

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Isaiah 8:23–9:3

1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17

Matthew 4:12–23

MONDAY

Mark 3:22–30

"... people will be forgiven for their sins..."

TUESDAY

Mark 16:15–18

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news..."

WEDNESDAY

Mark 3:1–20

"You are the Son of God!"

THURSDAY

Mark 4:21–25

"... the measure you give will be the measure you get..."

FRIDAY

Mark 4:26–34

"... the harvest has come..."

SATURDAY

Mark 4:35–41

"Have you still no faith?"

A Church Confident in Christ

"We are the Church." This slogan, which grew in popularity after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, points to a major theme of the Gospel of Matthew. More explicitly than the other evangelists, Matthew situates his telling of Jesus' life and mission around the formation of a community of disciples.

Of course, no writer in the New Testament understands faith as a purely individualistic relationship. All authors in the Bible recognize that God deals with humanity through the establishment of a people, a network of lives joined together in a common call. Yet it is Matthew who regularly brings the issue of the faith community into the spotlight. Matthew's Jesus is the Lord who founds a Church.

In today's Gospel, Jesus takes the first step in forming the Church: he calls his disciples. The

narrative stresses the initiative of Jesus in calling a community together. In Jewish culture, it was expected that disciples would seek out their teachers. This is the pattern presented in the Gospel According to John (1:35–42).

In Matthew's scene, however, Jesus is the one who finds his disciples. This is Matthew's way of stating that the Church is called together by the choice of Christ.

In a society that exalts the importance of the individual, faith can narrow to "me and Jesus." The Gospel of Matthew forestalls such a limited understanding of salvation. Our way to God is not a private adventure. We follow Christ together in a community of brothers and sisters. And if Christ has called us and Christ is with us, we have every reason for confidence. We need not be afraid.



The Faith of the Church

The bishops of the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the ancient truth that Christ is always present in his Church. This is especially true when the Church gathers for liturgy. At the Mass, Christ's presence can be perceived in the minister who presides; in the consecrated bread and wine; in the scriptural word, which is proclaimed; and in the Church, which gathers to pray and sing (Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 7).



Questions of the Week

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John. From this beginning, the Church will grow. But the Church is not for itself. Those who are called must call others. They must be fishers of people.

Adults

Do I understand that Christ who has called me expects me to call others? How have I recently shared my faith?

Children

I know that Jesus loves me. Do I understand that I respond to his love by the way I love others?

Responding to God's Word . . .

Coming to God as part of a community is often challenging. We can become frustrated or impatient with aspects of the Church. Differences between ourselves and others over theology or worship, poor judgments by our leaders, or the slow pace of a worldwide ecclesial structure can be discouraging.

Matthew anticipates such difficulties and provides encouragement. Not only has Christ called us together. Christ remains with us. In a verse found only in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reminds his disciples: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them"

(18:20). Matthew also carefully frames his entire Gospel with this truth.

In the first chapter, he tells us that Jesus will be named Emmanuel, which means "God is with us" (1:23). In the very last verse of the Gospel, the risen Christ assures his community with the pledge, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20).

None of these declarations eliminate the difficulties that can arise in Church life. But the words of Jesus show us the value of church community. We are the Body of Christ. We find Christ in each other. Our difficulties need not overwhelm us. His presence is our strength.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. When the family is gathered, discuss the ways you see Christ in each other—when two or three are gathered in his name.

In the workplace or in school. Identify someone who is difficult to love. Ask Christ, who is with you, to help you act with kindness toward that person.

In the community. If you find yourself in a conversation with complaints about the Church, express your conviction that Christ is still found in the Church.



Meditation Moment

Psychologist Abraham Maslow has an interesting response to the question of why so few people "leave all" to follow a dream—or to pursue a noble goal. He says they are afraid to become what they are capable of being. They thrill at the possibility, but they also shudder at it.

For reflection . . .

How do I respond to the thought of stepping out in faith and following Jesus more closely? How do I react to the idea of embarking upon a noble goal with Jesus?

WHAT I AM IS GOD'S GIFT TO ME.

WHAT I BECOME IS MY GIFT BACK TO GOD.

ANONYMOUS

FROM VISION BY MARK LINK, SJ

A Prayer for the Body of Christ

Lord, we are not always the people we need to be. We are not always the Church we need to be. Time and again our wants override our call, our inadequacies cloud your message, our sins betray your Good News. When our failures pull us down, when our smallness hides your greatness, revive us with your call; renew us with your love. Remind us that we are still your people, your Body, your Church called to serve the world. Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

Matthew 8:8

Words similar to these are used at Mass as the assembly's response to the invitation to communion.

Profile in Faith

The Centurion of Capernaum

Matthew (8:5–13), Luke (7:1–10), and John (4:46–54) all report Jesus' cure of the servant of a centurion who lived in Capernaum. This centurion was so sure of Jesus' power that he believed that Jesus could heal from afar. He believed that Jesus could be present, even when physically distant.

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