PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

YEAR C.

From the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time to the Third Sunday of Easter

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THE FOLLOWING is a very simple and brief overview of each of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations that will be proclaimed while this issue of Compass is current, from February to March 2004. One particular point is worth noting. During Lent, beginning with the Third Sunday of Lent, notes to Year A readings are also offered, besides comments on Year C. Some parishes prefer the Year A readings, especially in the light of the celebration of the RCIA. These readings, as we will see, raise the key themes and questions of our Christian lives: For what do we thirst? What drives us? What gives us life? How do we see or interpret what is going on in our world?

Please feel free to adapt and disseminate what follows, honouring, of course, the usual conventions of authorship.

PART ONE: NOTES ON THE READINGS

1. The First Reading (generally from the Jewish Bible) for each Sunday has been selected generally with the Gospel in mind. However it is important to see this reading in its own right, as one that speaks to its original (Jewish) audience about God. It is from this perspective that the notes are written. In our specific period in 2004, we hear from the books of the Torah and the story of Israel’s journey. We will also be introduced to a wide range of prophetic works. The following books of the Hebrew Bible are read: Genesis (in Lent) seeks to offer an insight into God’s revelation, care and formation of the people of Israel. These readings in Lent provide the background for the stories of Israel’s life which emerge in later books of the Bible; Exodus (Holy Thursday) is the great story of God’s liberation of the people from slavery in Egypt. Deuteronomy (1 Lent) continues to remember and celebrate Israel’s primary story of liberation; the reading from Joshua (in Lent 4) continues the story of Israel as they come to the land promised them by God; 1 Samuel (Lent 4A) picks up the memory of David’s selection as king of Israel. On several Sundays (Ordinary Time 4, 5, 6, Lent 5, Passion Sunday) we will hear from Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is important to remember that these writers seek to encourage God’s people to live by the covenant. Rather than seeing the prophets as ‘fortune-tellers’ who predict the future, they are passionate preachers of God’s love and covenant, who remind their listeners of the consequences of living this kind of life. This is especially the case on Passion Sunday (with Is 50) and the great song of God’s servant.

In the Easter Season the first reading comes from the New Testament, Luke’s Book of Acts, and replaces the Hebrew Bible reading. Now the focus is on the life of the Risen Christ as it is expressed in the fledgling Christian community in its new life after Pentecost and the miracles that are performed through the disciples. These are signs of Jesus’ continuing presence in the Christian community.

2. The Second Reading is generally from Paul’s letters, Romans (Lent 1, Lent 3A; Philippians (Lent 2, Lent 5) and II Corinthians (Lent 4). In Ordinary Time up to the Season of Lent the key focus reading will be from I Corinthians. Written around 54CE, Paul sought to address serious pastoral issues, which had come to his attention while he was staying in Ephesus. These concerned the relationships between the Corinthian Christians—expressions of religious elitism, gross sexual misdemeanours (one man was having sexual relations with his stepmother; use of prostitutes), and liturgical issues about celebrating Eucharist which reflected social divisions. The letter is ‘white hot’ with Paul’s sharp response to the Corinthian Christians. It is full of pastoral and theological interest for us, particularly in the light of our contemporary ecclesial issues. In our selection leading up to Lent, Paul focuses on the unity of the body—here he is talking about the
Christian body politic—which had become seriously divided through social elitism created through wealth differences.

3. The Gospel: In Year C of the Liturgical year, the Gospel is generally from Luke (with a few exceptions) The writer of this Gospel addressed an urban Greek-Roman community, located outside Palestine and in a Gentile world around 85 CE. Our selection of Luke in the time leading to Lent takes up the story of Jesus’ mission (Feb 8), his call to discipleship of Simon Peter (Feb 15), the Sermon on the Plain (Feb 22). In Lent the Gospel’s themes centre on the key aspects of this season which follow the usual Lenten pattern for Gospel readings established over the centuries. As already indicated above, the special readings from John’s Gospel are also commented on below, in the light of their proclamation in the RCIA.

PART TWO: BRIEF OVERVIEW OF READINGS

Feb 1—Ordinary 4: Jer 1:4f. The call of the prophet. Jer is appointed and strengthened by God, despite opposition that awaits. 1 Cor 12:31-13:13 Paul contrasts the gift of prophecy with gift of love. Love is preferred and the greatest. This helps to reorder elitism in those with the gift of prophecy. Lk 4:21-30. Continues from previous week’s selection. Jesus’ declaration of his mission meets opposition and rejection. Theme—opposition and rejection: Jesus meets opposition and rejection in his commitment to God, like Jeremiah. Jesus’ scandalous ministry of inclusion of the most impure and unholly is misunderstood.

Feb 8—Ordinary 5: Is 6:1-2a, 3-8 The call of Isaiah reflects on the experience of God’s holiness and his need for purification. 1 Cor 15:1-11 The centre-piece of Paul’s Gospel: Jesus’ death, resurrection and appearances. Lk 5:1-11. Simon Peter’s experience of and call from Jesus. Simon experiences unworthiness and fragility before Jesus’ holiness. Theme—our call. God calls us. This realization meets with suspicion, rejection, or even a sense of unworthiness. The call to follow and believe is God’s call to us, not our call to God. It is God’s work in us for the world.

Feb 15—Ordinary 6: Jer 17:5-8. Jeremiah encourages trust in God. This is what sustains and gives true life. 1 Cor 15:12-16-20. Paul’s gospel continues, affirming the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Lk 6:17,20-26. Luke’s version of the beatitudes. Different from Mt. Balanced by ‘woes.’ Addressed to rich and poor. Theme—blessedness: We are blessed through Jesus. We share in God’s life now, in what we are experiencing. Lk’s Jesus encourages us to search for what is most important, rather than be distracted by inconsequential.

Feb 22—Ordinary 7: 1 Sam 26:2f. A great story. David, who spares Saul recognizing his true identity, is blessed. 1 Cor 15.45f. Paul affirms human existence open to God’s spirit. This is what is ‘imperishable.’ Lk 6:27 A centrepiece of Lk’s sermon on the plain: love of enemies, without condemnation. Theme—God’s goodness: The story of David and the teaching of Jesus show how we can reveal God’s goodness, even in the most unexpected moments—esp. in times of violence, revenge and tragedy.

Feb 29—Lent 1: Dt 26:4-10. Remembers God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt and invites thanks to God. Rom 10:8-13. Union with Jesus brings joy, salvation and communion without distinction. Lk 4:1-13 The authenticity of Jesus’ relationship to God is ‘tested’ at its religious core. Theme—Centredness on God: Israel is reminded of its relationship to God; Jesus remains integrated and in communion with God, centred on God’s will. Can we identify people in our parish and society who illustrate this God-centredness?

March 7—Lent 2: Gen 15:5-12,17-18. God promises to be with and bless the pilgrim who trusts God. Abram and Sarah are ancient models of such trust. Phil 3:17-4:1. Our lives are to be focussed on God and Jesus who will transform us. Lk 9:28-36 Jesus is transfigured through prayer to experience God and the confidence of God’s presence in the midst of the struggles of his journey towards Jerusalem. Theme—Confidence. The struggle to trust, even in God at times of life’s difficulties, emerges often. Lent offers the possibility to draw closer to the God of Abraham, Sarah, Paul and Jesus.

March 14—Lent 3: Ex 3:1-8,13-15. Moses surprisingly encounters the God who wants to respond to peoples’ cries of pain. 1 Cor 10:1-6,10-12 The story of the ancestors of Israel is for our instruction. Lk 13:1-9. Jesus invites repentance and a change of heart in his listeners. Theme—Openness to God. Lent offers this precious moment to open
our lives, their hurt and sadness to God. This becomes a unique and unrepeatable moment. It is God's gift to us.

**Year A** Ex 17:3-7 The people's complaint against God: Life or death? Rom 5:1-2, 5-8. God's love revealed to us in Jesus. Jn 4. The woman at the well. Jesus as source of life, the eternal water. **Theme—Our Thirst:** For what do we thirst? How can we search out ways to satisfy our deepest longings? Name the ways the parish can and does this.

**March 21—Lent 4:** Josh 5:9-12. The Israelites come into the land God promised them and eat its produce. 2 Cor 5:17-21. Paul’s unequivocal message about God’s desire for communion (‘reconciliation’) with us. Lk 15:1-3, 11-32. The parable of the two lost sons and the loving parent. **Theme—Desire:** God loves us and seeks us out. God desires us.

**Year A** I Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13 The anointing of David, the unexpected and unrecognised one, as king. Eph 5:8-14. Living in the light of God. Jn 9. Story of the gradual insight into Jesus of the man born blind. **Theme—Light & seeing:** Name the ways that we deeply see, interpret and know our lives and world

**March 28—Lent 5:** Is 43:16-21. God is creator and redeemer who is about to do something ‘new.’ Phil 3:8-14. Paul wants to really know and be close to Jesus. Jn 8:1-11. Jesus loves, feels for and liberates the victimised woman. **Theme—our freedom.**

In what ways are people experiencing freedom, release, happiness and life in the parish, the church, our neighbourhood?

**Year A** Ex 37:12-14. God promises to open the graves of the dead, lead Israel back from exile with a new spirit. Rom 8:8-11. God’s spirit possesses us. Jn 11. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. **Theme—Life & resurrection:** This climaxes great themes of Lent in preparation for Easter — our resurrection and life. What brings us to life? Any examples where this is happening?

**April 4—Passion.** Lk 19:28-40. The disciples rejoice in Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. He comes acclaimed as king and religious leader. Is 50:4-7.

The song of the humble and attentive servant of God, ever alert and schooled in God’s ways. Phil 2:6-11. The famous hymn of Jesus’ embraced service that leads to his exaltation. Lk 22:14-23:56.

The innocent teacher and prophet suffers and dies as innocent victim of injustice. **Theme—Innocent suffering.** An opportunity to be in solidarity with the suffering Jesus revealed through those who are innocent victims of war, abuse, scandal, rejection and hostility. Jesus’ passion is revealed in our local streets.

**April 8—Holy Thursday.** Ex 12:1-8, 11-14. The Passover meal of deliverance. 1 Cor 11:23-26 Paul remembers Jesus’ last meal with his friends before death. Jn 13:1-15. Jesus’ act of foot-washing is a symbol of service and solidarity. **Theme—Leadership:** Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. Who reveals to us the most authentic values of human existence?

**April 9—Good Friday.** Is 52:13-53:12. Another servant song reflecting in length on his innocent suffering for others. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus is compassionate with us who suffered. Jn 18:1-19:42 Jesus, the exalted one, suffers, and dies as innocent lamb and acclaimed as king. The moment of death is also exaltation and victory. **Theme—Suffering.** God’s solidarity revealed through Jesus with the cries of suffering emitted by creation and human beings.

**April 11—Easter** Lk 24:1-12. Jesus is risen from the dead. The tomb’s visitors are invited to ‘remember’ the story of God revealed in Jesus in order to come to a sense of their own freedom. **Theme—freedom.** At the heart of our lives is God’s desire for us to be happy and free. Jesus is God’s promise of this. Easter permeates our universe.

**April 18—Easter 2:** Acts 5:12-16. The power of the Risen Jesus is active in the life of the early Christian Jewish community in Jerusalem Rev 1:9-13.17-19. The inaugural vision to John at the beginning of this work: The beauty and power of God is revealed. Jn 20:19-31. The Risen Jesus reveals himself to the frightened disciples, dispelling their fear and breathing into them his own spirit. **Theme—Joy:** God’s joy revealed through the Risen Jesus is present among us. It has the power to dispel fear and give confidence. Can we name examples of how God’s joy is present?

**April 25—Easter 3:** Acts 5:27-32. Peter & John heal through the power of the Risen Jesus. Rev 5:11-14. The vision of the exalted Jesus, the lamb once slain who lives forever. Jn 21:1-19. The Risen Jesus appears to Simon, the Beloved Disciple and the other followers. **Theme—Resurrection.** The power of the Risen Jesus is experienced by the disciples in acts of healing, recognition, love and response. How can we identify the power of the resurrection still obvious among us?