

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Isaiah 50: 5-9. Gospel: Mk 8:27-35

The majority of first readings are taken from the Books of the Prophets, who called the people back to God when they strayed, denounced injustice and proclaimed a covenantal relationship of love with YHWH. This first reading by the prophet Isaiah speaks of the suffering servant, an image that was picked up by the early church to prefigure the suffering of the innocent Jesus. In the Gospel, when Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah, he completely misunderstands what that means. Jesus has to admonish him when he cannot accept that Jesus' destiny involves suffering and death.

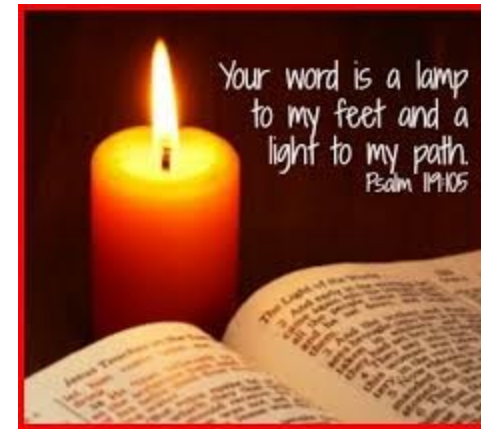
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Wisdom 7:7-11. Mk 10: 17-30.

When the first reading comes from the poetic or Wisdom literature, it can be very difficult to understand. However, sometimes poetry is the only way to try to put human words on the enormity of the love of our God. The first reading tells us that nothing compares with knowing God. In fact, "all gold is a pinch of sand" (Ws 7:9). The Gospel reading that follows introduces the rich man who does his best to live a good life and keep all of the commandments. However, his attachment to material goods prevents him from fully developing his relationship with the Lord.

A message from Pope Francis to Ministers of the Word:

"I hope you will be good bearers of the Word, with the same enthusiasm that we read in the Easter stories, where everyone runs: the women, Peter, John, the two from Emmaus ... They run to meet and announce the living Word."

POPE FRANCIS
26th April 2019



Workshop for Ministers of the Word

II

The Importance of the First Reading

Cork Scripture Group
www.corkscripturegroup.com

STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY OF THE WORD - GOSPEL CENTRED

One of the main roles of the Minister of the Word is to proclaim the Word of God at Mass. This revealed Word of God is found in all of the readings at Mass and not just the Gospel. The Minister of the Word proclaims it in the first and second readings from Scripture as well as inviting the congregation to pray the Psalm. The reading of the Gospel is the summit of the Liturgy of the Word but all of the other readings also contain God's message to us.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is built around the Gospel. Each of the three years of the liturgical cycle focuses on one particular synoptic Gospel (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and that Gospel is read sequentially throughout most of that liturgical year. By listening attentively to the Gospel, we get a very considered and thought-out picture of Jesus through the eyes of that particular evangelist.

The other readings however are not just fillers or add-ons. They perform three very different functions. As well as telling the story of our ancestors in faith, the first reading also highlights some aspect of the Gospel. The Psalm is an invitation to the whole congregation to pray and the second reading, which is usually from one of the Letters, offers practical advice on how to live as a follower of Christ.

THE FIRST READING

The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) except during Eastertide when it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings are not randomly chosen but are meant to throw light on some aspect of the Gospel of that particular day.

The Old Testament tells the history of God's covenant with his Chosen People. From the original covenant with Abraham, when YHWH promises that they will be his people and he will be their

God, the Old Testament traces the journey of the Chosen People through the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the uniting of the people under King David, various conquests and exiles, including the Babylonian exile and their constant hope that the coming of the Messiah will make them a great nation where all will live in prosperity and peace. It also contains rules and regulations about how to live a good life. These range from the Ten Commandments to very detailed liturgical, dietary and social regulations. The Chosen People were not always faithful to the covenant and, at those times, prophets arose to call them back to right relationship with YHWH. For this reason, many of the Old Testament readings in the Lectionary are taken from the prophets.

The Old Testament is a 'book of books,' containing different types of writing by a variety of authors, writing at different times for different groups of people. It includes historical, prophetic and wisdom (including prayers and poetry) books.

Despite the different types of writing, the following examples show how careful study of the first reading illuminates the message of the Gospel. They are all taken from the Sundays of Year B, which focuses on Mark's Gospel.

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time: First Reading: Leviticus 13: 1-2; 44-46. Gospel: Mk 1:40-45

The Book of Leviticus contains detailed laws about how the Chosen People are to live together in community. This passage details very strict rules about how people with leprosy are to be excluded. While the reasoning behind it was to protect the community, it meant that the leper was completely ostracised. After our experience with Covid, I think all of us appreciate the reality of exclusion and separation. The Gospel then tells of how Jesus reaches out with love to the leper and by curing him, returns him to his community and home.