

Gospel Connections for Teens

Reflections for Sunday Mass, Cycle A

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saint mary's press

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I dedicate this book to those who suffer injustice, especially those who are homeless or hungry, victims of domestic violence, trapped in war zones, unfairly imprisoned, or labeled as unpatriotic for challenging their government. May these Gospel passages and reflections inspire the young people who read them to stand by your side in the name of Christ, our savior.

This book was a joint effort. Three teens worked diligently as an editing team to help me refine each reflection. Their input was invaluable. So thanks to Rosanne Cruz, Dan Masterton, and Kate Schwarz. Your willingness to grow closer to Christ has inspired me.

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Introduction

I wrote this book because I never had one like it when I was a teen. I struggled each Sunday to connect the Gospel to my teen ups and downs. I hope this book helps you make those connections.

First, a brief explanation. In the Church liturgical year, the Sunday Gospel readings follow a three-year cycle. This book covers the first year of that cycle, called cycle A. In cycle A most of the Gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of Matthew.

Here's how you use this book, then. Look at the chart that follows this introduction. Look up the date of the coming Sunday in the chart, and you will find the correct reflection. Commit to spending twenty minutes each week reflecting on the Gospel before you go to Mass. Use the book's reflection process or create your own. Then go to Mass on Sunday and compare your reflection to the homily. You might even want to get a few friends together over coffee or snacks during the week to compare thoughts on the readings.

Because of space limitations, I've edited a few lines out of some of the Gospel passages. The Scripture citations at the top of the page indicate the complete Gospel passage for that Sunday. If I've shortened the passage, you will see a second citation immediately following the passage, indicating the exact verses I used.

All but a few of the names in the reflections are made up, though all the people I mention are real people I've come across in life and ministry.

Reflection Chart

Sunday Gospel Reflection	Page No.	2016–2017	2019–2020	2022–2023
1 st Sunday of Advent	14	Nov. 27	Dec. 1	Nov. 27
2 nd Sunday of Advent	16	Dec. 4	Dec. 8	Dec. 4
3 rd Sunday of Advent	18	Dec. 11	Dec. 15	Dec. 11
4 th Sunday of Advent	20	Dec. 18	Dec. 22	Dec. 18
Christmas Day	22	Dec. 25	Dec. 25	Dec. 25
Holy Family	24	Dec. 30	Dec. 29	Dec. 30
Mary, Mother of God	26	Jan. 1	Jan. 1	Jan. 1
Epiphany Sunday	28	Jan. 8	Jan. 5	Jan. 8
Baptism of the Lord	30	Jan. 9	Jan. 12	Jan. 9
2 nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	32	Jan. 15	Jan. 19	Jan. 15
3 rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	34	Jan. 22	Jan. 26	Jan. 22
4 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	36	Jan. 29	Feb. 2	Jan. 29
5 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	38	Feb. 5	Feb. 9	Feb. 5
6 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	40	Feb. 12	Feb. 16	Feb. 12
7 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	42	Feb. 19	Feb. 23	Feb. 19
8 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	44	Feb. 26		
1 st Sunday of Lent	46	Mar. 5	Mar. 1	Feb. 26
2 nd Sunday of Lent	48	Mar. 12	Mar. 8	Mar. 5
3 rd Sunday of Lent	50	Mar. 19	Mar. 15	Mar. 12
4 th Sunday of Lent	52	Mar. 26	Mar. 22	Mar. 19
5 th Sunday of Lent	54	April 2	Mar. 29	Mar. 26
Palm Sunday (The Passion)	56	April 9	April 5	April 2
Easter Sunday	58	April 16	April 12	April 9
2 nd Sunday of Easter	60	April 23	April 19	April 16
3 rd Sunday of Easter	62	April 30	April 26	April 23
4 th Sunday of Easter	64	May 7	May 3	April 30
5 th Sunday of Easter	66	May 14	May 10	May 7
6 th Sunday of Easter	68	May 21	May 17	May 14
7 th Sunday of Easter	70	May 28	May 24	May 21

Sunday Gospel Reflection	Page No.	2016–2017	2019–2020	2022–2023
Pentecost Sunday	72	June 4	May 31	May 28
Trinity Sunday	74	June 11	June 7	June 4
Corpus Christi Sunday	76	June 18	June 14	June 11
9th Sunday in Ordinary Time	78			
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time	80			
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time	82			June 18
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time	84	June 25	June 21	June 25
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time	86	July 2	June 28	July 2
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time	88	July 9	July 5	July 9
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time	90	July 16	July 12	July 16
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time	92	July 23	July 19	July 23
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time	94	July 30	July 26	July 30
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time	96	Aug. 6	Aug. 2	Aug. 6
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time	98	Aug. 13	Aug. 9	Aug. 13
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time	100	Aug. 20	Aug. 16	Aug. 20
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time	102	Aug. 27	Aug. 23	Aug. 27
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	104	Sept. 3	Aug. 30	Sept. 3
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	106	Sept. 10	Sept. 6	Sept. 10
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time	108	Sept. 17	Sept. 13	Sept. 17
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time	110	Sept. 24	Sept. 20	Sept. 24
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time	112	Oct. 1	Sept. 27	Oct. 1
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time	114	Oct. 8	Oct. 4	Oct. 8
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time	116	Oct. 15	Oct. 11	Oct. 15
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time	118	Oct. 22	Oct. 18	Oct. 22
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time	120	Oct. 29	Oct. 25	Oct. 29
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time	122	Nov. 5	Nov. 1	Nov. 5
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	124	Nov. 12	Nov. 8	Nov. 12
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	126	Nov. 19	Nov. 15	Nov. 19
Christ the King	128	Nov. 26	Nov. 22	Nov. 26

Reflections on the
Sunday Gospel Readings

Jump on a Boat This Advent

Take :05 Examine

How did I live out last week's Gospel message? What was tough? What was rewarding?

Take :05 Read

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Several years ago Hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans. Hundreds died. Rescuers found hundreds trapped on rooftops. Some argued that many people suffered only because the government authorities weren't prepared for the storm.

As Advent begins this week, Jesus reminds us that people suffered in Noah's time because they weren't prepared. Remember the story? It tells us that sin and injustice—ignored by God's people—caused the world's destruction.

Are we ignoring sin and injustice today? This is a good season to think about that. As you do, prepare yourself

for Christ in three ways. First, take time this Advent to read newspapers closely. Look for evidence of injustice: war, poverty, prejudice. Keep your eyes open at school. Notice kids ignored by others and notice the bullies who prey on the weak.

Sadly, you'll see that our world is still plagued by sin and injustice.

But remember, Advent is also a season of hope. It comes at the darkest time of the year (at least in the Northern Hemisphere), so we light candles to remember that Christ's power seeks to beat back the darkness of injustice every day.

Second, prepare yourself by looking for evidence of grace. To every war, God sends peacemakers. To every kid who feels left out, God sends a friend. Stay awake, Jesus says, and you'll see reasons for hope all over the world.

Third, prepare yourself to be grace and hope this season, the person who shines light by standing for peace, feeding the hungry, forgiving an enemy, or welcoming an outcast.

Sure, sin floods our world, but God sends boats to the rescue. Jump on board this Advent. People stranded by pain and injustice are waiting for you.

Take :10 Reflect

If a word or phrase from the Gospel grabs your heart, sit quietly for several minutes, repeating it to yourself and asking God to show you how it applies to your life. Or, reflect and possibly journal on the following question:

- Where can you make a difference at home, at school, or in the world this Advent?

Don't Just Trim the Tree

Take :05 Examine

How did I live out last week's Gospel message? What was tough? What was rewarding?

Take :05 Read

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:

A voice of one crying out in the desert,
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.

John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:1–10)

Maybe this Advent we should trim and burn some tree limbs, not just trim our Christmas trees.

John the Baptist seems to sternly warn religious leaders that people who ignore his call to change will face a fiery judgment. They'll be like rotten trees cut down and burned.

I think John liked to shock people. But for good reason. He lived in a world full of poverty and injustice. He wanted people to face how their sins were hurting the world.

Don't let John's harsh words scare you. True, our sinful habits and attitudes are like rotten trees or bare branches. Things like selfishness and prejudice take away our happiness, hurt others, and keep us from working for a just world. But Jesus can help us trim these "tree limbs" from our lives. I know a young man who decided as a teen to change his life in the van ride home from a Christian conference. He hadn't been treating girls he'd dated with respect. He'd been hanging out with the wrong crowd. Jesus, he said, showed him what to change and gave him the confidence to do it. He's a lot happier now.

We light candles in Advent to remember that Christ can bring light (guidance and warmth) to the darkness in our lives and in the world. We also remember that Christ's light can burn away what holds us back from our full potential. Take time in Advent to feel God's compassion in the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Or talk with a teacher, friend, or parent about things you'd like to change.

You'll realize, as you trim your Christmas tree, that Jesus is gently trimming your soul.

Take :10 Reflect

If a word or phrase from the Gospel grabs your heart, sit quietly for several minutes, repeating it to yourself and asking God to show you how it applies to your life. Or, reflect and possibly journal on the following question:

- What can you change about yourself this Advent to make the world a brighter place?