PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

YEAR B

From the Feast of the Trinity to the Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

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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 the celebrations between mid-June and mid-September 2006, from the Feast of the Trinity to the Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of their source.

The First readings over the period under consideration come from a variety of biblical writings of the First (‘Old’) Testament. These selections are always chosen with the gospel in mind. However, it would be helpful to reclaim these readings in their own right, as faithful reflections of God’s people, Israel, and not simply as a precursor to the Second (‘New’) Testament. Three types of writings that we will meet are the Prophets, Wisdom and the Torah.

• The ancient prophets sought to remind the people of Israel of their relationship expressed through covenant fidelity. Our selections come from Ezekiel (OT 14), Amos (OT 15), Jeremiah (OT 16) and Isaiah (OT 23, 24) and allow us to see the prophet’s conviction about the nature of God, the role of the prophet and God’s vision for the people.
• The Wisdom writings (the first reading in OT 12, 13, 20) introduce us to Sophia, God’s presence tangibly experienced in the world. Sophia is later associated with Jesus, especially in Jn 6, the gospel passages for OT 17, 19 and 20. John sees Jesus as Sophia, God’s envoy and reflection; he is ‘the Bread from Heaven.’
• The Torah of the First Testament consists of the first five books of the Bible. They are important for the Israelites’ belief in God. It offers us key insights into how their writers saw God’s action within the history of Israel and its leaders. For example, Ex 34 (Trinity, June 11) summarises Israel monotheism. Readings from Dt (Body and Blood, June 18) review God’s action towards Israel and Israel’s response to God (OT 22, Sept 3).

The Second Reading is generally from the letter tradition of the Second Testament. The readings are semi-continuous (one week follows the previous Sunday’s selection), usually from the letters attributed to Paul. In the period covered by this edition of Compass we will continue to read from 2 Corinthians (June 11 to July 9). We shall also meet Ephesians (July 16 to 30; Aug 13 to 27) and James (Sept 3 to 17).

• 2 Corinthians is a compilation of at least two other genuine letters from Paul and written around 57 from Macedonia to the Christian households at Corinth.
• The letter to the Ephesians, written in the 60s by a disciple of Paul, reflects further on Paul’s mission and seeks to apply Paul’s teaching to a new situation, while drawing closely on another ‘post-
Pauline’s letter, the Letter to the Colossians. A reminder to check the selection on August 27; it offers a preaching/litururgical challenge!
* James, perhaps one of the earliest letters in the Second Testament, is addressed to a Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and gets to the radical heart of religious practice.

The Gospel continues mainly from Mark, though John’s Gospel gets preferential treatment on OT 17, 19, 20 and 21 with the Bread of Life discourse from Jn 6, and briefly discussed above. Mark is addressing a Greek-Roman community, possibly at Rome, around 69-70CE struggling in its discipleship of Jesus. Our selection covers Mk 4:35 (OT 12) to 8:35 (OT 35) which is concerned about discipleship and presents the gospel’s portrait of Jesus. Mk’s Jesus heals, reveals God’s kingdom, challenges his disciples and defines what authentic religious practice and discipleship is to be. Mark offers us comfort and encouragement as we struggle to live in a world that seems ill at ease, overwhelmed by hard politics and international suspicion.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

June 11—Trinity: Ex 34: 4-6, 8-9. A summary of Jewish monotheistic faith: God is kind, compassionate, forgiving and faithful. 2 Cor 3:11-13. Community peace and unity is the ground for God’s self-revelation of peace and love. Jn 6:51-59. God’s stance is utter love to humanity and creation. Theme—God’s Desire or Communion: God’s Trinitarian life is communion and unity. God is turned in kindness towards humanity and creation. This appreciation critiques some conventional views of the Trinity as distant, aloof and irrelevant. What are images of God that might help us to reclaim the kind face of God?

June 18—Body and Blood: Dt 8:2-3, 14-16. A summary and rehearsal of God’s loving acts revealed in history to Israel, especially God’s feeding of Israel in the desert. 1 Cor 10:16-17. Paul’s essential meaning of the Lord’s Supper: communion with Jesus and each other. Jn 6:51-59. The gospel picks up the theme of manna from the first reading and explores how Jesus is the expression of God’s ongoing nurturing presence to the human community. Theme—God’s nurturing Presence: We are surrounded by many examples where people desire to be sustained and nurtured through-out life, but frequently feel dissatisfied. The Eucharist is the source of true nurture, the celebration of God’s desire for human communion, revealed through Jesus and expressed in the weekly Eucharistic Assembly.

June 25—Ordinary Time 12: Job 38:1-4, 8-11. A powerful reading that raises the key question of theodicy: Who is God? 2 Cor 5:14-17. Because of Jesus every perspective and view of our world is changed. Mk 4:35-41. The leaders of the Christian community (symbolised by the disciples in a boat) wrestle with the possibility of disaster and annihilation. They turn to Jesus. Theme—Who is God? Who is Jesus?: These two questions from today’s readings lead us to reflect on the heart of Christian faith. The gospel reveals the need to focus on Jesus in cosmic, ecclesial and personal struggle. He reveals the loving and confident face of God.

is the revealer of God’s healing presence that restores and incorporates those healed into community. Our liturgy allows a celebration of that presence still powerfully active in this community.

**July 9—Ordinary Time 14: Ez 2:2-5.** God declares to the exiled people that God is sending a prophet to them. 2 Cor 12:7-10. Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ becomes his means to faith in God in his weakness. Mk 6:1-6. Jesus is portrayed as God’s prophet rejected by his hometown. Theme—The Prophetic tradition. The role and importance of the prophet has always been acknowledged in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophet, exemplified in Mark’s portrait of Jesus, is one who speaks the truth, reveals God’s activity in human history and community, and experiences rejection. Who might be such prophets today in the local community?

**July 16—Ordinary Time 15: Amos 7:12-15.** Amos is the untrained and reluctant prophet urged to do God’s bidding, despite criticism from Israel’s religious leaders. Eph 1:3-14. A beautiful hymn summarizing Christ’s role in creation, and God’s desire to bring us into communion, to ‘adopt’ us. Mk 6:7-13. The disciples are sent on mission to preach the Gospel. Resistance to the message will be expected. Theme—Being a prophet. Continuing the theme from last week, the readings offer an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of baptism, as a call to be a prophet. Resistance, even rejection are expected. Today’s readings offer encouragement in our struggle to discipleship fidelity.

**July 23—Ordinary Time 16: Jer 23:1-6.** God promises the people new and faithful shepherds, and especially a future king who will reign with wisdom. Eph 2:13-18. Jesus is celebrated as the source of social, political and religious unity. Mk 6:30-34. Jesus shows concern for his disciples and compassion on the crowds who seem shepherdless. Theme—God’s Shepherd us. The image of a shepherd-in-God who looks after us, no matter what, is so rich and necessary today. What are the implications of a community who really believes in the active presence of such a God?

**July 30—Ordinary Time 17: 2 Kings 4:42-44.** The prophet Elijah takes a few loaves, gives them to his servant, to satisfy the hunger of a large number of people. Eph 4:1-6. The writer urges unity within the faith community. The source of such a bond of peace comes from God’s Spirit. Jn 6:1-15. Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. Theme—God feeds our hungers. God desires to feed us deeply in our life’s journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face that invite us to open ourselves to this God who seeks to respond to our deepest needs?

**August 6—Transfiguration: Dan 7:9-10, 13-14.** Daniel’s apocalyptic vision of God and God’s agent who is given power and authority. 2 Pet 1:16-19. The letter writer affirms that Jesus is God’s beloved one who shares in God’s glory. Mk 9:2-10. Jesus experiences God’s presence and beloved closeness. Theme—Our Belovedness. This feast celebrates who Jesus is: God’s beloved one who reveals God’s beloved presence to us. God’s loving attitude to us, that we are beloved too, is seriously questioned in a hard and difficult world. To reclaim this conviction will transfigure us, at it did Jesus.

**August 13—Ordinary Time 19: 1 Kings 19:4-8.** The exhausted prophet awaits death, but God revives him with food and drink to journey to Horeb. Eph 4:30-5:2. An exhortation to be open to God’s Spirit, live with kindness and forgiveness, and to imitate God. Jn 6:41-51. Jesus is God’s sustenance for our journey. He is the living bread from heaven. Theme—Our Sustaining God: Themes of the first reading and gospel underscore God’s desire to sustain us in our spiritual journey. Examples of exhaustion abound; the desire for ‘living bread’ is planted deep within our being. How can our communities identify this desire, and the expression of God’s sustaining presence?

**August 20—Ordinary Time 20: Prov 9:1-6.** The quest of true spiritual wisdom is ancient; wisdom (‘Sophia’) invites us to ‘lay aside im-
maturity and walk in the way of insight.' Eph 5:15-20. We are encouraged to live by wisdom with an awareness of God. Jn 6:51-58. Jesus is the true source of Wisdom offered through communion with his flesh and blood. Theme—True Wisdom: A way of life filled with wisdom is essential. Many look for wisdom in diverse ways (technology; study; economics etc). Jesus seeks to offer us true wisdom; he is from God; eucharistic communion with him promises life forever.

August 27—Ordinary Time 21: Josh 24:1-2, 15-17, 18. Before entering into Canaan, Joshua challenges the people to commit themselves to their ancestral God. Eph 4:32-5:2, 21-32. The writer offers advice on how to live religiously as God’s true household. The preacher must beware not to reinforce female submission and to appreciate the cultural and social conditioning behind this text! Jn 6:53, 60-69. Faced with the implications of the realistic language of eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood, some of his disciples turn away. The Twelve remain faithful. Theme—Centrality of God and Jesus. The statement of the disciples in Jn 6:68 (‘Lord, to whom can we go?’). captures the essence of the Christian journey: our focus on Jesus, the heart and meaning of true life, who reveals loving care of us, especially in times of struggle.

September 3—Ordinary Time 22: Dt 4:1-2, 6-8. Moses encourages the Israelites to live faithfully to God’s commandments and thus display wisdom and discernment to the people. James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27. A fine summary of essential truths for authentic living: generosity, openness to God’s word which needs to be acted upon, and a concluding radical definition of ‘religion.’ Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23. Mk’s Jesus defines true religious living, one that is centered in the heart. Theme—Authentic Religious Living. Whether people show up at church or not, everyone wants to be authentic in themselves and live in harmony with others. Today’s readings offer a wealth of insights for reflecting on authentic religious living. What resides in our hearts, and our relationship with Jesus are essential (Mk). These are expressed in the ways we are with others (James).

September 10—Ordinary Time 23: Is 35:4-7. The prophet envisages a God of liberty who frees and releases. God’s presence changes all perceptions; streams appear in the desert. James 2:1-5. Our response to the poor of the world is the touchstone of true religious living. Mk 7:31-37. Jesus heals one who is deaf; the ability to deeply hear and to proclaim the gospel is at the heart of discipleship. Theme—Being released. The God of liberty (Is) and the Jesus of healing (Mk) are with us in our attempts to creative concerned faith communities in which people are invited to minister. The future of our churches rests upon an engaged and motivated ministry of the baptized.

September 17—Ordinary Time 24: Is 50:4-9. A song of God’s servant, faithful yet persecuted, who seeks justice against his persecutors. James 2:14-18. Faith implies loving and caring actions towards others. Mk 8:27-35. The centre of Mk’s gospel: Who is Jesus for us? He is God’s anointed one who will suffer, be persecuted and die. Theme—Suffering. Those close to God (the servant in Is; Jesus in Mk) suffer. Fidelity to God is not without its struggles. How are members of this community examples of faithful living in the midst of suffering?

The religious imagination, at least in its Christian form, finds its final justification and explanation—the ‘why’ of things—not within the system but outside it. God is not part of the universe. To ‘symbolise’ means simply to communicate or connect, in Christian terms, with the transcendent Other. A symbol is simply connection, uniting, communion.