

PROCLAIMING NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

A WORKSHOP FOR LECTORS

INTRODUCTION

This brief workshop is intended to aid in refreshing and refining your skill in proclaiming New Testament readings. Hopefully you will be better able to discern the contemporary meaning of the reading and proclaim it with conviction.

At the outset it is important to understand that the work of the lector is to proclaim the readings, not to “pray” them; to bring the readings to life for the assembly, not merely to read to them.

To communicate the meaning of a written text, the reader needs to highlight those words and phrases that carry the weight of meaning and subordinate those which -- while important -- are not as important as the key words and phrases. In addition, the effective reader controls the variations in his or her voice so that the listeners are able instantly to grasp what is important and what is less so. Likewise, the reader communicates the full meaning of a text only when he or she is able to give some indication of the emotional tone as well as the logical content of the passage.

We are the storytellers of the greatest story ever told.

This workshop builds on the elements of the workshop “Proclaiming Old Testament Scripture.” Please refer to the syllabus for that workshop for questions on biblical genres, interpretation and pronunciation.

The New Testament contains 27 books: The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and the Gospel of John, the Book of Acts, the Letters of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude, and the Book of Revelation. This workshop will deal with the letters of Paul.

The second major section of the New Testament after the narratives about Jesus and the foundation of the Church, belongs to the writings

of Paul. There are thirteen letters or epistles under his name besides the Letter to the Hebrews which is often associated with him.

PREPARATION

In this workshop we will deal with the Second Letter to the infant Church at Corinth. Sometime after he wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians in 57 A.D., Paul received word that he was being criticized at Corinth and that his apostleship had been called into question.

In the early chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul expresses his deep affection for his readers and his deep love of the Gospel. In the closing passages he makes a strong defense of his apostleship.

The readings for the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B, follow.

You will recall from the Old Testament workshop that the second reading in our Sunday liturgy may not necessarily follow the same theme as the Old Testament reading and the Gospel. Please read the Gospel and then Hosea. Is there a unifying theme in these readings?

HOSEA 2: 16b, 17b, 21-22

Thus says the Lord:

I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.

*She shall respond there as in the days of her youth,
when she came up from the land of Egypt.*

I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the LORD.

2 CORINTHIANS 3: 1B-6

Brothers and Sisters:

*Do we need, as some do,
letters of recommendation to you or from you?*

*You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all,
shown to be a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink*

but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh.

Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

GOSPEL MARK 2: 18-22

The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast. People came to him and objected, "Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests fast ¹³ while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins."

Now read the Second Reading from 2 Corinthians.

The translation from the New Jerusalem Bible is below. Compare it with the NAB above.

Do we need, like some others, to have letters of recommendation either to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written in our hearts, that everyone can read and understand; and it is plain that you are a letter from Christ, entrusted to our care, written not with ink but

with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on the tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence we have through Christ in facing God; it is not that we are so competent that we can claim any credit for ourselves; all our competence comes from God. He has given us the competence to be ministers of a new covenant, a covenant which is not of written letters but of the Spirit; for the written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life.

Or this from the Revised Standard Version:

Do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Is there any connection here? Can you discern why this section of 2 Corinthians was chosen for this particular Sunday? Does this consideration help in our preparation for proclaiming it?

PROCLAMATION

The second reading in your workbook uses the same layout as does the Lectionary, except that the workbook uses bold type for emphasis. The bold words are suggestions only, and you may want to determine your own points of emphasis. This is the time to identify and become familiar with words that may be difficult to pronounce.

Now apply the things to think about from the Old Testament workshop..

- 1. Should this reading be taken literally or figuratively?*
- 2. Have we considered this reading in context?*
- 3. Have we taken into account the meaning of the words, in the*

languages written by the authors at the time, and not necessarily the English translation of them today?

This reading is not the easiest to proclaim and is somewhat typical of Pauline readings. Much of St. Paul is not punctuated for proclamation and we will therefore often find very long run-on sentences that are difficult to proclaim and listen to. The task now is to identify the best approach to proclaiming this passage.

Work on the text and repair the punctuation as need be.

RESOURCES

In addition to the LTP WORKBOOK FOR LECTORS AND GOSPEL READERS, there are several printed and on-line resources that will help you prepare. This is a selected list:

A WELL TRAINED TONGUE by Aelred Rosser and available from Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL. An excellent self-study program for lectors.

LECTOR'S GUIDE TO BIBLICAL PRONUNCIATIONS by Joseph Staudacher, available from Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, IN. Standard reference since its publication in 1975.

NEW JEROME BIBLE HANDBOOK available from the Liturgical Press in Collegeville, MN. An excellent and easy to use resource taken from the Jerome Biblical Commentary.

NEW ST. JOSEPH SUNDAY MISSAL, from Catholic Book Publishing. Very insightful introductions to every liturgy and reading.

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT by PHEME PERKINS, available from Paulist Press. Probably one of the best and easiest to read background texts on the New Testament.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNDAY READINGS by Fr. Richard Murphy, O.P., available from Servant Publications in Ann Arbor, MI. A precise distillation of the liturgical themes of all three cycles of the lectionary.

If you have access to the internet:

www.crosswalk.com is a resource where you can compare several translations of the bible.

www.netministries.org/bbasics/bbasics.html will provide free recorded pronunciations of virtually all problem words in the bible.

Commentary taken from *The Catholic Bible Study Handbook* by Fr. Jerome Kodel, O.S.B. Used with permission. This text is out of print.