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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

YEAR C

From the Eighteenth to the Thirty-first 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 from August to October 2004 (from the Eighteenth to the Thirty First Sunday of Ordinary Time). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, honouring, of course, the usual literary convention that acknowledges their source.

1. The First readings have been collated with the theme of the Gospel in mind. While this might lock these readings into a particular interpretation, the power of these important readings should not be forgotten, especially as the Christian community and its homilist draws on their unique, ancient insights always needing to be celebrated. Two themes from these readings over this period concern wisdom and wealth.

- During this time of the year (August—October), several readings are drawn from that body of Old Testament literature called ‘Wisdom.’ These are found in our readings from Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, and Sirach—also called ‘Ecclesiasticus’. Wisdom was a central gift for the Israelite people, and reflected God’s wisdom and presence among them. These readings focus on several features of God’s wisdom reflected in creation and among human beings: The gift of wisdom itself (OT 18), communion with God (OT 19), the need for discernment (OT 22), interiority (OT 23), God’s concern for the poor (OT 30), and

the all-pervading nature of God’s Spirit (OT 31).

- A second insight comes from the prophetic literature (beginning in the 8th cent BCE with Amos, OT 19 & 26) and invites us to consider the use of wealth and the exploitation of the poor. This theme dovetails with appropriate passages from Luke’s Gospel.

2. The Second Reading is drawn from the letters of the New (or Second) Testament. Only two are from Paul himself. *Philemon* (OT 23) was written by Paul in the mid-50s to a Christian slave owner to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus. Though Paul presumes the institution of slavery, his letter invites a way of relating based on the Gospel and spirit of Jesus rather than on social convention.

Several other selections for the second reading give us a feast of passages drawn from letters written after Paul’s death and called ‘post-Pauline.’ These early Christian letters, though conventionally attributed to Paul, were written by one of his disciples: *Colossians* dated in the late 60s or early 70s (OT 18), reflects on the nature of Jesus and what he offers the Christian community. There are selections from two other post-Pauline letters. These are more explicitly about pastoral issues concerning Christian leaders and their communities: *1 Timothy* (OT 25-26) and *2 Timothy* (OT 27-30) are written to address concerns about correct teaching, fidelity to the tradition about Jesus and ministry stability. These letters written towards the end of the

first century CE indicate that the Christian community was entering a new era in its development.

Outside of Easter, in Ordinary Time, the lectionary returns to its usual presentation of selections from Pauline literature with semi-continuous readings (one selection follows another). From Ordinary Time 12 to 14, the *Letter to the Galatians* (chapters 3 to 6) is proclaimed. Galatians is one of Paul's most critical letters. Written probably from Ephesus c. 54 CE, it addresses concerns about how one can have communion with God (which Paul technically names, 'justification'). For Paul, rather than a legalistic theological rigorism, Jesus is the only way to this communion. Jesus brings about a community of faith that is inclusive and non-discriminatory. This is the central feature of the Galatian reading on Ordinary Time 12. (20 June).

3. The Gospel readings during August-October are taken from Luke's Gospel, and the section of the gospel dealing with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9-19). Luke's gospel presumes an urban audience of c. 85 CE. The

writer is keen that Greco-Roman Christians are able to live authentically in their world with a sense of authenticity in their union with Jesus. The journey narrative of the gospel (Lk 9-19) provides the evangelist with an opportunity to explore the main attitudes which disciples need in their following of Jesus in the journey of daily living. These attitudes are about possessions and wealth (OT 18, 23, 25, 26, 30) sensitivity to God's presence (OT 19), membership in Jesus' community (OT 20, 28), hospitality (OT 22, 31), mercy and forgiveness (OT 24), faith (OT 27), and confident prayerfulness (OT 29). All these discipleship themes provide a contemporary Christian community with ways of reflecting on the vitality of its own life, and celebrating various local expressions of discipleship. On the Feast of the Assumption (August 15), the Lukan gospel proclamation concerns the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth. The canticle, the Magnificat, can assist today's Christian community recognise God's presence in the midst of a world that seems confusing, violent and oppressive of the poor and marginalised.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

August 1—Ordinary Time 18: *Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23*. The ancient wisdom-poet asks: What is true Wisdom after all our labouring? *Col 3:1-5, 9-11*. The writer encourages our focus to be on Jesus. This brings about renewal. *Lk 12:13-21*. Jesus warns against a greed that forgets about what is most important, true life. *Theme—Wisdom:* We celebrate the gift of wisdom which God offers us, through this community and our union with Jesus. Wisdom is a gift so necessary in a world preoccupied with materialism.

August 8—Ordinary Time 19: *Wisdom 18:6-9*. God calls us into divine communion and to share God's wisdom. *Heb 11:1-2, 8-19*. A beautiful and powerful narrative of the faith as lived by Israel's ancestors. *Lk 12:32-48*. Disciples are encouraged to be alert to God's

presence. *Theme—Faith.* The second reading provides a way of reflecting on and celebrating what faith is—lived commitment to God. What examples of local faith can be offered for reflection?

August 15—Assumption: *Rev 11:19; 12:1-6, 10*. Though frequently interpreted as a reading about Mary, it is rather a theologically poetic narrative about the story of Israel, in exile, seeking God's protection. *1 Cor 15:20-26*. Paul's witness to the resurrection of Jesus and 'those who belong to him.' *Lk 1:39-56*. The pregnant women meet and Mary acclaims a God who subverts the socially expected conventions of power and privilege. *Theme—Communion:* God's desire for ongoing communion is revealed in this feast. Mary is the first disciple of Jesus and the first to

experience the fruits of Jesus' resurrection.

August 22—Ordinary Time 21: *Is 66:18-21.* God's vision for community. *Heb 12:5-7,11-13.* The writer's encouragement and reassurance to those who suffer. *Lk 13:22-30.* The unexpected and unpredictable membership in Jesus' community of disciples *Theme—Community:* An important moment to reflect on the meaning of true religious community, to encourage inclusion and to identify those who might be excluded from parish or community life.

August 29—Ordinary Time 22: *Sirach 3:17-20,28-29.* An encouragement towards living with our focus on God and others, rather than from arrogance. *Heb 12:18-19,22-24.* Acclamation of God's nature and ourselves as 'citizens' of heaven. *Lk 14:1.7-14.* An enacted story about honour and table guests. *Theme—Eucharistic hospitality.* The Gospel offers an opportunity to celebrate the way the local community is inclusive, and expresses this liturgically.

September 5—Ordinary Time 23: *Wis 9:13-18.* A celebration of Wisdom, God's gift of interior communion. *Philemon 9-10.12-17.* Paul encourages Philemon to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, as 'a beloved brother.' *Lk 14:25-33.* The disciple is focussed on Jesus and nothing compromises this relationship. *Theme—Riches and poverty.* Luke challenges a world that sees possessions as a sign of divine blessing or favour. Can we celebrate those local heroes, perhaps unnamed or unrecognised, who live from a sense of total commitment to God and God's community?

September 12—Ordinary Time 24: *Ex 32:7-11,13-14* Moses intercedes to remind God about being faithful. *1Tim 1:12-17.* Jesus reveals God's mercy; we live out of and reflect this same mercy to others. *Lk 15:1-32.* Luke's central parable about mercy and forgiveness. Though tempted, don't shorten the reading. The elder brother's conduct needs reflection. *Theme—Mercy.* Every Eucharist is a celebration of forgiveness and mercy. This attitude, of God, is needed in our world today.

September 19—Ordinary Time 25: *Amos 8:4-7* The prophet names unjust practices that target the poor. *1Tim 2:1-8.* The writer urges prayers for civic leaders. *Lk 16:1-13.* The steward who acts to ensure that self-profit is not made from his master's debtors. *Theme—Acting Justly.* The weak, poor and marginalised are victims of exploitation in our nation. We are invited to name those victimised and be advocates of the exploited. This Eucharist joins us to Jesus and the wider community of the just.

September 26—Ordinary Time 26: *Amos 6:1a,4-7* The prophet targets those who benefit from the exploitation of the poor. *1Tim 6:11-16.* A late first century NT summary about Jesus' ministry and exaltation. *Lk 16:19-31.* Jesus' challenging parable about how wealth must be used to alleviate the needs of the poor. *Theme—Use of Wealth.* In Luke's day, a wealthy person was a greedy person. The readings encourage us not to be possessed by our possessions but to use them for others.

October 3—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 acts authentically and with faith, though limited. *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 10—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 thanks for the gift of healing. *2 Tim 2:8-13.* A revered hymn about Christ that encourages closeness to Jesus. *Lk 17:11-19.* Jesus responds to those who are excluded from community *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 Christian community seek to include those who

are excluded into its life?

October 17—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 Eucharist celebration and intercession?

October 24—Ordinary Time 30 *Sirach 35:15-17,20-22.* According to the wisdom writer, God is deferential to the poor. *2 Tim 4:6-8,16-18.* The writer affirms God's fidelity in the midst 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.

October 31—Ordinary Time 31. *Wis 11:22-12:2.* God loves and is merciful. God's Spirit permeates all creation and human beings. *2 Thes 1:11-2:2.* The writer encourages a spirit of calm, focussed on Jesus, in a time of struggle and uncertainty. *Lk 19:1-10.* Zacchaeus models the way of conversion: openness to Jesus, hospitality and care for the needy. *Theme—Graciousness:* The Wisdom's insight into the way God's spirit pervades everything leads to a new vision of what our planet and its people are really like. It leads to conversion, openness and graciousness, as reflected in Zacchaeus.

When we go to Holy Communion that intimate union between God and ourselves finds its most wonderful expression. As well, we are mysteriously united to all our sisters and brothers in the Church throughout the world. And in a timeless act of worship we are joined with the saints and angels in heaven. We are the communion of saints.

Let's always do our very best to allow the gift of the Eucharist to penetrate our lives. Jesus wants us to share his mission to build up God's Kingdom on earth. In communion with him all things are possible. He is the vine stem who nourishes us its branches, to produce its fruit.

The name 'Eucharist' comes from the Greek language: it means 'thank you' or 'thanksgiving'. We cannot treat any gift from God with indifference, much less the supreme gift of himself as our Saviour and Friend!

—'The Wonder Of The Eucharist'. Pastoral Letter From The Australian Bishops For The Feast of Corpus Christi, 2004.