

YEAR

C

Breaking Open the Word

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AN RCIA GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCRIPTURE

MARY KATHARINE DEELEY

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First Edition

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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 most appropriate since 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. Because the Scriptures convey the stories of a community, they are meant to be encountered in community as we gather to worship and celebrate together. It is also 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 ties 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.

How to use Breaking Open the Word

Breaking Open the Word is intended for use by team leaders of Christian initiation groups (adults, adolescents, and children). It can also be used as a separate resource: Whether you are planning homilies, leading or participating in faith-sharing groups, or searching for further enrichment through the Sunday readings, *Breaking Open the Word* will make it easier.

Available for each liturgical year (A, B, and C), *Breaking Open the Word* contains the readings for every Sunday of each year. Liguori Publications has published books for Years B and C, with Year A scheduled for 2022. The readings are arranged so there are twenty-eight weeks between the first Sunday of Advent and Pentecost, and there are twenty-eight weeks between Trinity Sunday and Christ the King.

The reflections, themes, and prayers in this book are aids to lead inquirers, catechumens, candidates, and neophytes. To better anticipate and stimulate questions and discussion, familiarize yourself with these resources. Leading others to Christ is the most important work you will do in your life; your personal preparation for this work is important.

Themes that emerge from the readings and reflections are listed at the end of each commentary with references to *Journey of Faith* materials. This includes 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 *Journey of Faith* lessons in the liturgical year.

Sundays between the first Sunday of Advent and the eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time refer to the Catechumenate period; Sundays between the first Sunday of Lent and Easter refer to the Enlightenment period; Sundays between the second Sunday of Easter and Pentecost refer to the Mystagogy period. 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), the Sundays between Trinity and Christ the King refer to materials from both Mystagogy and Inquiry.

Included in Breaking Open the Word

- Readings for all Sundays of the liturgical year (A, B, or 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 materials associated with Liguori Publications' *Journey of Faith* program.
- 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

The readings are taken directly from the *Lectionary* text used during Mass—a reflection of the *New American Bible Translation*. Since May 19, 2002, the revised *Lectionary*, based on the *New American Bible (NABRE)* is the only English-language *Lectionary* that may be used at Mass in the dioceses of the United States, except for the current *Lectionary for Masses with Children* which remains in use. Below is a suggested timeline for holding 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 the 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.

**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
New Revised Standard Version**

Enjoy!

First Sunday of Advent, Year C

READING 1, JEREMIAH 33:14–16

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”

PSALM 25:4–5, 8–9, 10, 14

READING 2, 1 THESSALONIANS 3:12–4:2

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. [Amen.] Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

GOSPEL, LUKE 21:25–28, 34–36

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Days Are Coming

It seems strange to have celebrated the triumph of Christ the King last week and find ourselves beginning a new year in our Church. “New year” suggests a time of new commitment and an anticipation of good things ahead. Jeremiah thought about that when he preached about the fulfillment of God’s promise. Likewise, Paul holds out hope of grace and love for the Thessalonians, urging them to live the Christian life ever more deeply. Only in the Gospel do we get a glimpse that these coming days will not be easy ones, and even at that, Jesus exhorts his listeners not to be weighed down with worry or wild partying for they have the means to escape the dark days and stand before the Son of Man. These messages may seem to be different, but are they?

The Heart of God’s Promise

By the time Jeremiah spoke his prophecy, The Israelites had already experienced a history of hardship and conquest. God had promised to make Abraham’s descendants as numerous as the stars, but a famine drove those descendants into Egypt. Enslaved there, the people called out, and God raised up Moses to help lead the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. When Moses died, God promised to raise up a prophet like Moses when the people needed it. Later, Assyria and then Babylon laid waste to the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Where was the promised prophet like Moses? God also promised to be with the House of David forever. Where was God in all this tragedy? Jeremiah says, “Wait—the days are surely coming.” But notice he doesn’t say that everything will be fine, and everyone will be happy. Rather, God promises that this righteous branch will execute justice and righteousness, after which everyone can live in safety.

A Path through the Storm

In other passages of 1 Thessalonians, Paul talks about vigilance, warning that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. He counsels steadfast faith in the meantime (see chapter 5). In our passage for today, Paul’s beautiful prayer to God to increase the love Christians have for everyone reminds us that we

are given the grace and strength to continue walking on the path toward God. Jesus does not sugarcoat the difficulty of transforming the world. When the day of the Lord comes, there will surely be distress among the nations and the people. Justice and righteousness demand that no one person or group of people holds all the power. Those in power might beg to differ. Jesus

offers a different perspective to his followers: “stand erect, raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.” Jesus’ vision of the Son of Man coming in a cloud recalls the words of the prophet in Daniel 7:13–14. Daniel refers to someone who looked like a human being, so “son of man” is not capitalized. Jesus is referring to himself ushering in the end times.

Good News for All of Us

In our homes, the beginning of Advent also heralds the coming of Christmas. Dutifully, we open the little doors on our Advent calendars, searching for the one precious gift. For many people touched by war, famine, poverty, or injustice, or those who are in a difficult time in their lives, God’s promise to come seems far away. Our readings today tell us that God remembers his promises and we have been given the way to live through the darkness. We are asked to increase our love and stand firm in faith always—in good and bad times. We can turn to our mentors and teachers in faith for guidance. We can ask our friends for help. We can become mentors ourselves, walking with others toward the one precious gift that is Jesus himself.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *How does God’s justice differ from the world’s idea of justice? Why is the day of the Lord so often depicted as a frightening time?*
- *Who has taught or is teaching you how to live and please God? Who are your mentors in faith?*

Related Journey of Faith Lesson

Q4, “Who Is Jesus Christ?”

Themes

End Times

Q4, “Who Is Jesus Christ?”

Hope

C6, “The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation”

C7, “The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick”

Persecution

C10, “The People of God”

C11, “The Early Church”

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

READING 1, ISAIAH 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch. Nations shall behold your vindication, and all the kings your glory; you shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the LORD. You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem held by your God. No more shall people call you "Forsaken," or your land "Desolate," but you shall be called "My Delight," and your land "Espoused." For the LORD delights in you and makes your land his spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

PSALM 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 9-10

READING 2, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

Brothers and sisters: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another, the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another, mighty deeds; to another, prophecy; to another, discernment of spirits; to another, varieties of tongues; to another, interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

GOSPEL, JOHN 2:1-11

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there

were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from—although the servers who had drawn the water knew—the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

A New Identity

In the brief few weeks between the Christmas season and the start of Lent, our readings give us the opportunity to reflect on what the Incarnation means for us and the world. Isaiah tells us it means a new identity—we are no longer called "Forsaken," but we are called, "My Delight is in her." Reconciled to God through Jesus, we have been given a new life and God rejoices in his people. Isaiah's vision comes almost at the end of his prophecy and holds out the glorious day when the reign of God will come on the land. Jesus would have said, "The kingdom of God is at hand," but we also know that the fullness of God's kingdom has not yet been accomplished. Isaiah and the rest of the prophets announced its coming. Jesus, the Incarnation of God, was the beginning here on earth. When it will fully come, we do not know. But the words and actions of Jesus give us a path to follow while we await his coming in glory.

Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

In John's Gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry at a wedding feast. The story of what happened at Cana is unique to John and seems odd when compared with the cure of the demoniac (Mark), the healings of a multitude (Matthew), and the preaching in the synagogue (Luke). Changing water into wine (reluctantly, if his conversation with his mother is any indication) seems almost petty. But John takes great stock in these "signs." John remembers Moses' words,

that God led the people out of Egypt with signs and wonders. Such signs were evidence of God's breaking into human history. The jars of water at the wedding were used for ceremonial washing and held between twenty and thirty gallons each. In an instant, Jesus produced 180 gallons of the best wine the guests had ever tasted. He changed something that was ordinary—water—into something extraordinary—wine. The abundance recalled the prophecies of a great banquet at the Day of the Lord (see Isaiah 25) in which all the nations would drink their fill. If Jesus can do that with water, what extraordinary thing might he make of us?

The Gifts of the Spirit

When Paul preached to the Corinthians, many of them embraced Christianity. But we know from Paul's

letter that there were also divisions in the Corinthian community. It seemed that when they came together at the table of the Lord, there were arguments, drunkenness, and some members who felt superior to others. This was not the extraordinary life he thought Christians should be living. In this section of his first letter, Paul lays out the expectation that Christians will respect the gifts that each has been given, reminding them that they are gifts from God for the common good. Healing, discernment, miracles, prophecy, tongues, and interpretation are given according to the Spirit and no one member had a monopoly on those gifts. For Paul, the common good (and the will of the Lord) was served when all members of the community lifted up the gifts of their brothers and sisters and used their own gifts for one another.

Good News for All of Us

Jesus brought us the promise of salvation and showed us a new way of living. Made strong by the grace of God in baptism and reconciliation, we are capable of overcoming hate, greed, jealousy, and everything that gets in the way of living as God's children. That God loves us so much is nothing less than a miracle. It is our turn to show the world the evidence of God's love in what we say and do and to invite others to do the same.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *Are there any gifts that you think the Spirit has given you? What do your friends say you are good at?*
- *Have you ever had an experience of an ordinary moment that has become extraordinary because of something that happened or something you felt?*

Related Journey of Faith Lesson

C2, "The Sacraments: An Introduction"

Themes

Celebration

C2, "The Sacraments: An Introduction"

C5, "The Sacrament of the Eucharist"

Covenant

C8, "The Sacrament of Matrimony"

Relationships

C10, "The People of God"

C11, "The Early Church"

Assumption of Mary, August 15

READING 1 (ABC), REVELATION 11:19A; 12:1–6A, 10AB

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed One."

PSALM 45:10, 11, 12, 16

READING 2 (ABC), 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–27

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet."

GOSPEL (ABC), LUKE 1:39–56

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in

a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

A Feast of Faith

Dogmas are divinely revealed truths and the most serious of church teachings. In 1950, the assumption of Mary was the last dogma proclaimed by the Catholic Church, but its origins go back to the first centuries of the Church, when Christians already recognized the special place of Mary as the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer or Mother of God. As early as the fifth century, we have evidence of Christians celebrating the dormition (falling asleep) of Mary. They believed that Mary died and her body was assumed into heaven, never to suffer the corruption of death. She was immediately and wholly brought into the presence of God.

The belief continued over the centuries until Pope Pius XII declared it as dogma. It makes sense. In Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, he declares that since death came through a human being (Adam), so the resurrection of the dead will come through a human being (Jesus). Paul also talks about the order of resurrection—first, Jesus who is the first fruit, then when he comes again, those who belong to him. It makes sense that of all of those who belong to

Christ, his Mother would be at the head of the line to experience resurrection in such an amazing fashion. In that, she is our foretaste of what we hope will happen to all of us. By God's grace, we will all get there in the end.

A Woman Clothed with the Sun

John's revelation of the great battle between God and evil (here depicted as the dragon) provides a dramatic backdrop for the appearance of the woman clothed with the sun. The roots of the vision go all the way back to Genesis when God tells Eve that there will be enmity between her offspring and the serpent's. The child will strike at the head of the serpent while the serpent will strike at his heel (Genesis 3:14-15). Revelation's more terrifying image of the dragon appears shortly after the woman who is pregnant. The dragon waits to devour the child but is thwarted by divine intervention, while the woman is given a place of safety.

The appearance of the woman suggests royalty. A crown is on her head and the moon is under her feet. The sun is a sign of importance and a symbol of divine

favor. This image was associated with Mary fairly early in the Church's history, though biblical scholars have also thought it could represent the Church. In any case, the Marian appellation Queen of Heaven draws its source from Revelation, and many paintings were based on the text. Her Son is most often considered to be Jesus, though again, some scholars differ.

An Inspired Prayer

Mary's beautiful Magnificat has been a model of prayer and proclamation since the earliest days of the Church. In it she praises the way in which God does what is least expected. He chooses a lowly girl to bear his Son; he lifts the lowly and takes down the powerful. The hungry will eat their fill and the rich will be empty. She also draws our attention to this coming child as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the entire people of Israel. When Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the "Mother of my Lord," it is a movement of the Holy Spirit and exactly what Mary needs to calm any anxiety and rejoice in what is happening. In the Divine Office, this canticle is recited every evening at vespers.

Good News for All of Us

No one knows what death will be like, and that might be unsettling to you. But our faith says that Christ conquered death and that we who have been baptized have eternal life. This doesn't mean our bodies will never die. It means we will live and meet God face to face. The assumption of Mary shows us that.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- *Pray the Magnificat aloud slowly. What lines stand out to you? What does it say about God and Mary?*
- *Mary is known by many names: Queen of Heaven, Star of the Sea, Our Lady of... (fill in the blank). If you had to give Mary a name, what would it be?*

Related Journey of Faith Lesson

Q14, "Mary"

Themes

Assumption, Mary

Q14, "Mary"

M5, "Our Call to Holiness"

Redemption

Q2, "What Is Faith?"

M1, "Conversion: A Lifelong Process"

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 that 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, our 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.