Lord, for times of refreshment and relaxation.* PR

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 6: Gn 1:1-19; Mk 6:53-56

Paul Miki and companions, martyrs

God saw how good it was. When you stop to think about it, God did an incredibly awesome job of creating this world in which we live. Everything is in balance, living in harmony. And after each act of creation, what did God do? God saw that it was good. The goodness of creation is goodness in and of itself, just because it is. Skies and seas, mountains and valleys, rain and snow, trees and plants, animals and fish



are not simply here for us to use but exist because they are good in themselves. *Lord of all, to thee we raise, this our song of grateful praise.* JL

Tues., Feb. 7: Gn 1:20-2:4a; Mk 7:1-13

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and creatures that crawl upon the ground. God's creation is a finely tuned network of interdependent relationships. As human beings, we are a part of God's creation, but we are also *apart* from creation. God gave humans unique powers and authority, powers that are meant to be used carefully and creatively. Our role is to be stewards of God's creation, but all too often we see the earth and its resources as commodities that we can use, exploit and destroy. We do not see creation as a community to which we belong. *For wisdom and courage to live as stewards of your creation, we pray.* JL

Wed., Feb. 8: Gn 2:4b-9, 15-17; Mk 7:14-23

The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Even though I grew up in the church, I think I was in college before I realized that there isn't just one creation story in Genesis. The first chapter is one story, with the litany of days and what God created on each day. In that account, humans are created last and given instructions to "fill the earth and subdue it." In the second story, humans are created first, and then God plants a garden in Eden and settles the man there to cultivate and care for it. Although they are different, these creation stories both ask the question, "Why are we here?" Both accounts give the same answer: We are here to care for God's creation. *For your grace as we seek to be faithful stewards, we pray.* JL

Thurs., Feb. 9: Gn 2:18-25; Mk 7:24-30

It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him. As this creation story continues, God realizes that the human being needs companions. Therefore, God creates all kinds of animals, but none of them are suitable partners for the man. Then God creates another human being, a woman, to be the first human's partner. The other creatures could not meet this need for human relationship. We were created by God to be in equal, mutual relationship with each other. Some might argue that "the more I'm around some people, the more I like my dog," but it is our relationships — whether broken or fulfilling, painful or wonderful — that help us become the people God intends us to be. *We give thanks, Love Divine, for companionship, love and community in all its many forms.* JL

Fri., Feb. 10: Gn 3:1-8; Mk 7:31-37

Scholastica, religious

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. The Garden of Eden. Paradise. Think lush green ferns, warm breezes, peace, plenty of sunshine. It's a place where nothing is broken, a place where God's shalom still reigns, a place where you could walk around naked and not even realize you're naked — as long

as you stay away from the fruit of one particular tree. But the woman doesn't stay away. She has a remarkable conversation with a serpent, eats fruit from that one particular tree, and Paradise is gone forever. The humans know they're naked, they know they're guilty, and so they hide from the strong, kind presence of God their creator and friend. *Guide and direct the choices we make, O God.* JL

Sat., Feb. 11: Gn 3:9-24; Mk 8:1-10

You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat! God comes to the garden, looking for Adam and Eve. "Where are you?" God asks, and the excuses start flying. Adam blames Eve for giving him the fruit, and then Eve blames the serpent for tricking her. In the end, they are all punished: pain for Eve, toil for Adam, and banishment for the serpent. How did they survive the loss of paradise? That is part of the story, too: They did survive. They decided to live. The days of peace and plenty were gone, but they were able to create a future for themselves in the world outside Eden — the world in which we live today. *We yearn for your presence with us, Divine Creator, on this side of Eden.* JL

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 13: Gn 4:1-5,25; Mk 8:11-13

[Jesus] sighed from the depth of his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign?" Much as our preschool daughter had loved simple board games, she disliked playing them with one particular friend. As an only child, the friend had not yet learned the art of *losing* games. She would insist on her right to throw the dice as often as it took to get a result she wanted. It reminds me of how the Pharisees dealt with Jesus' teachings. Deep down they knew the truth of Jesus' words, but they kept insisting on "proof" so as to avoid changing their own deep-seated attitudes. I, too, can make elaborate excuses to avoid modifying behaviors I know are not reflective of my baptismal call to love. *Be merciful, O Lord, and forgive when we avoid doing your will.* MJ

Tues., Feb. 14: Gn 6:5-8; 7:1-5,10; Mk 8:14-21

Cyril, monk and Methodius, bishop

Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees. Just a bit of "leaven" (yeast) grows by feeding on surrounding nutrients until the entire batch of dough is transformed. Knowing his disciples were still fragile in their faith, Jesus warns them that the greed and pessimism of the Pharisees could spread among them if they let it feed upon their fears and uncertainties. He reminds them to trust in what they have witnessed for themselves and in Jesus' ability to provide them with what they need to live out his message. In a world filled with "anti-religion" sentiments, I also need to close my ears to naysayers, remind myself of all that God has done in my life and hold fast to God's promise of salvation. *Give us faith, O Lord. Help our unbelief.* MJ

Wed., Feb. 15: Gn 8:6-13,20-22; Mk 8:22-26

Jesus laid hands on the man's eyes a second time and he saw clearly. My faith has undergone many changes over time,



hopefully becoming more mature. Most growth in my faith was initiated by an experience or an encounter that caused some doubts or questions about my beliefs. Glimpses of new perspectives are initially “fuzzy,” and often evoke both anxiety and excitement. With time and prayerful discernment, new truths become clearer and more solid; this deepens and expands my understanding of Christ’s message. I understand why Jesus tells the newly-cured blind man not to return to the village, for once a new understanding of faith is revealed, you can no longer live and believe as you once did. *Enlighten our hearts and minds, O Lord, that we may understand your message more clearly.* MJ

Thurs., Feb. 16: Gn 9:1-13; Mk 8:27-33

“Who do people say that I am?” ... Peter [replied], “You are the Christ.” I sometimes envision Jesus in the same finger-pointing pose of the old WWII “Uncle Sam wants you!” posters asking me, “Who do you say that I am?” Sure, I can recite memorized, catechism-based answers, but the question begs a more visceral response. How does knowing that Jesus is the Christ change who I am, how I think or how I live? Does it affect how I view myself or others? Like Peter, knowing who Jesus is inspires my behavior one minute, while in the next, I seem to be simply stating factual information. But Jesus’ question begs a heartfelt and committed response each day — even hourly some days. *Your love gives life and meaning to our day, O Lord.* MJ

Fri., Feb. 17: Gn 11:1-9; Mk 8:34-9:1

Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself. Today’s readings caution against the destructive consequences of human pride, that tendency to place one’s own desires before our respect for God and each other. In his encyclical letter “*Laudato Si’*, on Care for Our Common Home,” Pope Francis also reminds us of the consequences we face when we ignore our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation. “When human beings fail to find their true place in the world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves” (#115). “The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing but ourselves” (#6). As individuals, faith communities and even countries, we risk becoming modern “cities of Babel” when we forget our interdependence upon our creator and each other. *May we learn to see all of your creation with awe and respect, O God.* MJ

Sat., Feb. 18: Heb 11:1-7; Mk 9:2-13

Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Science presumes that a theory is accepted only after it is proven, while faith assumes that once you believe, proof becomes evident. As did Peter, who wants to pitch three tents to stay in the wonderful “mountain-top” moment, most of us prefer stable comforts and predictable futures. Choosing a life in Christ, however, rarely leads us in predictable directions. When Jesus calls us to follow him, we are asked to leap into the unknown, trusting that God will guide and accompany us wherever the path of faith may lead. We believe in Jesus’ authority, his enabling grace and his promise of life and hope

for those who dare to follow. *May fear of the unknown never prevent us from following your call to love, Lord.* MJ

Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 20: Sir 1:1-10; Mk 9:14-29

This kind can only come out through prayer. A Greek text, a late entry, the Book of Sirach is “apocryphal.” A poor substitute for the prophets who had fallen silent for hundreds of years, it gives us pleasantries such as “The sand of the seashore, the drops of rain, the days of eternity: who can number these?” Post that on Facebook and you’ll get a hundred “likes.” But it’s no help for the mess Jesus finds himself in today’s reading as he encounters a desperate father turning every which way to save his bedeviled son. “Have faith,” Jesus tells the father, who startles us with his honesty: “I do believe, help my unbelief!” That for Jesus is the kind of prayer to chase away a demon! *Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed, O Lord; holiness befits your house.* MD

Tues., Feb. 21: Sir 2:1-11; Mk 9:30-37

If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all. Jesus announces his passion — and his resurrection, don’t forget! — and the apostles react like children, arguing about who’s first. At least they have sense enough to be embarrassed when Jesus asks them about it. So, Jesus has to take an actual child, still blessed presumably with some sense of wonder, to set the standard for greatness. Jesus is going to Jerusalem; it would be really helpful if the apostles at least tried to understand what that means. Sirach tries to help: “My son ... prepare yourself for trials.” But what about me? Can I wonder like a child and simply just try to stay very close to Jesus. *Take delight in the Lord, and God will grant you your heart’s request.* MD

Wed., Feb. 22: 1 Pt 5:1-4; Mt 16:13-19

Chair of Peter, apostle

You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. A chair might be the last place we expect to find Peter, who was hardly the sedentary type! Jesus calls him a rock, (certainly, he was hardheaded), but in his own ministry, as portrayed in his first letter, he reminds us of the present pope, “a fellow presbyter,” and leader by example. From Peter to Francis — that’s a long arc! They both love the church, because they know “the chief Shepherd” is Jesus Christ, who binds us to himself. Some find organized religion a little stale, yet Peter’s declaration still sounds fresh: “You are the Christ, Son of the *living* God!” The church is alive, too! *Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil.* MD

Thurs., Feb. 23: Sir 5:1-8; Mk 9:41-50

Polycarp, bishop and martyr

Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Much of Sirach might be the tasteless salt Jesus has in mind. But today it’s got a kick to it: “Say not, ‘I have sinned, yet what has befallen me?’” Still, that’s nothing compared to Jesus, who salts his words with fire: “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off!” Same goes for your foot or your eye. Oh,



we know Jesus is just being metaphorical. Really? So, cut off your metaphorical hand then! Lent hasn't even started yet, and we're already getting an examination of conscience. But you have to take seriously someone who will literally have his hands and feet nailed to a cross. *Dear Lord, plant us like a tree near running water, whose leaves never fade.* MD

Fri., Feb. 24: Sir 6:5-17; Mk 10:1-12

... and the two shall become one flesh. Jesus cites creation itself for the equality of all persons, a reality unchanged even by original sin. Thus, divorce is no longer an indulgence of male privilege. The Pharisees didn't realize that "testing" Jesus would shatter their sexist worldview. But over the years, Jesus' teaching took on some of the hardheartedness that he wished to eliminate from the commandments given to Moses. As Pope Francis has established, adultery is serious, sure, but "no sin cancels the mercy of God." Equality was meant to elevate our relationships, not subject spouses and their children to sacrament-shaming. Sirach's platitudes actually may be helpful here, if we can define a marriage as the ultimate friendship: "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter." *Open my eyes, O Lord, that I may consider the wonders of your law.* MD

Sat., Feb. 25: Sir 17:1-15; Mk 10:13-16

Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. After a new teaching about divorce, Jesus asks us to be like children. It's the same point Pope Francis keeps underscoring: Children remind us to be true to God's mercy, no matter who their parents are. Sirach credits human beings with "an inventive heart." As the image of God, we certainly shouldn't be inventing barriers between children and their parents, as if we controlled the keys to the sacraments. When my adopted son Juan Anselmo finally made his first Communion at age 21, we kept an informal count. He just made his sixtieth Communion. Don't you think Jesus wishes that for everyone? *Your kindness, O Lord, is from eternity, and your justice toward our children's children.* MD

Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Mon., Feb. 27: Sir 17:20-24; Mk 10:17-27

... and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus does not say that the wealthy won't go to heaven. He does suggest that accumulating material things makes focusing on the kingdom of God more difficult. Even if we observe the commandments and avoid doing wrong, that doesn't mean we're consciously doing what is right. We're simply doing what's expected. Jesus tells the obedient rich young man that there's still more to do. The young man goes away sad. Jesus' clarification presents a hardship. The young man has grown accustomed to a certain lifestyle, as have many of us. Jesus' challenge forces us to reconsider our priorities. Material possessions are nice, but they're temporary and their pursuit distracts us from seeking the one source of lasting joy: Jesus Christ. *Lord, help us to focus on what is truly important.* PR

Tues., Feb. 28: Sir 35:1-12; Mk 10:28-31

Give to the Most High as he has given to you, generously, accord-

ing to your means. Early in his papacy Pope Francis said, "Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn." We're stewards of God's great gifts. Showing gratitude is a choice. We invest our time and resources in those things most important to us. If prayer, worship, service or the material wellbeing of the church take a backseat to other interests and endeavors, by default we're saying that we're too busy to acknowledge how much God has given us. We've no time to return such generosity, and, frankly, we aren't that grateful. How much and what we give are dramatically increased by why and, especially, how we do. *Help me to be a cheerful and grateful giver.* PR

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