

Touch with the Word

Lectionary-Based
Prayer Reflections

*Cycle C for
Ordinary Time*

Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart



saint mary's press

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I dedicate this book to my uncle,
Philip J. Calderone, SJ,
who teaches seminary at the Loyola House of Studies
in Manila, Philippines.

When I was little, I thought they named the country
after you!

What a blessing that our physical distance never
got in the way of our emotional and spiritual
closeness.

I love you and I miss you.

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Introduction

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 This Book

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 of the year 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, C cycle only. (The Sundays of B and A 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 only find the readings for the C cycle. The dates for each Sunday in the C 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 reflecting 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 is 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



The Trinity

Scripture

- *Proverbs 8:22–31*. Wisdom delights that she was there when our almighty Creator God brought forth the mountains, the fields, and the seas.
- *Romans 5:1–5*. We are at peace with our Creator, we are graced through Jesus our Redeemer, and our hope in the Holy Spirit will not leave us disappointed.
 - *John 16:12–15*. The Holy Spirit gives glory to Jesus. The Spirit will declare the truth that is God's, and we will know that the Spirit comes from God.

Theme

There is a special relationship between God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer, and their Holy and Divine Spirit. One of the greatest mysteries of our faith is the Trinity—the one God that is, at the same time, three distinct persons—all affecting our life, and all entities with whom we can relate.

We are part of and share in the delight of God the Creator's creation and the grace that Jesus won for us. We can also share in the truth that the Spirit brings to us.

Focusing Object

shamrock, a clover with three leaves

Reflections

For Adults

The shamrock is an ancient symbol of the Trinity, one plant with three leaves whose life juices are intermingled. God exists as love, as a community of three persons. Like the Trinity, we are called to exist as a community of loving persons.

- Which is harder for you to understand and believe: that one God exists as a community of divine persons, or that we are one human family called to exist as a community of loving persons?
- Who are the people in your life who form the closest community of love and support for you?
- Who are some people in your life that you would rather not exist in such “close community” with? Why? How do you deal with this reality?

The Spirit brings truth. It is often said that the Holy Spirit is the person of God that dwells within us and acts as our conscience, guiding us toward doing what is right and just. Following the way of the Spirit is the main message of every Gospel.

- Has the Holy Spirit ever brought you a painful truth you had to face?
- Has the Holy Spirit ever led you to a difficult decision you needed to make?
- Do you think your life is a good attempt at living out the main message of the Gospels? Why or why not?

For Teenagers

Saint Patrick is famous for making the shamrock a handy tool to illustrate the Blessed Trinity: one plant, three leaves that are all connected and united—symbolizing the one God, three persons that are all connected and united.

- Sometimes close relationships are also compared to the Trinity: the person you love, the person who loves you, and God. If God is a part of your relationship, it's hard to think of the two of you without the power, joy, and courage that God brings. Do you have any relationships like that? What are they like?

- A family, a team, or a close group of friends can also form a community of love that is similar to the Trinity—several persons that are connected and united in a very special way. Do you belong to any such group? If so, what makes it special?
- The Holy Spirit brings the truth of God. Sometimes in our life we are running away from a truth, or trying to ignore or avoid it. What basic truth in your life do you think God wants you to be more aware of?
- Sometimes in our life, when we have done something wrong or when we are about to do something wrong, the Spirit of God speaks to us through our conscience. Have you ever thought about doing something, until that voice inside you called you to do something else? What happened?
- The main message of every Gospel is to know the way of the Spirit and to follow the way of the Spirit. How easy is it to live your life that way? How is living your life that way similar to preaching the Gospel?

For Children

Even though we can't see God, we know that the shamrock is like God. The shamrock is one plant that has three leaves, and we believe that our one God is three persons.

- God, the Creator, created the whole earth and sky, and all the animals and people who live here. Look outside, and tell about something God created.
- Jesus is God. Jesus lived here on earth a long time ago. Jesus told wonderful stories and healed people who were sick. Can you think of a story you have heard about Jesus?
- The Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit lives inside of us and helps us feel happy whenever we do something good. When we do something wrong, the Holy Spirit helps us feel sad inside, so we know that what we did was wrong.
- Did you ever feel the Holy Spirit helping you feel happy or sad inside? What happened?

Closing

A part of the act of baptism in the Church of India is for the candidates to place their own hand on their head and say, “Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel.” —E. Paul Hovey

(Action 2000: C Cycle)

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