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# PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

**OCTOBER—JANUARY**

*From the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year C to the Second Sunday  
of Ordinary Time of Year A*

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## PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of *Compass* is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between October 2007 to January 2008, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year C to the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

**1. The First readings** generally are selected with the Gospel reading for the specific Sunday in mind. This could appear to make the first reading simply a precursor to the Gospel. However it would be important to allow the unique insights and celebration of the First ('Old') Testament readings to be honoured in their own right. The First Testament readings between November 2007 to January 2008 fall into three main types of literature: prophetic (Is, Mal, Zech, Zeph), historical (2 Sam, Mac) and wisdom (Sirach).

- Readings from Isaiah dominate this period (in Advent 1-4, Nativity, Baptism, OT 2-3). The selections come from two different authors (called First Isaiah, chapters 1-39, and Second Isaiah, chapters 40-55) writing at different periods of Israel's history, before the 6<sup>th</sup> century Exile, and during or after the return from captivity. The Isaiah selections for Advent and Christmas are from First Isaiah written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE at a time of po-

litical crisis. The prophet looks to a hopeful future brought about by God's presence through an anointed one, a future king. This king should not be interpreted as Jesus, but one from the immediate royal household that Isaiah reflects upon. Christians reflecting on Isaiah saw in Jesus a way in which Isaiah's vision was expressed in their own day.

The selections in the Sundays Ordinary Time (OT) from Second Isaiah are songs of God's servant, who will suffer and bring liberation to God's people. These songs look to a future time of freedom and religious fidelity. God's concern about the social consequences of the nation's political alliances shape the various stages of Isaiah and the prophetic voice that is sounded throughout these stages. This particular focus through Isaiah provides an opportunity for the local Christian community to reflect on the political and national issues which will preoccupy us in our time and within our country.

**2. The Second Reading** for each Sunday is drawn from the letters of the New (or 'Second') Testament, with the exception of the Feast of the Baptism (Jan 13) when the reading is from Acts 10. This key reading sets up the future missionary agenda for Paul in the *Book of Acts*. God's community is called to be inclusive of all peoples, rather than exclusive. This is a central baptismal theme to be celebrated on this particular feast. Apart from Acts



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10, the rest of the selections for the second reading are from letters by Paul himself (Romans during Advent, and 1 Corinthians on OT 2 to 3), his disciples (for example, in 2 Thessalonians on OT 32 and 33; Colossians on the Feast of Christ the King – which might be called the Feast celebrating Jesus’ Universal Authority) or the Catholic epistle of James (Advent 3). This broad selection of various writings from early Christian communities offers us a glimpse of the vitality of their lives and some of the pastoral issues they faced.

- *2 Thessalonians*, written towards the late first century, deals with concerns about the delay of the second coming of Jesus and the need for Christians to be alert to God’s coming—appropriate readings for the final Sundays of the liturgical year.

- *Ephesians and Colossians*, penned perhaps in the 70s, to Christians living in Asia Minor, present an image of Jesus as Lord of the universe, and of Christians called to holiness in their union with Jesus, confident of his presence in their struggles.

- *Romans*, Paul’s great epistle written about 57 CE from Corinth, presents the maturity of his theological reflection, especially God’s plan for all people and desire for salvation. These ideas can be well developed in the celebration of Advent as our communities look to God’s care in the midst of their challenges.

- *1 Corinthians* is an important letter from Paul, written around 57 CE from Ephesus. It is heard in 2008 in the first Sundays of Ordinary Time.

ary Time. In the letter Paul attempts to address issues of elitism and factionalism amongst the Corinthian Christians, concerns still with us today.

**3. The Gospel readings** during October to January mainly come from Luke and Matthew.

- We conclude ‘the Year of Luke’ with texts from Lk 20 and 21, taken up with spiritual or theological watchfulness to what is happening and an alertness to God’s presence in the events that occur. These readings prepare for the final Lukan reading on the Feast of Christ the King (Nov 21), where the dying Jesus offers compassion and forgiveness to a repentant criminal. Within our Australian context, this gospel reading subverts the conventional image of leadership. Luke portrays a leadership exemplified by compassion and forgiveness.

- The new liturgical year which begins on Advent 1 (Dec 2) also commences our readings from Matthew’s Gospel. This will be the principal gospel throughout the rest of the liturgical year. Written in the mid 80s of the first century to Christian Jews, it presents Jesus as the authoritative presence of God who is able to interpret the Torah for Christians in a time of dire change. Advent 1, when Mt is first proclaimed, continues the theme of watchfulness, and subsequent Sundays prepare us for the coming of the teacher-like-Moses, Jesus. The readings in the first Sundays of OT from Mt begin to explore the nature of Jesus’ ministry (OT 3).

## PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

**October 7—Ordinary Time 27:** *Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4*. The prophet cries to God for deliverance from violence. God offers a vision of the possible. *2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14*. The leader is encouraged to be a person of integrity, reflection and trust. *Lk 17:5-10*. The disciple is encouraged to be a person of faith who acts authentically. *Theme—Acting in Faith*. In a world of violence, the disciple is encouraged to retain a perspective and trust centred on God. Local communities abound with living examples of such contemporary disciples.

**October 14—Ordinary Time 28:** *2 Kings 5:14-17*. A Syrian (and foreign) army-officer obeys God’s prophet from Israel and is healed of leprosy. He seeks to offer the prophet a gift for his healing. *2 Tim 2:8-13*. A revered early Christian hymn about Jesus that encourages closeness to him. *Lk 17:11-19*. Jesus heals those who are excluded from community life because of their disease. *Theme—Exclusion*: The first reading and the Gospel invite a reflection on the power of exclusion which suffering and illness brings. How does the local Chris-



tian community seek to include those who are excluded into its life? Who are the true healers in our community?

**October 21—Ordinary Time 29.** *Ex 17:8-13.* Moses' prayer for victory is effective. *2 Tim 3:14-4:2.* The minister is encouraged to be faithful to what has been taught, to Scripture, and to the task of courageous proclamation. *Lk 18:1-8.* An unnamed widow's persistence gains justice and response from an elite judge. *Theme—Prayer:* The Eucharist is the local church's moment of prayer for and union with all humanity and creation. What are the current situations and events that could be the focus of our Eucharist celebration and intercession today?

**October 28—Ordinary Time 30** *Sirach 35:15-17,20-22.* According to the wisdom writer, God shows deference to the poor whose prayer 'pierces' the clouds. *2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18.* The writer affirms God's fidelity in a time of suffering and trial. *Lk 18:9-14.* Jesus' God subverts the socially expectation of favour and privilege. *Theme—God listens.* God responds to our cries in times of difficulty, loneliness and distress. God seeks to be with all who struggle. What makes us sad? What is difficult?

**Nov 4—Ordinary Time 31.** *Wis 11:22-12:2.* God's wisdom (*Sophia*) permeates everything with love. *2 Thes 1:11-2:2.* Paul prays for the Thessalonians aware that God will be revealed in them. *Lk 19:1-10.* Zacchaeus models true discipleship and conversion to Jesus. *Theme—Responding to God.* Each of today's readings reveals God's desire to be with humanity and creation; they invite an openness to God's action which reaches out in love to others. Zacchaeus shows us how.

**Nov 11—Ordinary Time 32:** *2 Mac 7:1-2.9-14.* Jewish martyrs witness to God's power to raise them up in resurrection. *2 Thes 2:16-3:5.* God is faithful and loves us especially in adversity. *Lk 20:27-38.* Jesus teaches about a vision beyond the present which is a share in God's life. *Theme—God's Life:* People constantly reflect on their present and commit themselves to God even in adversity. They witness to God's presence in their world and God's life continues beyond what appears to be. Our communities are filled with such ordinary and faithful witnesses.

**Nov 18—Ordinary Time 33:** *Mal 3:19-20.* The prophet affirms God's care ('sun of righteousness') will continue to us in the midst of difficulty. *2 Thes 3:7-12.* People are encouraged to continue to live

committed to the present world rather than focus purely on the world to come. *Lk 21:5-19* Jesus encourages his disciples not to be led astray, or follow messianic pretenders, promising everything. *Theme—Fidelity.* In our local community, many people continue to model fidelity in love of God and discipleship of Jesus even in the midst of difficulties. These people can be named and celebrated. A little note about the gospel. This is apocalyptic writing at its best, not literal descriptions but theological insights into God's presence. **Nov 25—Jesus' Universal Authority:** *2 Sam 5:1-3.* David is anointed king over Israel. *Col 1:12-20.* A famous hymn celebrating Jesus' cosmic, universal rule and leadership of the Church. *Lk 23:35-43.* Jesus' final word before death is forgiveness to a criminal. Jesus' compassion continues right to the end of his life. *Theme—Compassion:* Jesus shows that a true leader (in political, civil or church life) is one who models compassion, especially to those who seem undeserved. Such leadership goes against the convention. Compassion, in this approach, is shown to those only deserve it. Jesus' approach is non discriminatory.

### Liturgical Year A

**Dec 2—Advent 1:** *Is 2:1-5.* God's vision for Jerusalem: a place of union and justice. *Rom 13:11-14.* Paul encourages spiritual alertness in the present. *Mt 24:37-44.* Jesus encourages disciples to 'keep awake', spiritual alertness and sensitivity to what is now needed. *Theme—Alertness:* This first Sunday of the new liturgical year begins with encouragement to live sensitive to God's presence to oneself, the community and world. 'Spiritual alertness' is necessary for recognising God's advent. What ways are helpful for allowing us to grow sensitive to God's presence?

**Dec 9—Advent 2:** *Is 11:1-10.* The prophet envisions a new era of social communion, cosmic harmony and deep kindness initiated through God's spirit through the 'root of Jesse.' *Rom 15:4-9.* Paul encourages community hospitality and unity as his readers await God's coming. *Mt 3:1-12.* John the Baptist proclaims Jesus' coming as he encourages his audience to prepare themselves through a life of repentance and conversion. *Theme—Conversion.* The Baptist's message announces the essential dispositions in us as we prepare for the birth of Jesus: Openness to God and our world, and a spirit of conversion. These have universal and cosmic



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implications (as in Isaiah).

**Dec 16—Advent 3:** *Is 35:1-6a, 10.* God's coming will bring cosmic and earthly renewal, and human liberation. The whole universe and all enlivens it will be liberated. *James 5:7-10.* We patiently await God's coming. We live peaceably with all. *Mt 11:2-11.* Jesus announces his mission of liberation and healing. *Theme—Liberation and healing.* Our world struggles and is in need of God's healing. God's Will is for wholeness, healing and happiness. We celebrate God's desire for creation, including human beings.

**Dec 23—Advent 4:** *Is 7:10-14.* God promises through the prophet. King Ahaz will receive a sign of royal perpetuity. The King resists God's promise. *Rom 1:1-7.* This introduction to Paul's great letter summarises the heart of the Gospel: Jesus' role with humanity. *Mt 1:18-25.* The annunciation of the birth of Jesus to Joseph: Jesus is named 'God-with-us.' *Theme—God's presence.* Every Eucharist is a celebration of God's presence in this community, and through this community to the world. Many are searching to experiencing this presence. Examples abound.

**Dec 25—Nativity:** *Is 9:2-7* The prophet honours a future anointed leader who will be a source of authority and hope. *Titus 2:11-14.* God's grace has appeared in Jesus who offers us hope and release. *Lk 2:1-16.* The birth of Jesus in a city setting. *Theme—Birth.* The metaphor of birth is a reminder of hope, promise, newness and freshness. Jesus' birth brings the promise of these to our world. Can we celebrate how this is happening around us, and name where hope and promise are needed?

**Dec 30—Holy Family:** *Sir 3:2-6, 12-14.* A collection of wisdom sayings about family harmony and respect. *Col 3:12-21.* We are God's saints, beloved and forgiven. (Unless the last few verses 18-21 are explained adequately in the light of the Greco-Roman understanding of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and household relationships, they are best omitted). *Mt 2:13-15, 19-23.* Joseph responds to God ('the dream'). This response shapes his attitude to his family. *Theme—Family life.* Much unhelpful commentary is offered on this day that excludes those who are single or adds more guilt to those whose family living is difficult. How can the attitudes that permeated the relationships of Jesus' own family be modelled in *this* community today?

**Jan 6—Epiphany of Jesus:** *Is 60:1-6.* God's light shines on creation and humanity. This makes a difference to how our world is perceived. *Eph 3:2-*

*3.5-6.* The mystery of God's universal and hospitable love means that share in God's life. *Mt 2:1-12.* The wise follow the stars; their eyes are on the heavens, their ear to the Scriptures and their desire on Jesus. *Theme—Being Enlightened.* At the core of every being is the inner light of God. We affirm our search for God and the way we draw close to God through Jesus. Epiphany is a continuous feast (however unrealised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify some of the ways this happens today?

**Jan 13—Baptism of Jesus:** *Is 42:1-4, 6-7* God delights in the Servant, who will bring liberation to the disconsolate. *Acts 10:34-38.* Peter acclaims to a Roman household of Cornelius that Jesus is God's baptised and anointed one. All people, irrespective of background, belong to God. *Mt 3:13-17* Jesus is baptised and declared 'beloved.'. *Theme—Being Beloved.* In a world of struggle, this celebration offers an opportunity for the baptised community to remember and celebrate its 'belovedness.' God delights in us. This is an important moment to name who God is for us, and we for God, especially when contrary voices seem to dominate.

**Jan 20—Ordinary Time 2:** *Is 49:3, 5-6* God's Servant is chosen from before time, with a mission of restoration to a broken and dispersed people. *1 Cor 1:1-3.* The beginning of a famous letter, in which the Corinthian Christians are reminded of their call to sainthood, and their relationship to God and Jesus. *Jn 1:29-34.* John the Baptist recognises Jesus as the chosen one and possessor of God's Spirit. *Theme—Spirit Possessed:* Our communion with Jesus through baptism and Eucharist confirms us as those who are possessed with the Spirit of God. We are called, like the Servant, to proclaim restoration and hope to people

**Jan 27—Ordinary Time 3:** *Is 9:1-4.* A beautiful poem of God's overwhelming vision for humanity: light, peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. *1 Cor 1:10-13, 17-18.* Paul addresses the problem at Corinth of division. The true source of unity is Jesus, the Good News. *Mt 4:12-23.* Jesus' presence and ministry echoes the *Is* reading of liberation, and the first community of disciples is called. *Theme—Liberation and Hope:* The hope expressed in the vision of Isaiah in the first reading is always desired. *Mt's* Jesus expresses this as he calls his first disciples. How is this community today an expression of that hope and liberty, of Isaiah's vision?