

The Most Holy Trinity

Year B

GOSPEL

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The eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

(Matthew 28: 16-20)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Many of the prayers of the Church express our belief in a Triune God (three persons in one). One of the greatest prayers is the Sign of the Cross where we dedicate ourselves 'In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'
- Although the Scriptures describe God as Father, Son and Spirit, many centuries elapsed before the Church formulated the doctrine of the Trinity. This formulation is enshrined in the Nicene Creed.
- St Patrick reportedly used the shamrock to describe the three persons in one God to the pagans of Ireland.
- St Augustine described the Trinity as the lover, the beloved and the love between.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text is taken from the very end of Matthew's Gospel after Jesus has been raised and appeared to some women. He instructs them to tell the disciples to leave Jerusalem and travel to Galilee to the place he has arranged to meet them. This place is on a mountain. In Jewish tradition and in Scripture, the top of a mountain is associated with closeness to God and is often the setting for God's self-revelation to his people Israel.

The disciples who gather there are a fragile bunch! Their hopes and dreams have been shattered by the death on the cross of the one they saw as saviour. The disappearance of his body from the tomb has left them wondering and afraid. Now Jesus appears to them and offers words of great consolation. He has ultimate authority in heaven and on Earth and issues the disciples with three instructions.

First, they must go *to all the nations*, not just to the people of Israel. Christ's salvation is for all people. We must remember

that Matthew was writing to a predominantly Jewish community which was struggling with allowing gentiles to enter as people of faith in Jesus. Next, he instructs on a new initiation rite – baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. For Jews the old initiation rite was the circumcision of male children. Membership in the new people of God is open to all, male and female, gentile and Jew. Finally, Jesus replaces the old Law, the commandments given to Moses, with a new Law, the commandments given by Jesus.

In conclusion, Jesus assures them (and us) that he will be with them always, even to the end of time.

- How has this promise of Jesus been fulfilled over the centuries?
- Where do you see the Spirit of God operating in our world today?
- How do you experience God's Spirit with you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are there things which cause you to hesitate in your approach to Christ? In what ways are you aware that Christ is with you always?
- At the end of each day spend some time reflecting on when and how Christ was with you during that day.
- Have you ever experienced a sense of closeness with the divine that left you with a feeling of awe, of being truly aware of God's presence? Share some of those moments with others.
- When and where do you feel a sense of God with you? What is the stimulus for such moments? Can you see ways in which this understanding can help you in growing your relationship with God?
- The final words of the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass are a doxology – a prayer of praise – which expresses the dynamism of the Trinity.
- Repeat those words often this week:
*Through him (Christ), and with him, and in him,
O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour is yours,
forever and ever, Amen.*

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Year B

GOSPEL

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On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, his disciples said to Jesus, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparation for you to eat the Passover?' So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him, and say to the owner of the house which he enters, 'The Master says: Where is my dining room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there.' The disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and prepared for the Passover.

And as they were eating he took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it', he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, and all drank from it, and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many. I tell you solemnly, I shall not drink any more wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.'

After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives.

(Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Passover is an important Jewish feast which commemorates the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12:1-13:16). The blood of a sacrificed lamb was daubed on the doorposts of the homes of the Jews so the angel of death would 'pass over' their dwellings and kill only the first born of the Egyptians.
- The Passover Festival included a ritual meal with the eating of unleavened bread, cooked lamb and the drinking of a ritual cup of wine. Jewish families still practice this ancient ritual today.
- The Passover is more than a remembrance of a past event; it makes present again the reality of God's saving action.
- After Israel had been liberated from slavery in Egypt, God entered into covenant with them at Mt Sinai. This is a special relationship. 'I will take you as my people and I will be your God' (Ex 6:7). This meant that Israel had to live in a certain way. They had particular obligations to follow in keeping their side of the agreement.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The ritual meal of the Passover is always shared by families and Jesus and his disciples have formed a family so it is natural that they will celebrate this great Jewish feast together. The traditional Passover celebration looked back to the experience of Exodus but it was always understood, not only as a commemoration, but as a making present again of that experience of liberation through the saving action of God. The unleavened bread recalls the manna given in the desert and the wine recalls the crossing of the Red Sea. At Jesus' meal he changes the point of reference. He no longer looks back to the Exodus experience but looks forward to the cross. The bread is no longer the manna of the desert but his own body which will be broken. The wine no longer symbolises the crossing of the Red Sea but his own blood which will be spilled for many. The blood of the lamb sacrificed on the cross will be the symbol of a new covenant between God and people – no longer the covenant of Moses, but the covenant of love which Christ inaugurates through his death and resurrection; the gift of himself to the world.

- What might be required of those who drink the blood of this new covenant? What does our part of the agreement entail?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What preparations are you making for your 'pass-over' to full membership of the Church?
- Do you long to share in the Eucharist?
- Find ways to pour yourself out for others this week.
- What family rituals do you have in your home? Where or how did these originate? What special celebrations do you observe? Share your stories with others.
- Jesus' own prayer life was nourished by the Psalms. Pray today's Responsorial Psalm often this week:
*How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?
The cup of salvation I will raise;
I will call on the Lord's name.*

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus went home with his disciples, and such a crowd collected that they could not even have a meal. When his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind.

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, 'Beelzebul is in him,' and 'It is through the prince of devils that he casts devils out.' So he called to them and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot last. And if a household is divided against itself, that household can never stand. Now if Satan has rebelled against himself and is divided, he cannot stand either – it is the end of him...

'I tell you solemnly, all men's sins will be forgiven, and all their blasphemies; but let anyone blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and he will never have forgiveness: he is guilty of an eternal sin.' This was because they were saying, 'An unclean spirit is in him.'

His mother and brothers now arrived and, standing outside, sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting round him at the time the message was passed to him, Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.' He replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those sitting in a circle about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.'

(Mark 3: 20-35)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Scholars have long debated the nature of the relationship to Jesus of those family members mentioned in this text. The Catholic Church holds that Mary remained a virgin all her life and therefore those referred to here are possibly from a broader extended family of 'brethren' or kin which was a common way of referring to family in that period. Some scholars suggest they may be children of Joseph from a previous marriage.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text is an example of the classic 'Marcan sandwich' where Mark introduces a theme or episode, interrupts it with another seemingly unrelated aspect and then returns to the original and unifies the two. This literary device helps build tension and suspense. At issue here is the opposition of his family and the dispute on blasphemy. What comes immediately before this text in Mark's Gospel is a list of the twelve whom Jesus has chosen – his new family. Family now goes beyond birth lines but encompasses all those who do the will of God.

The scribes 'from Jerusalem' accuse Jesus of blasphemy and acting for Satan. They fail to see that in casting out demons Jesus is actually undermining the power of the evil one, dividing his 'house'. Instead, the scribes themselves are guilty of blasphemy. They attribute a power from God – the power to cast out demons – to Satan himself. God is willing to forgive all sins but the inability to distinguish good from evil makes one impervious to the presence of God and therefore beyond forgiveness. Those who recognise and do the will of God are the family members who stand united in faith.

- How do you understand the notion of 'sin'?
- What are the consequences of separation from God?
- What is God's will for you at this point?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How did your own family react to your decision to become a member of the Church?
- Do you now see other members of the Church as your wider family?
- Spend time with your own family this week and strengthen the bonds and love you have for them. Be aware and welcoming to those who may not have a strong family to turn to.
- Today's Entrance Antiphon makes a wonderful prayer for this week:
*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; whom shall I dread?*
Use this confident affirmation often this week.

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to the crowds: *‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear. And when the crop is ready, he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come.’*

He also said, *‘What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.’*

Using many parables like this, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

(Mark 4: 26-34)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Parables are very short stories with a double meaning. They act like metaphors and can be interpreted very broadly. To understand the parables of Jesus we must be attentive to both the literal and metaphorical language used.
- The nearness of the kingdom (or reign) of God is the central plank of the teaching of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel.
- The term ‘kingdom of God’ occurs only in the New Testament but similar expressions are found in the Old Testament. It refers to a time when God’s will would be done on Earth.
- Matthew uses the term ‘kingdom of heaven’ as a way of avoiding the use of the sacred name of God.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Parables provoke interpretation. They make us wonder what Jesus was referring to and what he really meant. At times, he is quite vague about the real meaning and his disciples are left wondering. Think for example of the parable of the Sower which Jesus must later explain (Mk 4: 13-20). At other times, like the instances we have in this gospel reading, Jesus is quite explicit: he tells his hearers that he is talking about the kingdom of God. Even so, he must still explain his meaning to the disciples when he is alone with them. Unfortunately, Mark does not report for us what interpretation Jesus places on these parables.

In the Old Testament, the imagery of the reign of God had an apocalyptic dimension; it was to come to fullness at the end times when the wicked would be punished and the faithful vindicated. Only then would there be a new heaven and a new Earth. The message in Mark’s Gospel however, is quite different. Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God has already begun. It is among us now. ‘This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mk 1:15). Like the seed planted, it takes root and grows mysteriously into something much larger than itself. The kingdom or reign is a gracious gift from God brought near in Christ and demanding a response of faith from those who recognise the truth of his word. The kingdom offers a challenge; like the man who sowed the seed, we must be ready to cooperate in God’s work when the harvest time comes.

- The kingdom or reign of God refers to the time when God’s will is done. What signs of the growth of the kingdom of God can we discern in our world today? Where do we see God’s will being done?
- What things do you think hinder the growth of the kingdom today?
- How are we called to cooperate in God’s work? What must we do?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘He spoke the word to them so far as they were capable of understanding it.’ How much has your understanding grown so far in your journey?
- Are you ready for the harvest?
- What more needs to be explained to you?
- Be attentive this week to how the seed of God’s word and love is growing within you. Foster this growth in as many ways as you can and try to plant the seeds of faith in the hearts of others.
- Use today’s Gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:
*The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower;
all who come to him will live forever.*

Nativity of St John the Baptist Year B

GOSPEL

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In the days of King Herod of Judea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both getting on in years.

Now it was the turn of Zechariah's section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the ritual custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense the whole congregation was outside praying.

Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink. Even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom that the virtuous have, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him.

(Luke 1:5-17)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Both Zechariah and Elizabeth come from the priestly families of Israel. All male descendants of the priestly families had duties to attend to in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is not a full-time job. Since there were so many 'priests' a roster system meant that each man only served a brief period in undertaking their priestly duties.
- The Temple in Jerusalem had several outer courts: the vast exterior Court of the Gentiles, where all people could go; the Court of the Women, where only Jews could enter and women go no further; the inner Court of Israel where male Jews could enter and where the priests offered sacrifices. At the rear of the Court of Israel stood a massive structure – the sanctuary. This consisted of two chambers.
- The outer chamber was where the incense altar was housed. The inner chamber – the Holy of Holies – was empty. This was where the Ark of the Covenant had stood before it was looted and taken to Babylon in the 6th century BC. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement.

- The Jerusalem Temple was constructed to the same plan, but on a much grander scale, as the tented sanctuary described in Exodus 25-30.
- The first Temple was looted and destroyed by the Babylonians. The second Temple was rebuilt after the return from the Exile and rebuilt again on a grand scale by Herod the Great. It is Herod's Temple which is the setting for this text and the one which Jesus knew.
- John the Baptist was arrested and executed by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, because the Baptist denounced the ruler for marrying Herodias who was his niece and had been married to his half-brother.

EXPLORING THE WORD

John the Baptist is an important figure in all four of the gospels. In all four he is identified with the beginning of Jesus' ministry but in Luke, the association between the two is taken back in time to the announcement of the birth of each character. The parents of both John and Jesus are depicted by Luke as pious Jews who do all that the Law requires of them. Here the promise is given to Zechariah that a son will be miraculously born to him in his old age. There is an echo here of the promise made to Abraham and Sarah. This is to be no ordinary child. Even from his mother's womb, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit and his task is quite explicit. In his ministry he will reawaken in people a love for their God. Like the great prophet Elijah, he will 'turn the hearts' of the people, refocusing them on what truly matters. In doing this, John is preparing a people who is worthy of the one who is to come. John stands firmly in the prophetic tradition of Israel. He comes out of the desert proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God and issuing a call to repentance (Lk 3:2-3). He baptises those who repent of their sins and announces the coming of one who would be greater than he and who would baptise with the Spirit. Some believed that John himself was the awaited Messiah (Lk 3:15) but John is unequivocal: he is simply preparing the way for the one who is to come.

- Read Lk 3:1-22 which tells of the public ministry of John the Baptist.
- Dwell especially on vvs 10-14. Here the people ask what they must do. John's answer is clear. If you have two cloaks, give to someone who has none. Share your goods so all have enough. Do not take more than is your due. Treat people fairly and do not extort from them or speak ill of others.
- Explore what this means as the catechumens prepare for the coming of the Lord. What must they do?

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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When Jesus had crossed in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him and he stayed by the lakeside. Then one of the synagogue officials came up, Jairus by name, and seeing him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her to make her better and save her life.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all around him. While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the synagogue official to say, 'Your daughter is dead: why put the master to any further trouble?' But Jesus had overheard this remark of theirs and he said to the official, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith'... So they came to the official's house and Jesus noticed all the commotion... He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead but asleep.' But they laughed at him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha, kum!' which means, 'little girl, I tell you to get up.' The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At this they were overcome with astonishment, and he ordered them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

(Mark 5:21-43, shorter version)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Jairus, as an official of the synagogue, belonged to one of the groups who were traditionally deeply suspicious and disapproving of Jesus. Here however, Jairus' faith is contrasted with the lack of faith of the onlookers who simply laugh at Jesus. His faith is rewarded.
- For Jesus to lay hands upon a young woman of twelve years of age (old enough to be betrothed) would have been seen as a scandalous act. Jesus breaks through the restrictions of social norm to bring life.
- The longer version of this gospel tells the story of the cure of the woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years.
- To have physical contact with women who were menstruating or with corpses meant that the person who had touched them became 'unclean' and therefore unable to participate in the religious life of Israel. Here Jesus contravenes the Jewish law to bring wholeness and life.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus treats with respect and concern two 'untouchables': the haemorrhaging woman and the young girl's corpse. This double story shows us not only his compassion for those who are sick and his power over death but also his willingness to go beyond social and religious prohibitions in the service of others. The sick and desperate woman overcomes her social inhibitions in order to touch Jesus, hoping that mere contact with his garments will ensure her healing. Her faith urges her to act. In the case of Jairus' daughter, the child herself cannot ask. Instead, it is her father, who as a synagogue official was probably deeply suspicious of Jesus, who pleads for her. In both cases it is faith which is the key to healing.

- Have you ever been unable to help yourself; totally dependent on another person for your needs?
- Do you feel any special bond with any of the characters in this gospel? In what ways do you associate with them?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' Reflect on this statement.
- In the full text of this gospel, two people reach out to Jesus seeking to have their needs met. What are your needs at the moment? How can Jesus help in having those needs met?
- Be aware of your human connections with others this week. Look around for opportunities to extend a life-giving touch to others.
- Share reflections on a time when you felt ostracised by others. How did you feel?
- Who are the people in our communities, in our streets, who are the 'untouchables'? What are some of the ways in which welcome and healing can be extended to them?
- Use this week's Gospel Acclamation for your prayer:
Our Saviour Jesus Christ has done away with death and brought us life through his gospel.

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

(Mark 6:1-6)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- There is great debate about the relationship of 'the brothers of the Lord' to Jesus. Some scholars suggest that they were in fact literal brothers (or half-brothers or step-brothers), while others scholars point out that it was common practice to refer to cousins and even more distant relations as 'brothers'. The Catholic Church holds that Jesus was the only child of Mary, the virgin mother of Christ.
- The reference to Jesus as 'son of Mary' was a slur on his legitimacy because, in Jesus' time, people were usually identified as the child of their father.
- The man referred to here as 'James, the brother of the Lord' later became the leader of the Church in Jerusalem.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The questions asked by the townspeople of Nazareth are interesting ones. They rightly seek to understand the origins of Jesus' wisdom and power. 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him?' They recognise that Jesus is not the source of his own authority. There is a greater power behind him. Their failure lies in the fact that they do not recognise the source of Jesus' power and authority. They do not see the presence of God in the words and deeds of their compatriot. Indeed, Jesus is designated as 'son of Mary', a slur on them both at a time when one's genealogy was traced through the line of the father. Jesus is astonished by the inability of the townspeople to look beyond what they are familiar with to the obvious signs of the kingdom of God in his actions and words. The kingdom of God requires the cooperation of people if it is to become a reality. He can do nothing there!

- Are there times when you close your eyes to the presence of God in the ordinary things of life?
- How does recognising your own blindness make you more open to the presence of God around you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have there been times when you were not accepted? How did you deal with this?
- What are the things that prevent your faith from taking root or growing?
- This week, try to become aware of those things which hinder your growth in faith. Work actively in overcoming them.
- Recall times when you have felt rejected or scorned. What were your feelings at those times? What was it that caused your rejection?
- Have there been occasions when you have acted as the 'prophet'? How were you received? Share your stories with others.
- Ponder the mystery contained in these phrases from the gospel this week:
Where did the man get all this?
What is this wisdom that has been granted him?

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs giving them authority over the unseen spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, ‘Do not take a spare tunic.’ And he said to them, ‘If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust from under your feet as a sign to them.’ So they set off to preach repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

(Mark 6:7-13)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Jews often had to pass through pagan territory which surrounded their own lands. The gesture of shaking the dust from their sandals was a common one when Jews passed from pagan lands into the lands of Israel.
- The word ‘apostle’ comes from a Greek word for being sent out.
- Some Christian sects and denominations take this text as the reason they send out people in pairs on missionary activity to spread the gospel.
- The instruction to the disciples to take only sandals and a staff symbolises their complete dependence. Jesus is to be their bread, their clothing, their wealth.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Up until this point in Mark’s Gospel the disciples have been travelling with Jesus, listening to his teaching and witnessing his actions. Now they are called to take a more active role. They have watched him drive out demons and cure the sick. Now they are called on to repeat in their own lives and mission, exactly what he does himself. This is a great test of their response to what they have learned thus far. They are to take nothing with them but a staff and sandals, the symbols of the wandering missionary. Nothing else is necessary; they rely on God as they follow Jesus. When they are accepted by people, they are to remain with them, a sign that the kingdom of God is near at hand. For those who reject them, simply shake off the dust and continue the journey. As we saw in last week’s gospel, nothing can be achieved where there is no faith.

- Jesus advises not getting upset by rejection but simply moving on. How do you cope with rejection?
- How might we understand the call to simplicity of living today? What concrete actions can be taken to live more simply and more sustainably? In what ways is living this way a reflection of the gospel and faith in Christ?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How can you live more simply with only the things you need rather than the things you want?
- How do you feel when people don’t listen to you? Do you always really listen to others?
- Find ways to share your faith and your journey with others this week. This is taking a risk and you may be ridiculed. Are you able to rise to the challenge?
- Have you ever been thrust into a new job or had to take on a responsibility without much preparation? How did you cope? What mistakes did you make? What did you learn from this experience? Was it a valuable experience for you? Share your stories with others.
- Today’s Gospel Acclamation makes a wonderful prayer for this week:
*May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
enlighten the eyes of our heart
that we may see how great is the hope
to which we are called.*

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

(Mark 6:30-34)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The image of the shepherd is often used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the relationship between God and his people Israel. They are the flock whom he will gather and protect.
- Our use of the term 'pastoral' comes from this image of Christ as the shepherd of his flock.
- Jesus regularly took time to be alone, to pray and to contemplate God. Here he invites his followers to do the same.
- This is the only place in his gospel where Mark refers to the disciples as 'apostles'.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In last week's gospel, we read of the disciples being sent out on their mission to preach, cast out devils and cure the sick. Their mission has been a great success and now they excitedly return to tell Jesus of 'all they had done and taught'. They are weary but still the people come. They are so busy that they don't even have time to eat! Jesus is aware of their needs and insists that they find a quiet place to rest. But the crowds too have their needs and they follow Jesus and the disciples, yearning for answers to their problems. Jesus is also moved with compassion when he sees the needs of the people. They are like lost sheep who are desperately searching for truth but don't know where to find it, so he sets himself the task of teaching them and bringing them closer to that truth. Jesus meets the needs of both the disciples and the crowds and thus becomes the 'good shepherd' who will look after his flock.

- In what ways is Jesus meeting your needs at the moment?
- You could introduce different styles of prayer, particularly meditation, which catechumens could practice or develop.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the many competing demands on your time and your attention? How do you find solitude and quiet in the midst of this busyness?
- Have you ever felt like a 'sheep without a shepherd'? A little lost and unsure?
- How eager are you in pursuing Christ? Are you hurrying towards faith?
- Make time this week to be alone to reflect on your journey; to rest before God.
- Pray the well known and loved Psalm 23 often this week:
*The Lord is my shepherd,
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me
to revive my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.
You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil,
My cup is overflowing.
Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever.*

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee – or of Tiberias – and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave of curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of the Passover. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, ‘Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?’ He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, ‘Two hundred denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said, ‘There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Make the people sit down.’ There was plenty of grass there and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, ‘Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted.’ So they picked them up and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given said, ‘This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.’ Jesus, who could see that they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

(John 6:1-15)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Sea of Tiberias and as Lake Gennesaret, both of which were sizeable towns on the Lake’s western shore.
- The Philip of this episode is mentioned in all four apostolic lists (Mt 10:3, Mk 3:18, Lk 6:14, Acts 1:13). He came from Bethsaida on the northern shores of the lake and is referred to most often in John’s Gospel.
- Two hundred denarii is a large sum of money. A denarius was a Roman silver coin and one denarius represented a worker’s daily wage.
- ‘This really is the prophet who is to come into the world.’ One of the great symbols of the coming of the Messiah often used in the Hebrew Scriptures was the abundant feast. Here Jesus provides abundantly, thus he is presented as ‘the prophet who is to come.’
- The twelve hampers’ full that were gathered up could well represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus gathers all the people to himself.
- God fed the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven.

EXPLORING THE WORD

For the next five weeks we will follow the story of the multiplication miracle and the long discourse which follows it in John’s Gospel. The ‘bread of life’ discourse provides important teaching on the Eucharist. It is significant that the setting is shortly before the Passover which was the Jewish feast recalling the escape of the people from slavery in Egypt and their being fed by God with bread (manna) from heaven in the desert. One of the expected signs of the coming of the Messiah was another, even greater, feeding with manna. The people have been attracted to Jesus because of his cures of the sick and now they come looking for more.

Jesus provides more than enough; there is an abundance. The actions of Jesus in this text remind us of the Eucharist. He takes, gives thanks and gives out the bread. But the crowd misunderstands his gift. They seek a Messiah who will liberate them from Roman oppression or who will provide their material needs. Jesus is not interested in being that kind of ‘king’.

- Is it possible that sometimes we expect Jesus to be something other than he is. We may try to make him fit our mold rather than us fitting his mold. What expectations do you have of Jesus? Are they realistic?
- What hunger do you hope Jesus will fill in you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In what ways are you being fed and nourished on your journey towards baptism?
- Try to provide what others need this week.
- What ‘hungers’ may have driven the vast crowd to follow Jesus? Reflect together a little on what our world today is hungering for. What great needs in our world need to be met? What are you hungering for at this point in your life?
- Use today’s Psalm response this week:
*The hand of the Lord feeds us,
He answers all our needs.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

We are instantly reminded of the actions of the Eucharist in this text. The actions of the priest at the altar echo the actions of Jesus. He takes, blesses, breaks and shares the bread. The Eucharist unites and feeds the Christian community so that it can continue to be Christ’s living presence in the world. This living presence must be manifested in various ways by the Church as it seeks to feed the needs of the hungry. In this gospel Jesus urges the disciples to pick up all the pieces so that nothing is wasted. In our consumerist western society there is so much waste while in other parts of the world, people’s basic

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered:

'I tell you most solemnly, you are not looking for me because you have seen signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat.'

Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.'

Then they said to him, 'What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent.' So they said, 'What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as Scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus answered,

'I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you bread from heaven, the true bread, for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

'Sir', they said, 'give us that bread always.' Jesus answered, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; He who believes in me will never thirst.'

(John 6:24-35)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- There is no Eucharistic action at the last supper in John's Gospel. Instead, it occurs at this point.
- The word 'Rabbi' in Hebrew literally means 'my great one.' At the time of Jesus it referred to masters or teachers who had a following of disciples who learned from them.
- There is great debate among scholars about the meaning of the term 'Son of Man' and whether Jesus used this title of himself or whether his disciples used it of him after his death. In the Book of Daniel, it is used as a term for God's final agent of salvation at the end times.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text comes at the beginning of a long discourse which forms the basis of the Eucharistic teaching in John's Gospel. The crowd has been amply fed by the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and now they come looking for more. But Jesus is aware of their shallow motives. They seek only to fill their bellies rather than looking for the true meaning of his actions or the mystery behind the signs. The translation of this text urges the crowd to work for the food which Jesus 'is offering' in the present tense, but the Greek is actually in the future tense: 'Work for the food... the Son of Man will offer you'. This points forward to the time when Jesus will be lifted up and exalted on the cross – the pivotal moment of John's Gospel. This self-gift of the Son is the food which will endure to eternal life. The people are being directed beyond their immediate needs to something which will satisfy a much deeper and more fundamental need. Belief in Jesus will provide the nourishment for that deep need.

- What deep and fundamental needs brought you to begin this journey you are on?
- What feeds your inner yearnings?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What must you do to do the works that God wants?
- Make time each day this week to reflect on the real nourishment you yearn for. What truly sustains your life?
- 'What sign will you give?' Have you ever required proof of something before you believed it? What are some of the 'truths' which we accept in our lives or our world which we believe but cannot prove? Share your reflections together.
- Say often this week:
Lord, let me come to you so that I will never thirst or be hungry.

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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The Jews were complaining to each other about Jesus, because he had said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph' they said. 'We know his father and mother. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus said in reply, 'Stop complaining to each other.

No one can come to me unless he is drawn by my Father who sent me, and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God, and to hear the teaching of the Father, and learn from it, is to come to me.

Not that anybody has seen the Father, except the one who comes from God: he has seen the Father. I tell you most solemnly, everyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; But this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

(John 6:41-51)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Gospel of John contains several 'I am' sayings. When God revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush he called himself 'I am who am'. Jesus' use of this term is a pointer to his true identity as Son of God.
- The 'manna' of the desert experience is indeed a real phenomenon. It is a highly nutritious substance which forms in the early morning possibly from the secretions of beetles which feed on the tamarisk plant.

EXPLORING THE WORD

'The Jews' of this gospel are having great difficulty in accepting Jesus' origins. They have seen the abundant feast which is promised when the Messiah comes; they have seen the signs that God worked through Jesus and he has told them he is the bread that came down from heaven. But still they are trapped in their earthly reality and cannot move beyond it into the mystery of God present among them. For 'the Jews' the gift which God gave is the Law. They cannot move into the new reality that Jesus has surpassed this and offers something greater – his flesh for the life of the world. It is through his death and resurrection that salvation will be won. The final line of this text is the lead into the climax of the discourse which will shock the crowd in next week's gospel.

- Jesus is offering a powerful gift. What gift have you received so far through your faith in Jesus?
- How can you share this gift with others?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'To hear the teaching of the Father and learn from it is to come to me'. Reflect on your journey so far. Are you coming closer to Jesus?
- Do some extra spiritual or religious reading this week to help you 'hear the teaching of the Father' and come closer to Jesus.
- Share a story of a time when you were strengthened or nourished by another person? What were your needs at that time? How did this person help fill them?
- Use today's Psalm response this week:
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

It is impossible to hear the term 'bread from heaven' without thinking of the Eucharist. For Catholics the Eucharist is 'the source and summit' of the life of the Church and the faithful.

- Talk about what that means. You could refer to the passage from *Lumen Gentium* (§11), a document from the Second Vatican Council, where this is explained or refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§1324) where this concept is dealt with.
- Reflect on the substances used in the Eucharist – bread and wine. The Catechism can again be useful here (see #1333-1336).
- You could use this occasion to teach catechumens the correct way to approach the altar and hold the hands for receiving the Eucharist. What is the symbolism of this action?

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you.'

Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.'

This is the bread that comes down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate; they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'

(John 6:51-58)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- After the flood (Gen. 6-8) God established a covenant with Noah. He promised never again to send a deluge on the Earth and said to Noah, 'every living and crawling thing shall provide food for you, no less than the foliage of plants. I give you everything, with this exception: you must not eat flesh with life, that is to say blood, in it' (Gen 9:3).
- Based on Scripture, Jewish people have various laws governing what may or may not be eaten. These rigorous dietary laws are adhered to even today.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In the continuation of the discourse, Jesus' claim that he is the living bread come from heaven is brought to a new height. Not only has he surpassed the manna given by God in the desert, he now claims that it is his flesh and blood which gives life. For the Jews this is an abomination. The very strict dietary laws of Judaism precluded the eating of flesh with blood in it. Jesus' hearers again remain at the physical understanding of his words. They imagine some form of cannibalism and are outraged. 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' But Jesus is not deterred. He insists that he makes God known because he comes from God. Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man will bring those who believe to eternal life – not the physical life of this world but to life with the Father forever.

- This is a difficult teaching for 'the Jews' to accept. Do you have difficulty accepting all the teaching of Jesus? Use this time to ask questions and clarify any difficult beliefs of the Church.
- What kind of life is Jesus offering you? Is it for now or the future?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What do you draw life from? What is the source of your nourishment?
- What impact does the promise of eternal life have on how you live now?
- How do you understand the idea of eternal life?
- Find ways this week of bringing life and nourishment to others. Provide them with what they need. Celebrate as a family.
- Recall significant meals you have shared. Reflect on why it is that food and drink are part of human celebrations. Imagine what a celebration would be like without the fellowship of eating and drinking together. Share your reflections.
- Continue to use the Psalm response as a prayer for this week:
Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you.'

Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me.'

This is the bread that comes down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate; they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'

(John 6:51-58)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- This is another example in the gospels of Peter taking a leadership role among the twelve.
- Peter's role of leadership among the chosen is why, to this day, his successor, the Pope, has a special position among the leaders of the Church.
- In John's Gospel, the author often uses the device of 'dualism' to contrast life in the spirit with the life of this earthly existence.
- There is no institution of the Eucharist at the last supper in John's Gospel. That occurs in this passage. At the supper, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.

EXPLORING THE WORD

For several weeks we have been following the story of Jesus' revelation of himself as the one sent from God and how his followers may draw life from him by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. In this text we find that it is not only 'the Jews' who find it difficult to accept his revelation and his teaching. Even his followers struggle with this truth. Jesus knows of their struggle but will not be drawn into offering supernatural proof of his revelation: the Son of Man ascending to heaven! But still some do not understand his words and cease to follow him. Jesus then turns to his closest companions and offers them a choice. They may go or they may stay. Peter voices the response on behalf of them all. It is a wonderful affirmation of faith. *'Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we believe. We know that you are the Holy one of God.'*

This choice is not based on clear understanding but on faith and on love for Jesus. The mystery of God often defies understanding but faith is the key to a share in it.

- Freedom of choice is essential to the Christian message. What made you choose to follow Christ?
- *'Lord to whom shall we go?'* What are the alternatives to Christian faith which are offered by 'the world'? How attractive are those options to you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are there things which stop you believing in all that Jesus taught?
- What do you find most challenging in the teaching of Jesus?
- Have you ever been tempted to walk away? What has kept you on the journey?
- This week spend time in reflecting on your journey so far. What are you finding a challenge? Are you able to freely make the commitment to the Holy One of God?
- What are some of the significant choices you have made in your life? Do you weigh things up carefully, examining the pros and cons or do you rely on gut feeling and emotional response in your decision making process? Share your experiences.
- During this week make Peter's act of faith your own: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life and we believe. We know that you are the Holy One of God.*

