

GENERATIONS OF FAITH



Jesus' Actions: As Important As His Words How Jesus Proclaimed and Enacted the Kingdom of God with his Deeds

“Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” This ancient proverb, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, is an eloquent and apt summary of how the Gospel writers recollect Jesus’ ministry: As Elizabeth Johnson explains: “Jesus did not just speak about the coming reign of God. In his own practical ways he enacted it. In the things he did it began to arrive, began to come about in people’s lives.” (*Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*)

How did Jesus proclaim and enact the kingdom of God with his deeds? How did Jesus live the dream at the heart of his life? In her excellent book, Johnson proposes that a careful reading of the Gospels reveals five characteristic behaviors of Jesus:

1: “Jesus called disciples to follow him.”

Leaving everything behind, they formed a community of brothers and sisters who learned and followed Jesus’ ways; keeping Jesus’ dream alive after his death and resurrection.

2: Jesus “showed partisanship for the marginal people of his society and did so in many, many ways.”

By the power of God, Jesus forgave sinners and healed the physically, emotionally and spiritually sick. He restored wholeness in their lives – and in so doing gave “them a taste of the joy of the kingdom’s arrival.”

3: “Jesus shared companionship both with his disciples and with the wider circle of those interested in him.”

In Jesus’ world, sharing a meal identified people as colleagues, friends, even family. Jesus ate not only with

his beloved disciples, but also with tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes: people dismissed as beyond the reach of God’s reign. “A foretaste of the kingdom of God is savored at these joyful meals, where Jesus is guest of honor or host ... this is not a superficial joy. It springs from a deep sense that persons are restored to their own dignity and peace before God, and find themselves in a new community with one another.”

4: “Jesus is both faithful and free regarding the great Jewish tradition of Torah.”

Jesus was an observant Jew. Occasionally, however, his actions contradicted the law ... but only when the wellbeing of someone was at stake. For example: “In face of the sick, the suffering, and the hungry, the Sabbath observances were given second priority. That is how he interprets the Torah.” For Jesus, self-giving love (agape) is at the heart of both the reign of God and the law: “Such love grounds the law, puts it in correct perspective, and fulfills it. Loving this way, Jesus himself creates a liberating life-style and shows a wonderful freedom to do good.”

5: “Jesus’ whole ministry was rooted in prayer.”

Not only is Jesus faithful to the prescribed daily and ritual prayer practices of his Jewish faith; he also prays with “personal initiative.” He prays alone; he makes time to pray with his disciples; he even teaches his disciples how to pray - recall how the Lord’s Prayer sums up Jesus’ vision of the kingdom of God. Indeed, it is this deep wellspring of spirituality that serves as the source of both Jesus’ preaching and his action.

Seasons of Faith: Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday (February 14 this year) and lasts until Holy Thursday Evening. During the season of Lent, we are invited to consider how we might more closely follow Jesus in our lives by making choices to *give up* the things that keep us from being better disciples and to *give of* ourselves by loving others as Jesus taught us to do with his words and through his actions. Lent is traditionally a time of intensified prayer, fasting and almsgiving (charitable works.) Throughout the season of Lent, look for St. Matthew’s “We Thirst for You, O’ Lord” bulletin inserts to learn more.

Pray It Forward: Imaginative Prayer

“In imaginative prayer you attempt to place yourself in a biblical scene by using your imagination. Then you reflect on what God has revealed to you through your prayer.”—James Martin, SJ

“Start by choosing a favorite gospel passage to reflect on, say, Mark’s account of the healing of the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12) ... As in any prayer, you first ask for God to be with you, remembering that any grace you receive in prayer is in itself a gift from God. Next, you read the passage and use your imagination to slowly set the scene; as St. Ignatius would say, you ‘compose the place’ in your mind. So you ask yourself: *Who am I in this gospel story?* Are you part of the excited crowd that has gathered to see Jesus? Are you the owner of the house, who is annoyed that his roof is being torn apart? Are you one of the man’s friends, who have climbed onto the roof and are worried about losing their footing? Or are you the paralyzed man himself, desperately hoping for healing, but at the same time wondering what this carpenter from Nazareth can possibly do? **Next:** *What do I see?* You might imagine what the house looks like, along with the expression on Jesus’ face, or the looks of the people in the crowd.

Then: *What do I hear?* The gospel says that there were plenty of people squeezed into the house: As they listen to Jesus, are they loudly enthusiastic or reverently silent? Are there sounds from the courtyard outside? What do you imagine Jesus’ voice sounding like?

Finally: *What do I smell?* So many people packed together might mean a fairly unpleasant odor! What about other smells—from the outdoor oven or the family goat?

Roll It! In these ways you use your imagination and your senses to place yourself within the scene. Then you let the gospel story unfold, almost like a movie playing out. And here’s the most important part: As the scene unfolds in your imagination, pay attention to any emotional reactions or insights that occur to you. For example, you might find yourself watching the paralyzed man and feeling a deep longing or intense jealousy, thinking, ‘I need some healing in my life!’ ... You may also have an insight—not so much an emotional reaction as an intellectual one. Not long ago, I was praying with this passage and realized that the paralyzed man could not have been healed without the help of his friends. How often it is the community who carries us to God, who brings us to the place where we can be healed.”

—James Martin, SJ, “Use Your Imagination: A Prayer Tip from St. Ignatius”

Catholicism 101:

The Origins of Lent

The first recorded mention of a period of preparation for Easter comes from the Council of Nicea in 325. While this particular church council is best known for producing the "Nicene Creed," a profession of faith still in use today, the Council of Nicea also produced a number of institutional directives (canons) relating to practical aspects of early church life. It is in the fifth of these canons that Lent is mentioned. (Actually, the word used is *tessarakonta*, a Greek word meaning "forty.") Although some sort of ritual preparation for Easter probably dates back to apostolic times, this is the first historical mention of a period of time lasting forty days. The number forty is biblically significant – recall, for example, that in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus' public ministry begins after he spends forty days in the wilderness resisting the temptations of the devil. While in many languages the word for Lent means "forty," Church historian Norman Tanner, S.J., explains that: "The English word 'Lent' has another, very beautiful derivation. It comes from the Anglo-Saxon (early English) word meaning to 'lengthen'. Lent comes at a time when the hours or daytime are 'lengthening', as spring approaches, and so it is a time when we too can 'lengthen' spiritually, when we can stretch out and grow in the Spirit."

To learn more about the history and evolution of the liturgical season of Lent, check out Fr. Tanner's excellent article, "A Short History of Lent," which you'll find online at:

http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20110315_1.htm

"From the time of the Mosaic law, the People of God have observed fixed feasts, beginning with Passover, to commemorate the astonishing actions of the Savior God, to give him thanks for them, to perpetuate their remembrance, and to teach new generations to conform their conduct to them. In the age of the Church, between the Passover of Christ already accomplished once for all, and its consummation in the kingdom of God, the liturgy celebrated on fixed days bears the imprint of the newness of the mystery of Christ." – Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1164

We Recommend:

Reading the NT in 40 Days

Biblical Scholar Felix Just, S.J. recommends the following plan for reading the whole New Testament in just 40 days. This Lent, why not try it out?!

- Day 1: Mark 1-4
- Day 2: Mark 5-8
- Day 3: Mark 9-12
- Day 4: Mark 13-16
- Day 5: 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- Day 6: Galatians
- Day 7: Philippians and Colossians
- Day 8: Philemon & Ephesians
- Day 9: Matthew 1-7
- Day 10: Matthew 8-12
- Day 11: Matthew 13-18
- Day 12: Matthew 19-24
- Day 13: Matthew 25-28
- Day 14: 1 Corinthians 1-9
- Day 15: 1 Corinthians 10-16
- Day 16: 2 Corinthians 1-13
- Day 17: Romans 1-8
- Day 18: Romans 9-16
- Day 19: Luke 1-3
- Day 20: Luke 4-7
- Day 21: Luke 8-11
- Day 22: Luke 12-16
- Day 23: Luke 17-21
- Day 24: Luke 22-24
- Day 25: Acts 1-6
- Day 26: Acts 7-10
- Day 27: Acts 11-16
- Day 28: Acts 17-22
- Day 29: Acts 23-28
- Day 30: 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus
- Day 31: Hebrews 1-10
- Day 32: Hebrews 11-13 & James
- Day 33: John 1-5
- Day 34: John 6-10
- Day 35: John 11-16
- Day 36: John 17-21
- Day 37: 1 & 2 & 3 John & Jude
- Day 38: 1 & 2 Peter
- Day 39: Revelation 1-11
- Day 40: Revelation 12-22

Fr. Just notes that most daily selections can be read in about 20 to 30 minutes. He also suggests taking some extra time each day to reflect on what you have read, on its meaning and application for your life: What "good news" is God revealing to our world through this text? What is God saying to me personally? How can I apply his Word in my own life?

Living the Lectionary

February 4, 2018

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Adults: What can I do to be better prepared to proclaim the Good News with conviction?

Kids: How can I share my faith and trust in Jesus with my friends?

February 11, 2018

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

Adults: Would you have the courage to tell others to do as you do in order to be Christian?

Kids: What can you do this week to be an example to others?

February 14, 2018

Ash Wednesday

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Adults: What good could I do this week without seeking acknowledgment or praise?

Kids: What good could I do this week without telling others what I have done?

February 18, 2018

1st Sunday of Lent

Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

Adults: What daily activities can I do without so that I can use that time to renew myself in Jesus, the Messiah?

Kids: What good habit can I work on in order to grow closer to Jesus?

February 25, 2018

2nd Sunday of Lent

Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

Adults: How deeply do I believe that God is for me, and no one can destroy me?

Kids: When you have important choices to make, do you and your family pray to make the right choice?

From RCL Benzinger
<http://rcllectionary.com>