PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

YEAR C

From the Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C) to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (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 from November 2004 to January 2005 (from the Thirty Second Sunday of Ordinary Time of Year C to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year A). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, honouring, of course, the usual literary convention that acknowledges their 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 2004 to January 2005 fall into three main types of literature: prophetic (Joel, Ezek, Zech, Isaiah; Joel); (Joel, Mic, Nahum, Obadiah) and 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 over this period.

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 9) when the reading is from Acts 10. This central reading sets up the future missionary agenda for Paul in the Book of Acts. God’s community is called to inclusive of all peoples, rather than selective. This is a key baptismal theme which can be celebrated on this particular feast. Apart from God’s desire for the whole of creation...
ence 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 2005 in the first OT Sundays and their context concerns Paul's attempt to address issues of elitism and factionalism amongst the Corinthian Christians, concerns that are still with us today.


- 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.

- The new liturgical year which begins on Advent 1 (Nov 28) 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) and the essential qualities for discipleship (OT 4).

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

November 7—Ordinary Time 32: *2 Mac 7:1-2,9-14.* Jewish martyrs witness to God's power in their 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 contemplate the future. The reading reveals Jesus' compassion. Theme—*Compassion:* Jesus shows that a true leader (in politics, or the church, local community) is one who models compassion, especially to those who seem undeserved.

comprehensive implications (as in Isaiah).

December 12—Advent 3: Is 35:1-6a, 10. God’s coming will bring cosmic, earthly and human liberation. The whole universe and all that live in it are liberated. James 5:7-10. The call to patience. God will come. 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. This becomes a moment to identify this and to celebrate God’s desire for creation, including human beings.

December 19—Advent 4: Is 7:10-14 God promises to King Ahaz through the prophet 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 1:18-24. The announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph: Jesus is 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 experience this presence. Examples abound.

December 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 to a Roman household of Cornelius that Jesus is God’s baptised and anointed one. 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.

January 16—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 church at Corinth are reminded of its call to sainthood, and its 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.

January 23—Ordinary Time 3. Is 8:23-9:3 A beautiful poem of God’s overwhelming vision for humanity: peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. 1 Cor 1:10-13.17. Paul addresses the problem at Corinth of division. The 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 this hope for humanity?