

YEAR

B

Breaking Open the Word

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AN RCIA GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCRIPTURE

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Overview

What is Breaking Open the Word?

The *Lectionary for Sunday Mass* forms the basis for the RCIA process. This is appropriate because the Scriptures tell the story of the faith experienced by the people of God: the relationship between the Chosen People and Yahweh, and the relationship between the early Christian community and Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. As we reflect upon these faith stories, our own stories of how God has impacted our lives become more clearly perceived and articulated. The Scriptures convey the stories of a community. So it is fitting that the catechumens and candidates gather in community to break open God's word and apply it to their own lives in the here and now.

In their reflection and linking of the Scriptures to their own lives, the early Christians began to develop official summaries and teachings about the meaning of their communal religious experiences. Since these doctrines and dogmas were born of theological reflection grounded in Scripture, the Church now links these teachings to Scripture in the RCIA process. Therefore, the sessions begin with Scripture reflection and move toward an encounter with Catholic belief. Since it is primarily through the Sunday liturgy that the community hands on its traditions and beliefs, this is also the most opportune time for the catechumens and candidates to be formed by the community. Beginning with the period of the catechumenate, it is urged that they be dismissed from the liturgy following the Prayers of the Faithful to reflect together upon the word of God and the teachings of the Church.

Breaking Open the Word—available for each of the three liturgical years (A, B, and C)—contains all the readings for every Sunday of each year. The readings are arranged so there are twenty-eight weeks between the first Sunday of Advent and Pentecost and twenty-eight weeks between Trinity Sunday and Christ the King. Commentaries for each Sunday, written by Scripture scholar Mary Katharine Deeley, follow the readings and are introduced with titles.

How to use Breaking Open the Word

Breaking Open the Word is designed to be useful for all team leaders of Christian initiation groups—adults and adolescents—and it serves as an excellent resource for participants in adult initiation classes. Additionally, it holds value for individual use, separate from Christian initiation: Whether you are planning homilies, involved in small-group faith-sharing, or simply searching for further enrichment and knowledge through the Sunday readings.



Relevant *Journey of Faith* lessons are listed at the end of each reflection.

These include lessons related to the theme, as

well as at least one lesson that ties most closely to the Scripture readings. Incorporating these lessons ensures that you cover all the lessons in *Journey of Faith* during the liturgical year. Sundays between the first Sunday of Advent and the eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time refer you to lessons from the *Journey of Faith* Catechumenate packet; Sundays between the first Sunday of Lent and Easter refer you to lessons from the Enlightenment packet; Sundays between the second Sunday of Easter and Pentecost refer you to lessons from the Mystagogy packet. Because the twenty-eight weeks between Trinity and Christ the King may be used either for continuing Mystagogy or for beginning a new group of inquirers (or both), all the Sundays between Trinity and Christ the King refer you to both the Mystagogy and the Inquiry packets.

The commentaries, themes, and prayers contained in this book are aids for preparing you to lead inquirers, catechumens, candidates, and neophytes. You are invited and encouraged to familiarize yourself with these resources to better anticipate and stimulate questions and discussions. Leading others to Christ is the most important work you will do in your life; your personal preparation for such significant and rewarding work can never be adequately emphasized. *Breaking Open the Word* is a valuable resource for this type of work.

Included in Breaking Open the Word

- Readings for all Sundays of liturgical years A, B, and C, Advent through Christ the King
- Readings for the Easter Triduum
- Year A readings for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent
- Readings for those occasional Sundays that supersede Ordinary Time Sunday readings
- Scripture commentary for every set of readings
- Discussion and/or reflection questions for every set of readings
- Readings are cross-referenced to the catechetical lessons
- A brief collection of short gathering prayers and dismissal prayers for each phase of the initiation process
- A thematic index

All readings are taken directly from the Lectionary for Mass for use in the dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC.

Suggested Agenda for a Sunday Session

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 30 minutes | Liturgy—all gather in church. Dismissal after the Prayer of the Faithful. |
| 10 minutes | Refreshments and settling in. |
| 15 minutes | Prayer and reflection—Where are we at this moment? |
| 45 minutes | Reread, reflect upon, and share the readings of the day—either all or one chosen for this session. Spouses and sponsors can join this session after Mass. |
| 10 minutes | Evaluation and prayer—How are we going to live the Scriptures this week? |

Note: During Precatechumenate (Inquiry) or Mystagogy, this format may be adapted for either a Sunday morning after Mass or for a weekday evening session.

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*I thank you my God every time I remember you,
constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers
for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel
from the first day until now. And this is my prayer, that
your love may overflow more and more with knowledge
and full insight, having produced the harvest of
righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the
glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 1:3, 4, 5, 9, 11

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First Sunday of Advent, Year B

READING 1, ISAIAH 63:16B–17, 19B; 64:2–7

You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay, and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.

PSALM 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

READING 2, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3–9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

GOSPEL, MARK 13:33–37

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Remembering God

When he gave his first interview to the press as the 266th pontiff, Pope Francis was asked, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” His notable first response was: “I am a sinner.” He said it with a candor and humility that awed the world. How many of us are so willing to admit our faults? Even more to the point, how many of us truly kneel before God in prayer and confess that we are sinners? We might wonder what God’s reaction would be and whether such an admission could truly set us free.

At the beginning of the Advent season as we prepare for Christmas and the coming of Jesus Christ, Isaiah the prophet describes the terrible situation in which the Israelites found themselves. They were in exile, their temple destroyed. They felt abandoned by God. Perhaps they were even angry with God because of what had happened. If we were to read all of Isaiah we would learn that many of the Israelites had failed to follow God’s law. Now in a foreign country, the people realized that without the familiar prayers, ritual, and community to guide and support them, they were falling further away from God. Isaiah acknowledges that God was justified in his anger, but he doesn’t turn his back. Instead, Isaiah calls out to God in an act of absolute trust. Isaiah helps us remember that God is our Father who works awesome feats for his people. When we remember God, even in the midst of sorrow and hurt, we open ourselves to him. But it’s important to note that Isaiah is a model servant of humility before the Lord. God is the potter, we are the clay, and allowing God to work on us throughout this season prepares us for his coming.

Spiritual Strength

Throughout Scripture, we see that God continually reached out to his people even when they failed to be steadfast in their faith and were lured away by temptations of the world or their own desires. This

falling away often happens during periods of prosperity. When things are going well, we forget about God. It isn't until bad things happen that we remember him. We usually ask, "Where is God?" and cry out to him during times of suffering and distress. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul tries to encourage the early Christians to stay strong when life gets tough. He doesn't want them to fall into sin when confronted with persecution; he wants them to know in their hearts that God has given them the spiritual strength to withstand any difficulty. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, they

are able to withstand the temptation of sin or of despair when sorrow comes.

The word for the season is "watch." Jesus compares God to the master who leaves his servants to do the household work while he is away. His implicit warning that they keep alert for the Master's return is an admonition that serves us well. This season isn't about getting Christmas presents. It's about preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord. May we also find ourselves awake and waiting.

Good News for All of Us

Advent is often hijacked by our focus on family gatherings, decorating, giving gifts, and end-of-school terms. But these four weeks before Christmas mark the beginning of a new liturgical year and a renewed dedication to the Lord's place in our lives. As the people of God, we juxtapose comfort and challenge. Though God gives us everything we need for our journey, we aren't promised it will always be easy. When difficulty comes, we may be tempted to turn away from God or begin to believe that he has abandoned us. Let us not forget we have turned away from him many times and he has always welcomed us back. We must stay awake to guard against those temptations, and remember that God will always return. Both Isaiah and Paul use the image of a pregnant woman to describe us as a people who wait for the Lord. And we wait now, in this season, for God who has already come and who will come again.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *Describe a time when you felt like you had been abandoned by family or friends. Who did you turn to? What got you through that period in your life?*
- *Advent is the premier time of expectation and waiting. Was there ever a time you expected something and had a hard time waiting for it? How did you get through that waiting period?*

Related Journey of Faith Lessons

C10, "The People of God"

Themes

Conversion

C3, "The Sacrament of Baptism"

C4, "The Sacrament of Confirmation"

Covenant

C10, "The People of God"

C12, "Church History"

Remembrance

C2, "The Sacraments: An Introduction"

C11, "The Early Church"

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

READING 1, 1 SAMUEL 3:3B–10, 19

Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was. The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, “Here I am.” Samuel ran to Eli and said, “Here I am. You called me.” “I did not call you,” Eli said. “Go back to sleep.” So he went back to sleep. Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. “Here I am,” he said. “You called me.” But Eli answered, “I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep.” At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, “Here I am. You called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply. Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.” When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, “Samuel, Samuel.” Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect.

PSALM 40:2, 4, 7–8, 8–9, 10

READING 2, 1 CORINTHIANS 6:13C–15A, 17–20

Brothers and sisters: The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body; God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him. Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

GOSPEL, JOHN 1:35–42

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and

followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi”—which translated means Teacher—, “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah”—which is translated Christ—. Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas”—which is translated Peter.

The Beginning of Discipleship—Listening

We don’t always know the voice of God when he calls us. In the first reading, the young Samuel isn’t sure who he heard in the middle of the night, but he goes to Eli and responds, “Here I am.” Eli assumes Samuel has been dreaming until he comes in the third time saying that someone called him. Eli, who spent a lifetime listening for the Lord, suggests it is God himself who is calling the young prophet. When he sends Samuel back to listen again, he tells him to simply lie quietly. The first step of discipleship is listening to what the master says.

The Second Step of Discipleship—Come and See

The call of the disciples in John’s Gospel doesn’t take place on the seashore as in the other Gospels. The day after testifying that Jesus is the Son of God, John the Baptist sees Jesus walk by. He announces to the two disciples in his presence: “Behold the Lamb of God,” and the disciples proceed to follow Jesus (John 1:34–35). John gave no thought to keeping his disciples with him. He didn’t cling to his power but freely pointed to one who was greater than he.

Like the young Samuel, John’s disciples aren’t sure who they’re following. When Jesus asks what they’re looking for, their response seems absurd. “Where are you staying?” Jesus issues the perfect invitation: “Come and see.” In John’s Gospel, seeing is interpreted as understanding and accepting the significance of what’s

happening; by contrast, blindness is the refusal to understand or accept. If the first step of discipleship is listening, the second is seeing all we can.

After their encounter, Andrew, the only one of the two whose name we know, tells his brother Simon about the man he met. Andrew refers to Jesus as “the Messiah.” Amazed, Simon also goes to see. When he arrives, Jesus looks at him and changes his name to Cephas (the Latin word is *Petros*, meaning “rock.”) In the Old Testament, when God changed a person’s name, it was a sign that God had a mission for that person. We don’t hear about Peter’s mission in John’s Gospel, but it’s recorded in Matthew 16:18: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

The Third Step of Discipleship—Live the Life

Disciple means “student” or “scholar.” The disciples of Jesus, particularly the Twelve, spent their time with Jesus trying to learn everything they could and obey what he said. After the resurrection, they shared their good news with others and taught them. In today’s epistle, Paul is concerned with giving in to the desires of the body. Paul expected Jesus to come soon, so he warned against getting entangled with earthly pleasure. Paul also plays on the understanding that the relationship between God and Israel is analogous to a marriage. To worship other gods was to be a prostitute or a fornicator. Both our physical bodies and the body of the Church are temples where God dwells. We are cautioned to keep them pure and free from sin.

Good News for All of Us

As we reflect on Jesus and what he taught, we may wonder: *How do we best hear and obey him? How do we become the disciples we are meant to be?* Samuel relied on Eli to tell him what to do. John’s disciples would not have followed Jesus if John had not pointed him out. Even Paul needed help to see the Lord clearly. We also have guides. Think about the holy men and women who quietly do things in such a way that we want to know them and be more like them. We also have the saints who have heard the voice of God and listened. Additionally, there are likely teachers, friends, priests, and family members with whom we share spiritual moments experienced in the sacraments and in prayer. In these conversations, we learn the practice of faith. Together we move closer to God and invite others to do the same. Listen, see, follow, and invite. It is important to remember these steps always. Ultimately, they will lead us home to God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *Where do you think you are now in your journey to follow Jesus?*
- *Have you talked to anyone about becoming (or being) Catholic? How did they respond? If you haven’t talked to anyone about it, consider why?*

Related Journey of Faith Lesson

C11, “The Early Church”

Themes

Call

C2, “The Sacraments: An Introduction”

Confirmation

C4, “The Sacrament of Confirmation”

Discipleship

C10, “The People of God”

C13, “Christian Moral Living”

All Saints, November 1

READING 1 (ABC), REVELATION 7:2–4, 9–14

I, John, saw another angel come up from the East, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who were given power to damage the land and the sea, “Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” I heard the number of those who had been marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand marked from every tribe of the children of Israel. After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.” All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: “Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, “Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you are the one who knows.” He said to me, “These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

PSALM 24:1BC–2, 3–4AB, 5–6

READING 2 (ABC), 1 JOHN 3:1–3

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

GOSPEL (ABC), MATTHEW 5:1–12A

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”

Singing About the Saints of God

The last stanza of an old hymn by Lesbia Scott, now in the public domain, goes: “[Saints] lived not only in ages past; there are hundreds of thousands still; the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus’ will. You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea, in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea; for the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too.” The verse has always made me smile because it combines the understanding that to be a saint, we must love to do Jesus’ will above all else and because, in 1929, Ms. Scott understood that we are all called to holiness no matter who or where we are.

On All Saints’ Day, we celebrate the great communion of saints—those who have been sure examples of God’s love and presence in the world to generations of believers. The saints heard and responded to God’s voice in their lives. They trusted in God even when the world seemed dark and they were challenged to continue. As Catholics, we believe they stand before God now as John’s vision in the Book of Revelation describes.

It may be more important, however, to remember that the Saints were not perfect. Many, like St. Augustine or St. Paul, led sinful lives before their conversion experience. Some had bad tempers like Sts. Peter and Jerome. Those who knew her also remember Dorothy Day, whose cause for canonization is in progress, as being very fiery. Still other saints, like Mother Teresa, suffered long periods of doubt when they wondered if God heard them at all.

We Are God's Children Now

The First Letter of John is an extended reflection on the understanding that God is Love. The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich once wrote that before God ever made us, he loved us. That foundation of love has given

courage and trust to everyone who follows the path of discipleship. But I like what John says: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be had not yet been revealed." Only God knows how he will work in us and what path we will take. Our trust is in our identity as God's children. As the children of God who is Love, we are bound to love one another. The rest will follow.

How to Be a Saint

In spite of these things, saints continued to do what they thought God wanted, whether it was founding a religious order to help the poor or simply living lives of such holiness in their towns and villages that others looked at them and knew that God was present in them. They allowed God to work through them.

Good News for All of Us

The universal call to holiness is challenging for all. Our tendency is to think of holiness as belonging solely to our public figures: the pope, priests, sisters, and the saints. And yet, all of us know someone who embodies the Christian life. They are compassionate, loving, and just. They care about everyone they meet. They find comfort and strength in their relationship with God. They aren't perfect, but a light shines in them, which makes us want to know more about them. They are God's witness in the world and, God willing, we'll be one, too.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *Do you, your friends, or family have a special saint that you turn to for strength or see as a role model for how to live the Christian life?*
- *Saint Paul called the people of God "saints," which means "holy" or "set apart." Why would Paul refer to Christians as "set apart"?*

Related Journey of Faith Lesson

Q15, "The Saints"

Themes

Freedom

M3, "Your Spiritual Gifts"

M5, "Our Call to Holiness"

Revelation

Q6, "Divine Revelation"

Q7, "Your Prayer Life"

Q13, "The Church as Community"

M4, "Discernment"

Saints

Q15, "The Saints"

M2, "The Role of the Laity"

Dismissal Prayers

Dismissal Prayers During Inquiry

Prayer

Merciful God, we have begun this journey of faith together. We are grateful for the companions on our way, for the openness with which we receive one another, and most of all, for your love, which brought us here. As we leave today, fill our hearts with a desire to know you even more and when we return, let it be with joy and eagerness. Amen.

Prayer

God of all people, sometimes questions and doubts fill our minds and we can only ask, listen, and reflect on the response. Be patient with us as we hesitate and seek. Continue to call our names so we might find our way in the dark. We know we are never alone when we are with you and one another. Be present to us in our searching for you. Amen.

Prayer

Faithful God, the stories of our journey to faith bring us together in the great story of your salvation. Help us bear witness to your presence as we leave here today. Give us courage to continue the path if the way gets harder, to support one another, and to reach out in prayer to you whenever we are able. Amen.

Prayer

We give you praise, O God, for your faithful presence in our lives. Your Holy Spirit moved us to seek you in new and different ways. Walk with us as we commit ourselves to go deeper into your mystery. Draw us closer to you with the stories of your presence, the grace of your peace, and the love you expressed through your Son, Jesus Christ. We long to see you face to face. Amen.

Dismissal Prayers During Catechumenate

Prayer

God, Father of us all, the stories of faith in your sacred Scripture tell us the story of your presence to your people from the moment of creation to the resurrection of Jesus and even now. Give us insight to learn from them and faith to see them not just as stories of people who lived a long time ago but also as stories that speak to us of your presence so many centuries later. Help us to share what we are learning with others. Amen.

Prayer

Open our minds and heart, O Lord, to learn the truth of your love for us. Let us see in these Scriptures the evidence that you have cared for us and called us from the very beginning of our lives. When questions and doubt seek to overcome us, let us remember that you have the words of life. Amen.

Prayer

Good and gracious Lord, we are hungry for your grace and truth. We long to hear your voice calling us in every place in our lives. Now that we have shared your words in sacred Scripture, let them so fill us that we try to live them in our lives and thus give honor to you. Amen.

Prayer

Loving God. We leave this gathering ready to take the next step of following your Son, Lord Jesus Christ, into the story of his life, death, and resurrection. We thank you for being with us since the beginning. Be present to us now as we begin to learn what discipleship really means. Watch over us as we place our trust in you. Amen.