

Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:

<http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>

This is the publisher's copyrighted version of this article.

The original can be found at: <http://compassreview.org/archive.html>

© 2005 Compass

Published version of the paper reproduced here in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher. Personal use of this material is permitted. However, permission to reprint/republish this material for advertising or promotional purposes or for creating new collective works for resale or redistribution to servers or lists, or to reuse any copyrighted component of this work in other works must be obtained from the journal Compass.

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

YEAR A

From the Sixth Sunday of Easter to the Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Prepared by Michael Trainor

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 May to July (from the Sixth Sunday of Easter to the Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year A). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, as you honour the usual convention of authorship.

1. The First readings in Easter focus on the story of the early Christian community, as portrayed through Luke in the Book of Acts. Each of the selections over Easter pick up important stories enabling a Christian community today to reflect on the importance of the Easter event. These include the Samaritan or Gentile 'Pentecost' event (Easter 6) which expands further on the action of the Spirit, Jesus' ascension to God 40 days after Easter (Ascension), and the Pentecost story itself (on Pentecost Sunday), a climax of the Easter Season.

After Pentecost, the first reading selections in the Solemn Feasts of Trinity and Body and Blood help to explore the theological and liturgical significance of these feasts, with their emphasis on the nature of God (Ex 34—Trinity) and God's wilderness nurture of Israel with food and drink (Body and Blood).

When the return of Ordinary Time from June 5 onwards, the first reading covers a huge sweep of First Testament literature, with a particular focus on the prophets. In each case, the theme of the gospel has shaped the selection of this reading. It is useful to be reminded (and to celebrate) the First Testament readings in their own right. They are stories of Israel's experience of God and foundational for the Christian community.

2. The Second Readings in the Easter Season are from 1 Peter, written not by Peter himself,

as has been assumed in the past, but by one assuming a pastoral leadership for the Christian churches in Asia Minor. The letter addresses people experiencing turmoil and confusion in their daily religious lives. The writer seeks to encourage his addressees and remind them of their baptismal life. For this reason 1 Peter is appropriate for reflection in the time of Easter.

In the time after Easter when we enter into Ordinary Time, the second reading is exclusively from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 4 through to 8. These semi-continuous selections cover some of the most profound insights into Paul's theology of God, the Spirit and the life of the Spirit into which Christians are called through Baptism. These selections in this time of the Liturgical year (from OT 10 to 18—June 5 to Jul 31) are rich and powerful. They offer an opportunity for the community name and celebrate what is at the heart of Christian living.

3. The Gospel readings in the Easter Season help to celebrate the liturgical theme celebrated. Easter 6, for example, continues a theme from previous Sundays of preparing for the coming of Jesus' Spirit. The Ascension Gospel of May 8 is a summary of Matthew's Gospel. In a simple, climactic scene, the Easter Jesus empowers the disciples to teach and make disciples of all peoples. In light of this, Pentecost becomes a liturgical highpoint. The Spirit's presence breathed into the community by the Johannine Jesus (Jn 20) confirms God's empowerment of the disciples.

When we return to Ordinary Time on June 5, after the Solemnities of the two previous Sundays, we also return to Matthew's Gospel. As we remind ourselves that this gospel is addressed to a Jewish-Christian community in the later part of the first

century, we are also able to note some of the Jewish directed themes that permeate these gospel selections. The selections from Mt 9 to 14 enable us to experience the figure of Wisdom revealed in Matthew's Jesus: He teaches, calls into disciple-

ship, nurtures and empowers. It is this figure that is important for a world searching for wisdom today, and a Christian community seeking wisdom in how to form itself into an authentic presence of God to this world.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

May 1—Easter 6: *Acts 8:5-8,14-17.* The Gentile Pentecost through the ministry of Philip. *1 Pet 3:15-18.* Wise advice for difficult times. *Jn 14:15-21.* Jesus' command of love and promises to send the Spirit. *Theme—Living in Difficult Times:* The Easter presence of the Risen Jesus strengthens us when times are tough. Like the Samaritans, the Spirit can empower us in the unexpected.

May 8—Ascension: *Acts 1:1-11.* Luke's community grieving for the return of Jesus is encouraged to continue its life. *Eph 1:17-23.* The centrality of Jesus in God's plan and our communion with him. *Mt 28:16-20* The final summary scene of Mt. *Theme—Ongoing Fidelity.* The Ascension feast reminds us of God's continual presence with us in our church, local and personal struggles.

May 15—Pentecost: *Acts 2:1-11* God's Spirit empowers the fragile Jerusalem community and unites it. *1 Cor 12:3-7,12-13* God's Spirit empowers the community with gifts to bring about unity. *Jn 20:19-23* Jesus breathes his Spirit on to the frightened community of disciples. *Theme—Courage:* In times of fear or anxiety, the Feast of Pentecost reminds us we are empowered by God's Spirit.

May 22—Trinity: *Ex 34:4-6,8-9.* Moses declares an essential truth about God: God is merciful. *2 Cor 3:11-13.* God is a community of lovers, into which disciples are called. *Jn 3:16-18.* God's love for us is revealed in Jesus. *Theme—Invited into God's life:* The Trinity is an essential truth of God: a communion of Persons, in love, into which we are invited and out of which we love. We reflect God's life to others.

May 29—Body and Blood: *Deut 8:2-3,14-*

16 Moses reminds Israel about God's care of them revealed through food and drink in the desert. *1 Cor 10:16-17.* Eucharist is communion in the one body. *Jn 6:51-58.* Jesus is the living Bread of God. *Theme—Life:* The Eucharist celebrates God's life with human beings, and their life in God with each other. This becomes an opportunity to identify how this happens locally.

June 5—Ordinary Time (OT) 10: *Hos 6:3-6.* The prophetic invitation to sincere love of God rather than religious exhibitionism. *Rom 4:18-25.* Paul presents Abraham as the exemplar of hope and faith. *Mt 9:9-13.* Jesus forms a renewed community of disciples, in the spirit of Hosea. *Theme—Authenticity:* The first and third readings invite the community to reflect on its authenticity of religious life and practice. What examples can be named that show such a spirit of authenticity?

June 12—OT 11: *Ex 19:2-6* God reminds Moses (and the people) of the care and protection shown to them. *Rom 5:6-11* Through Jesus we are brought into deep communion ('righteousness') with God. *Mt 9:36-10:8.* Jesus forms his renewed Israelite community of disciples to proclaim 'good news.' *Theme—Good News.* The good news of God's caring protection of us (1st reading) and the kind of community that gathers around Jesus (Gospel) needs to be celebrated today.

June 19—OT 12: *Jer 20:10-13.* The prophet's struggle with God, yet fidelity to the call. *Rom 5:12-15* The gift of divine deliverance through the action of Jesus is celebrated by Paul. *Mt 10:26-33.* Jesus' reminder to his disciples not to be frightened, but to trust in God. *Theme—Don't Be Frightened:* Fear dominates

our world and community. We are being invited into a community, protected and cared for by God.

June 26—OT 13. *2 Kings 4:8-11.14-16.* Hospitality receives a divine reward—fertility. *Rom 6:3-4.8-11.* Paul's theology of Baptism: union with Jesus in death and resurrection. *Mt 10:37-42* Hospitality is an essential quality of the disciple. *Theme—Hospitality.* Hospitality to the stranger or the seeker of asylum is at the heart of Jesus' community. What examples are there where this is happening with largeness of spirit?

July 3—OT 14: *Zech 9:9-10.* God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. *Rom 8:9.11-13* We are possessors of God's spirit, out of which we live. This orientates our lives. *Mt 11:25-30* The invitation to come to Jesus who seeks to be with us in our struggles. *Theme—God's Comfort.* Many feel the burdens of life. The faith community reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How does this happen practically at a local level?

July 10—OT 15 *Is 55:10-11.* God's Word is eternally effective. *Rom 8:18-23.* The whole of creation is caught up with humanity in the inward search for God and the release of God's spirit of renewal. *Mt 13:1-23* The Great Parable chapter: God's Reign is present mysteriously and unexpectedly. *Theme—God's Presence.* To dispirited people the invitation to contemplate a God who is present, active and

mystery is an essential truth. It uplifts, converts, strengthens and offers a fresh perspective.

July 17—OT 16. *Wis 12:13.16-19.* God teaches, offers hope and wisdom. *Rom 8:26-27.* God's spirit helps us in our weakness. *Mt 13:24-43* The parables of good and evil. *Theme—Weakness.* The human experience of weakness and disaster invites us to draw close to a God who is present in the struggle. Mt's parables remind us of the realism of life's ambiguities which are part of discipleship.

July 24—OT 17 *1 Kings 3:5.7-12.* Solomon is blessed for searching for wisdom and discernment rather than wealth *Rom 8:28-30.* God invites us to live in the image of Jesus. *Mt 13:44-52.* The parable of the search for the pearl of great price. *Theme—Wisdom:* All of us desire deep, lingering wisdom to live in peace and happiness with ourselves, others and God. Many illustrations abound where such wisdom is practiced by unwitting disciples.

July 31—OT 18 *Is 55:1-3.* God is the true source that nourishes the inner desires of the human heart. *Rom 8:35.37-39.* We can never be separated from God's love for us. *Mt 14:13-21* Jesus' compassion moves him to feed the hungry crowd. *Theme—God's love.* The second reading could serve as the basis for a prolonged meditation on God's love for us. This theology needs to be reclaimed when voices around seem to speak contrary words.

MEMO TO PARISH PRIESTS:

The last issue of Compass sold out completely (apart from a handful of copies we kept in case libraries need them to complete their collections). One reason for the demand, besides the high quality of the articles, is that we sent a few copies to some parishes for sale to parishioners. If you would like us to do that for your parish, please let us know. We accept gratefully any money for sales, but we do not bill the parishes for the number of copies sent.

—Ed.