

ORDINARY TIME PREPARATION CYCLE A – PART FOUR

Introduction to the 23d and 24th Sundays: We have finished reading Matthew's narrative about how deep faith in Jesus is the only way of entrance into the Church. For two Sundays now we read Jesus's discourse on what life in the Church is to be like.

23d Sunday

Background: This Sunday's part of Jesus's sermon describes both the negative and the positive. The first section describes what are the proper procedures needed to achieve reconciliation whenever there is a dispute among Church members. ("Binding" and "loosing" are technical terms about making a legal decision about a matter under dispute.) The second section describes the blessings that flow from unity within the community.

Discussion Questions

1. Is reconciliation hard or easy for you? Why?
2. Do you find yourself judging others by rules and regulations or by love?
3. Who for you is a credible voice within your community, a "faithful watcher"? Why?
4. What situation inside or outside the Church do you think your parish community is ignoring?

Practice: Most parishes seem to have an outreach society such as St. Vincent de Paul. Does your parish also have an advocacy group? Find out what issues they are working on. If there isn't one, do some research about Amnesty International or the Southern Poverty Law Center or some similar group.

24th Sunday

Background: Jesus continues his sermon on what life in the Church means.

Discussion Questions

1. How has Jesus already abundantly forgiven you?
2. When do you find yourself being hardhearted towards others?
3. Where do you see hardheartedness in the Church or in society?
4. How do these words of Jesus challenge you not just with your family and friends but at work?

Practice: Think of one person whom you feel you justifiably dislike, then pray for that person by name every day this week.

Introduction to the 25th to the 31st Sundays: The Gospel selections for these Sundays present the words and teachings of Jesus as he reveals how disruptive and countercultural life in the kingdom/reign of God can be.

25th Sunday

Background: Jesus startles us with a story about how amazingly generous God really is. Our “thoughts” and “ways” are not like God’s

1. Are you secretly still trying to “earn” your way into God’s kingdom/reign of love?
2. When have you already experienced God’s generosity and mercy?
3. How has trying to live like Christ already changed your viewpoint on some political or economic issue?
4. Being loved calls forth gratitude. How are you already “laboring” for the kingdom/reign as you try to show your gratitude to God?

Practice: Generous gratitude involves not just treasure but also time and talent. Which one of these are you being stingy about? How might you change that part of your life?

26th Sunday

Background: God is always generous, but Jesus tells us this week about how our choices and subsequent actions matter as well. Words of faith are important; deeds of love are crucial.

1. What is your biggest regret about your choices in life? Why?
2. What is a decision you have made which has made you and others happy?
3. How do you see the ideals of Jesus already changing your life?
4. Jesus “emptied himself” for us out of love. Where do you think that God is calling you to embody that same kind of love in your life?

Practice: Find a copy of St. Ignatius Loyola’s Prayer for Generosity, and use it every day this week in your prayer alone or with others.