

# in Touch with the Word

Lectionary-Based  
Prayer Reflections

*Cycle A for  
Ordinary Time*

Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart



saint mary's press

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To my mother:  
Thank you, thank you, thank you  
for life, for love, for joy.  
It is so much fun being your daughter!  
You give me great ideas,  
wise insights,  
constructive feedback,  
unconditional support,  
and weekly laughter.  
The best part about being an author  
is your pride and enthusiasm with each new book!  
I love you, Mom!

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# Introduction

## Using This Book

Did you ever go to Mass on Sunday, listen to the Scripture readings, and then promptly forget what they were all about or how your life relates to their message? Does this sound familiar? Even though you may have listened to a homilist who connected the word with you and challenged you at that time, what about the week before the Sunday Scriptures or the week after? How can you anticipate and prepare for the word? How can you stay in touch with the word that was heard?

This book is a resource designed to do just that—to help you prepare for the Sunday Scripture readings and to help you stay in touch with the word.

Using *In Touch with the Word* is a simple procedure. First, decide which Sunday's readings you are going to share. If it is Friday afternoon, you might want to reflect on the readings for the next Sunday so you can be more prepared for the upcoming liturgy. If it is Monday morning, you might want to remember the readings you heard on Sunday so you can stay in touch with that word the rest of the week. Next, turn to the page for the Sunday you have in mind. There you will find reflections, questions, and a prayer based on that Sunday's readings.

### **The Sunday Scripture Readings**

The Scripture readings for each Sunday are found in a book called a lectionary. The Sunday readings follow a three-year, A-B-C cycle that continues to repeat itself. The readings in the A cycle highlight the Gospel of Matthew. The readings in the B cycle highlight the Gospel of Mark. The readings in the C cycle highlight the Gospel of Luke. (If you are wondering about the Gospel of John, don't be

concerned. His readings are woven throughout all three years on special days that seem to need that “John” touch.)

The church calendar year consists of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, plus Ordinary Time. This book covers Ordinary Time, A cycle only. (The Sundays of B and C cycle in Ordinary Time, and the Sundays of the Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons will be found in other volumes of this series.) Most Sundays have three sets of readings, one for each cycle. But in this book you will find only the readings for the A cycle. The dates for each Sunday in the A cycle are given for the next several years.

You will note that the Scripture readings are not reprinted in this book. It would make the book too big and too expensive. You will need either a lectionary or a Bible to read one or more of the Scripture readings as part of the prayer reflection. However, a capsulated version of each Scripture reading is provided.

One of the three Scripture readings listed with each Sunday has an open bullet (◦) next to it. This indicates which reading will be most focused on in the reflection and which one you might want to read as part of the reflection.

### **Theme**

A summary of a central theme of the readings is also offered. You may want to use it to set a context for the reflection questions that will initiate sharing of and reflection on the word.

### **Reflections**

The reflection questions for each Sunday address audiences in three categories: adults, teenagers, and children. However, feel free to cross categories in the use of the questions whenever it is appropriate.

### **Focusing Object**

For each set of readings, you will find a suggested focusing object. Using a focusing object in these

prayer reflections is not mandatory, but it is helpful, especially with teenagers and children. It is a visual, hands-on reminder of the readings and their message. For example, anticipating or recalling the meaning of the passage about our relationship with Jesus being like a vine and its branches is much easier and more vivid if a plant with a stem and branches is present when reflecting on the reading of that passage.

The focusing object is handy for facilitating the prayer reflection and sharing. For example, after the Scripture reading is proclaimed, the facilitator asks one of the reflection questions for everyone to think about and share their thoughts. Then the facilitator picks up the focusing object and begins the sharing. When finished, the facilitator passes the object to the next person who is ready to share.

The focusing object can be passed around a circle, so everyone knows when their turn is coming, or it can be passed randomly as people become ready to share. A large group does better sitting in a circle and passing the object around in order. In a small group—one that fits around a table where everyone can reach the middle—anyone who is ready can pick up the object, share, and replace it for the next person who is ready to take a turn. Also, using the object makes it obvious when a person's turn has ended—no one has to guess. If someone just wants to offer a one-word response, or even remain silent, the focusing object is simply handed to the next person.

The focusing object is more than a reminder or a turn-designator. It is also an effective way to reduce the self-conscious feeling many people get when they are expected to share with a group of their peers. Persons handling an object and looking at it tend to relax and forget that a roomful of people are watching them. People who are relaxed and comfortable do a better job of sharing. This is true of adults, teenagers, and children!



After everyone has had a chance to share, the object comes back to the facilitator, who ends with the “Closing” or any other words she or he feels would be appropriate.

The focusing object can stay on a kitchen table or a classroom shelf all week, acting as a reminder of God’s word and the people’s response.

### **Closing**

A closing is provided for each prayer reflection. It consists of a poem or reading that ends the reflections with an inspirational touch. You will notice that the closings come from a variety of cultures, and each culture adds a rich spiritual tradition to the prayer reflections.

### **Indexes**

Each Sunday’s prayer session is indexed by focusing object and by theme in the back of this book.

## **Settings**

### **Parish**

**Parish staffs, councils, and committees** usually want to start their meetings with some type of prayer. Prayer based on Sunday’s readings is a great way to help the group relate to the parish liturgy, connect with the message of the Sunday readings, and start the meeting off on a spiritual plane.

**Homilists** can benefit from this resource by looking at the message through the eyes of adults, teenagers, and children. This can provide a springboard for the type of insights needed to be pastoral, effective, and challenging to the assembly of mixed ages that typically gathers each Sunday. (Actually sharing the reflection questions with adults, teenagers, and children and listening to their responses each week provides even better feedback for a homilist!)

**Liturgy planning groups** will find this book helpful. Members with different degrees of liturgical experience and understanding can read the theme

summaries, share the questions, and get a feel for the flow of the Scriptures. The suggested focusing object can also remind the group to investigate the possibilities of symbolism in the physical environment of the worship space.

**Prayer groups and small Christian communities** will find *In Touch with the Word* very helpful, especially if the groups include families with children of different ages.

### **Youth Groupings**

**Youth ministers** will find the prayer reflections in this book a simple way to prepare a youth group or team for the readings they will hear the following Sunday or feast day and to help them stay in touch with the readings they heard the previous Sunday. At the same time, the reflections call attention to the major seasons of the church year. The prayer process in the reflection works equally well with junior high teens or high school teens.

**Parish religious education teachers and catechists** meeting with a class once a week can use this resource to relate to the Sunday and feast day readings. Sending a note home each week encouraging parents to discuss the readings with their children at the dinner table or at bedtime, perhaps with a similar focusing object, is a good way to weave a family connection into a parish religious education program.

**Religion teachers in Catholic schools** looking for a way to connect students with their parish community will value this resource. Anticipating or recalling the Scriptures read at the parish liturgies will help students stay in touch with their parish community.

### **Families**

**Busy families** will find that using *In Touch with the Word* at home is a great way to make liturgical worship more relevant for their teenagers or younger children. Using the prayer reflections does not take long and is easy to do. Best of all, it helps the family as a whole connect with what is said at Mass and

remember it throughout the week. Parents may find their teenagers more likely to share prayer if they are doing it “for the sake of their younger brothers and sisters” than if they think they are doing it for themselves!

**Parishes with family-based programming** can use this resource in several ways. If the parish supplies families with resources to be used at home, every family can receive a copy of *In Touch with the Word* to use on their own. If families gather regularly at the parish for a scheduled activity, the sharing process can be incorporated with the program. If family groups meet in cells or units, they can be provided with copies of this book and suggestions for how it can be used in the context of their meeting.

Whether you work with adults, teenagers, or children in a parish, school, or home setting, you will find that being in touch with the word is easy with *In Touch with the Word*.

# Trinity Sunday



## Communication

### Scripture

- *Exodus 34:4–6,8–9*. Moses approaches God humbly, yet boldly requests that God pardon the sins of the stiff-necked Israelites. God speaks the Divine Name three times.
- *2 Corinthians 13:11–13*. Paul's letter ends with a trinitarian formula.
- *John 3:16–18*. God, who is the source and parent, sends Jesus, the Redeemer and only Son, to save the world, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers may know God and have eternal life.

### Theme

The Trinity is a mystery, impossible to fully understand. So we often speak in analogy or try to use words that reflect a unified threesome. God our Maker is indeed a God of compassion and forgiveness. In the Gospel, John pulls together the relationship of God, our compassionate and forgiving maker, with Jesus the Son, who is also God and our Redeemer. And Paul, in the second reading, refers to God as Maker, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together in his greeting in the name of God as Trinity.

### Focusing Object

A greeting card

## Reflections

### For Adults

Paul sends greetings, and he encourages us to greet one another with a holy kiss. Paul ends with a trinitarian blessing for grace, love, and fellowship. Greetings, blessings, and prayers are almost inseparable in a Christian community. People greet one another, support one another, and bid farewell, all in the name of God. Communication with God and communication with brothers and sisters in Christ appear to be the same thing. With such a community philosophy, prayer is second nature. God is always the focus. Everything is said and done with the spirit of faith and love.

- How is the community of that description similar to or different from the everyday community you experience?

Prayer is communication with God. God is always communicating with us—we are surrounded by God’s love and care. Yet we don’t always seem to be aware of God’s presence and connection with us. Usually it is up to us to open the channels so that God’s communication can flow to us.

- How easy or difficult is it for you to open up those channels?
- How would you describe your prayer life? As rich and fulfilling? dry and barren? fragile but growing?

### For Teenagers

The second reading is like a greeting card from Paul. It is a note of encouragement and love. In Paul’s day they don’t have “smiley faces” that say, “Have a nice day,” but Paul still cares enough to send the very best. He sends greetings and blessings in the name of God as Trinity—our Creator, our Savior Jesus, and the Spirit they share. We share in that holy and divine Spirit whenever we greet and bless one another.

- When was the last time you sent someone a greeting card that your parents didn’t make you send?

- When was the last time you received a card that wasn't a Christmas or birthday card?

Prayer is like a greeting card to God and from God. Greeting cards do not create love and friendship between people, but they are a channel so that feelings and thoughts can be shared and expressed more easily.

- What feelings and thoughts does God express to you? How do you know?
- What feelings and thoughts do you express to God? How do you do it?

### **For Children**

Lots of people like to send and receive greeting cards.

- Do you like getting Christmas cards and birthday cards?
- Who sends you Christmas cards and birthday cards?
- Do you ever get any other cards? If so, when? from whom?
- Do you ever send cards? If so, to whom?
- What kinds of things do you like to write in the cards you send?

Praying is like sending God a greeting card. Praying is also like receiving a greeting card from God.

- If you could actually mail a card to God, what would you write on it?
- What do you think God would write on a card to you?

### **Closing**

Prayer is like the turning on of an electric switch.

It does not create the current; it simply provides a channel through which the current can flow.

—Max Handelman

*(Vision 2000: A Cycle)*

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“One of the unique characteristics of this book, along with reflections on the lectionary readings, is the inclusion of a focusing object. Besides lending insights into the Scriptures, the focusing object trains people to see symbolically. In doing so, it enhances the ability ‘to see more than meets the eye,’ to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, the sacred in the secular.”  
**Dr. Maureen Gallagher**, Archbishop’s Delegate for Parishes, Diocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“Lisa-Marie is definitely ‘in touch’ with the needs of young people and families—and how they approach the word of God. *In Touch with the Word* will not only help various generations in praying the Scriptures, but will also assist homilists in making the word come alive in their preaching.” **Thomas N. Tomaszek, MEd, MTS**, Director, Spectrum Resources, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and consultant to the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry’s Prayer and Worship Project Team