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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

APRIL—JULY

From the Sixth Sunday of Easter to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

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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 Sundays between April and July 2008, from the Sixth Sunday of Easter to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

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 picks up important stories enabling our Christian communities 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 forty days after Easter (Ascension), and the Pentecost story itself (on Pentecost Sunday), which is 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 we return to the readings of Ordinary Time on June 1, we will see how the first reading for these Sundays in Ordinary Time covers a wide range of First Testament litera-

ture, with a particular focus on the prophets. In each case, the theme of the gospel has determined 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 come from 1 Peter, written not by Peter himself but by a Christian leader in Rome concerned about the pastoral care of Christian in Asia Minor. The letter addresses religious people experiencing turmoil and confusion in their day-to-day lives. The writer seeks to encourage his addressees and remind them of their baptismal life. For this reason 1 Peter is appropriate for reflecting on the implications of our baptismal commitment in this Easter season.

When we move into Ordinary Time, the second reading is predominantly from Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapters 3 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 9 to 12—June 1 to Jul 27) are rich and powerful. They offer an opportunity for each of our local faith communities to 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 4 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 1, 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 note some how Jewish themes permeate these gospel readings. The selections from Mt 7 to 14 enable us to experience the figure of Wisdom revealed in Matthew's Jesus: He teaches, calls into discipleship, 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

April 6—Easter 3: *Acts 2:14, 22-28.* Luke summarises Peter's Pentecost sermon in terms of the Gospel's story about Jesus. *1 Pet 1:17-21.* God's vision of the relationship to God which all the baptised share. *Lk 24:13-35.* Two unfaithful disciples experience the presence of the Risen Jesus in the 'breaking of bread,' the moment of Eucharistic communion. *Theme—Jesus' Presence.* Jesus continues to be present to all, especially when darkness, blindness or personal issues seem to cloud life's journey. The centrality of the Sunday Assembly becomes the place of our encounter with the Risen Jesus.

April 13—Easter 4: *Acts 2:14, 36-41.* Peter appeals to his attentive audience to be converted to God. *1 Pet 2:20-25.* Jesus is the model of how to be with God in the midst of life's suffering. *Jn 10:1-10.* Jesus is the sheep-fold gate who allows access to God and protection for his community. *Theme—Jesus, the Gate:* We seek safety, security and protection. Jesus offers us a community where we can be at ease with God. What are some of the ways in which this happens in Sunday Eucharistic Assembly?

April 20—Easter 5: *Acts 6:1-7.* Seven are appointed to minister to the practical needs of the Jerusalem Christian community. Luke shows how ministry must be flexible, inclusive and respectful of all. *1 Pet 2:4-9.* All those baptised form a holy priesthood and spiritual household. *Jn 14:1-12.* Jesus is the way, truth and life for troubled people. *Theme—Call of the Baptised.* Our community that gathers each Sunday is precious. It is God's 'royal

priesthood,' blessed and beloved by God. Baptism empowers us all to ministry, especially in a Church once dominated by ordained ministry. Baptism is at the heart of future ministry and lay ecclesial leadership.

April 27—Easter 6: *Acts 8:5-8, 14-17.* Philip preaches to the Samaritans. Peter and John visit them and pray that the Samaritans will receive the Holy Spirit. A second Pentecost now takes place amongst a non-Jewish people! *1 Pet 3:15-18.* Reverence for God is at the heart of the Christian life. This enables the believer to act with integrity especially in times of difficulty or false-accusation. *Jn 14: 15-21.* Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. This 'Advocate' will be with his disciples. *Theme—Release of God's Holy Spirit.* God's Spirit permeates every human being and atom of creation. This empowerment guarantees God's Spirit in directing the future of our churches.

May 4—Ascension: *Acts 1:1-11.* Luke's community grieving for the physical return of the earthly Jesus is encouraged in its ongoing life. *Eph 1:17-23.* Jesus is central in God's plan and God's communion with us. *Mt 28:16-20* This is the climax and summary of Mt's Gospel. *Theme—Fidelity and Confidence.* The Ascension feast reminds us of God's continual presence with us in our church, local and personal struggles. We can be confident of the future, despite the struggles we experience.

May 11—Pentecost: *Acts 2:1-11* God's Spirit empowers and unites the fragile Jerusalem community of disciples. *1 Cor 12:3-7.12-13* The many gifts evident in the Christian community are the

signs of the ongoing activity of God's Spirit that brings about communion. *Jn 20:19-23* Jesus breathes his Spirit of forgiveness and peace on to his frightened disciples. *Theme—Courage*: In times of fear or anxiety, our celebration of this Pentecost reminds us we are empowered by God's Spirit.

May 18—Trinity: *Ex 34:4-6.8-9.* Moses declares the 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—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 triune life in world, just as others reflect God's inner life to us.

May 25—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—The Sunday Assembly*: At a time when we think about new ways of liturgical life as priest numbers decline, the Sunday Eucharistic Assembly become more important than ever. Here we celebrate God's life with us and our communion with all who gather, and those who feel excluded.

June 1—Ordinary Time 9: *Dt 11: 18. 26-28. 32.* Moses teaches the heart of religion: a total focus on God. This is the heart of Judaism. *Rom 3: 21-25. 28.* Paul also teaches the heart of religion: Focus on God through Jesus. This is called 'righteousness.' *Mt 7: 21- 27.* Jesus teaches the heart of discipleship: A focus on Jesus and his words. *Theme—Focus on God.* Living each day with an explicit consciousness of God is at the heart of Judaism, the faith life of Jesus and Mt's community. How can this awareness be encouraged and celebrated in our local Sunday Assembly?

June 8—Ordinary Time 10: *Hos 6:3-6.* The prophet invites Israel to a genuine 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 us to reflect on the authenticity of our church life and practice. Where do we see today authentic religious life and practice? Who exemplifies this spirit?

June 15— Ordinary Time 11: *Ex 19:2-6* God reminds Moses (and his 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 (first reading) and the kind of community that gathers around Jesus (Gospel) needs to be celebrated today.

June 22— Ordinary Time 12: *Jer 20:10-13.* The prophet is faithful to God's call despite his struggle with God. *Rom 5:12-15* Paul celebrates the gift of divine deliverance through Jesus' ministry. *Mt 10:26-33.* Jesus reminds his disciples not to be frightened but 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 29—Peter and Paul: *Acts 12: 1-11* God delivers Peter from imprisonment. *2 Tm 4: 6-8. 17-18.* The apostle reflects upon his fidelity to God and God's fidelity to him. *Mt 16: 13-19.* Peter publicly identifies Jesus as the 'Messiah' ('Anointed One'). Jesus calls Peter as the 'rock' upon which the Christian community is built. *Theme—Apostolic Witness*: The faith obvious in our community is the fruit of faithful witness to Jesus over the centuries in every generation. This faith is founded on the faith of the first community disciples, symbolised in Peter and Paul and their missions to the Jewish and Gentile worlds respectively. This mission continues today amongst us.

July 6—Ordinary Time 14: *Zech 9:9-10.* God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. *Rom 8:9.11-13* We possess God's Spirit who empowers our daily lives. *Mt 11:25-30* We are invited to come to Jesus who wants to be with us in our daily struggles. *Theme—God's Comfort.* Many people today feel the burdens of life. Our faith community gathered in this Sunday Assembly reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How is this happening practically at a local level?

July 13—Ordinary Time 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* This is the 'Great Parable' chapter of Mt's Gospel: 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 20—Ordinary Time 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.* This is 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 our struggles. Mt's parables remind us of the realism of life's ambiguities which are part of discipleship and mysteriously reveal God's presence.

July 27—Ordinary Time 17: *1 Kings 3:5.7-12.* Solomon is blessed for seeking 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.

THE TRIDENTINE MASS AGAIN?

Dear Editor,

Comment is called for on Fr Joseph Grayland's article published in the spring 2007 issue of *Compass*, 'The Tridentine Mass Again: Can the Church Celebrate in Two Rites?'

The answer to Fr Grayland's question is a resounding Yes, as that is what the Church has been doing for centuries. Historically, the liturgical life of the Catholic Church has been carried on through about 20 ritual traditions. Most of these are found in Eastern Catholicism but even today in the Western Church the Roman rite does not have a monopoly.

The Western Church used to have more rites until most of them fell into desuetude after the Second Vatican Council even though the Council itself directed that all existing rites were to be preserved and respected (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 4). This was just one of many liturgical principles enunciated by the Council which were disregarded in the post-conciliar reform.

The main problem with Fr Grayland's position is that it is based on a faulty understanding of the history of the Roman missal promulgated by Pope John XXIII in 1962. Fr Grayland insists that the precursor of the 1962 missal, the missal promulgated by Pope Pius V in 1570, was the product of the theological perspectives and polemical mindset of the Church in the context of the Protestant Reformation.

Far from being something created to deal with the politico-ecclesiastical struggles of the mid-sixteenth century, the 1570 missal was merely a codification or standardisation of the Roman rite of Mass as it then existed and had been celebrated for some centuries. Unlike the 1969 missal of Pope Paul VI, the 1570 book was not a general, far-reaching overhaul of structure, texts and rubrics. The main

change was a reduction in the number of prefaces and sequences. In every other aspect, the 1570 missal was almost identical to the first printed edition of the Roman missal, which appeared in 1474 and which was itself little different from Mass as it was celebrated at the papal court in the thirteenth century. In other words, the essential form of the missal of 1962, via the missal of 1570, cannot have been a reaction to events in the sixteenth century as it preceded them in time by several hundred years.

Fr Grayland's confusion is reinforced by calling the 1962 missal 'Tridentine'. It is Tridentine only in the sense that Pius V's codification of the Roman rite was ordered by the Council of Trent. The origins of that missal and of the theological, ecclesiological and liturgical presuppositions underpinning it lie hundreds of years before the Council of Trent and have nothing to do with either the Protestant or the Catholic Reformations.

This confusion might be avoided if the 1962 missal were called by some such designation as 'the old Mass', 'the traditional Mass', 'the Latin Mass', or, better still, 'the Mass of John XXIII' which describes it exactly.

Fr Grayland is also mistaken when he claims that Pius V's intention was that all the liturgical rites other than the Roman would, over time, cease to be used. The exact opposite is the case. The Pope ordered that all rites which had been in existence for at least 200 years, including the rite of his own Order, the Dominican, were to continue. The disappearance of most of these rites was delayed until the 1960s in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

Yours sincerely,
Christopher Dowd OP