

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 50:5–9a
James 2:14–18
Mark 8:27–35

MONDAY

John 1:45–51*

"You will see greater things than these."

* Saint Bartholomew, Apostle

TUESDAY

Matthew 23:23–26

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees . . ."

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 23:27–32

" . . . inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

THURSDAY

Matthew 24:42–51

"Keep awake . . ."

FRIDAY

Matthew 25:1–13

" . . . the kingdom of heaven will be like this."

SATURDAY

Mark 6:17–29

"Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."

These Words Are Hard!

Today's text comes at the end of the "Bread of Life Discourse" that we have been reading since the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. This will be the last reading from the Gospel of John before taking up Mark again.

These final verses of chapter 6 resume the murmuring criticisms that we read before and describe the scandal that Jesus' words were causing even among his disciples: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" (John 6:60).

The question reflects not only the doubts of the first disciples, but also the crisis of John's own community—the difficulty in accepting Jesus as the sacramental Bread of Life. Jesus knew that some of his own disciples would have difficulty accepting this teaching.

The disciples feared that Jesus' radical



words were driving people away.

They felt that the Eucharist and the Cross were stumbling blocks for many who otherwise would follow them.

John the Evangelist concludes the chapter with the presentation of two possibilities for action: Peter and Judas.

Peter, speaking for the Twelve, professed faith in Jesus, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the

words of eternal life. We have come to believe . . ." (John 6:68–69).

Judas, on the other hand, remains in the group but is already divided between his loyalty to Jesus and the darkness that will eventually lead him to betray his friend (see John 6:70–71).

Jesus is the Bread of Life for the Christian community. He is the vine, the source of strength and nourishment. Where else can we go?

The Faith of the Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that the first announcement of the Eucharist divided and scandalized the disciples. The mysteries of the Eucharist and of the Passion of Christ never cease to be an occasion of division. Our Friend and Lord is inviting us to discover that only he has the words of eternal life (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1336).



Questions of the Week

It is part of the human condition to avoid that which we do not understand. When we hear opinions that shake our beliefs, we usually criticize the person who proposed them. Jesus did that with his words on the Bread of Life.

Adults

What part of Jesus' message do I find hard to live?

Children

How do I feel when a classmate doesn't understand my religion?

Responding to God's Word. . .

It is easy to relate to the disciples. Most of us are uncomfortable with the concept of mystery. We use the term when we talk about such things as the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Eucharist.

Mystery does not imply a secret or a spooky Halloween concept. Mystery refers to something that is real but beyond our imperfect human understanding; something that causes awe rather than discussion.

Often this kind of talk scandalizes the listeners. What did Jesus mean when he said that he would rebuild the Temple in three days? What was he trying to say when he promised to come back again and not leave us orphans?

The discourse of the Bread of Life in the Gospel of John falls under this category of

scandalous sayings. Jesus was saying that one can eat the best food in town, but if they do not eat the Body and drink the Blood of Christ they will have no life within them.

It was part of the Jewish tradition to eat animal meat offered to God. The problem with Jesus' teaching is that he was not referring to animals, but to himself, a person. He offers to nourish us with his own Body and Blood—his very life. This was difficult to accept for many people of his time, especially because it was coming from the simple son of the local carpenter.

May we all take the side of Peter and respond to this mystery of our faith by proclaiming, "We have come to believe . . . that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69).

SUGGESTIONS

In the home. Take some time to ask everyone in your family how they feel about the Eucharist.

In the workplace or in school. Ask your Christian friends if they receive Holy Communion and what it means to them.

In the community. Encourage people in your parish to read a good book that deals with the Eucharist in a Catholic context.



Meditation Moment

The film *Lady Sings the Blues* portrays the life story of singer Billie Holliday. Diana Ross spent months preparing for her role as Billie. She read miles of print about Billie's life and listened to hours of Billie's songs. "I was committed to doing a good job," Diana said. "I tried very hard to know her as much as I could."

For reflection . . .

Diana's commitment to make Billie live again on the screen is a model for my commitment to make Jesus live again in our world. It invites me to ask, Am I as loyal and faithful to Jesus as Diana was to Billie? As the twelve disciples were to Jesus?

NEVER LET GO OF LOYALTY AND FAITHFULNESS. TIE THEM AROUND YOUR NECK, WRITE THEM ON YOUR HEART.

PROVERBS 3:3

ADAPTED FROM MISSION BY MARK LINK, SJ

Lord, I Believe; Help My Unbelief

God of all truth,
Guide us in our path as we
search for answers to the
Doubting Thomas in all of us.
Fill us with your light and
wisdom and give us the
grace to believe in you even
without seeing. We ask this
in the name of Jesus
who is the Way,
the Truth, and the Life.
Amen.

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

[Jesus] said to Thomas . . .
"Do not doubt but believe."
Thomas answered him, "My
Lord and my God!" Jesus
said to him, "Have you
believed because you have
seen me? Blessed are those
who have not seen and yet
have come to believe."

John 20:27-29

Profile in Faith

Saint Thomas the Apostle

Saint Thomas, sometimes referred to as Doubting Thomas, is best known for his questioning nature. During the Last Supper, when Christ told the Apostles that he was going to prepare a place for them, Thomas argued about the specifics. He was also unwilling, later, to believe that Christ had appeared to the others. It was only after Christ revealed the marks of his wounds that Thomas' skepticism disappeared. At that point, Thomas became convinced of the Resurrection and exclaimed the famous phrase: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). His feast day is celebrated on July 3.

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