

Gospel Connections for Teens

Reflections for Sunday Mass, Cycle C

Corey Brost, CSV

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I dedicate this book to my brother and sister Viatorians, especially those who have stood by me for many years. Your faith, patience, support, challenge, and humor have shown me the face of God. You have made me a more faithful disciple and have helped me find life to the fullest (see John 10:10). And for that, I can't thank you enough.

This book was a joint effort. Four teens worked diligently as an editing team to help me refine each reflection. Their input was invaluable. So thanks to Rosanne Cruz, John Leahy, Kate Schwarz, and Celine Fitzgerald. Your willingness to grow closer to Christ has inspired me.

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Introduction

I wrote this book because I never had one like it when I was a teen. I struggled each Sunday to connect the Gospel to my teen ups and downs. I hope this book helps you do just that.

First, a brief explanation. In the Church liturgical year, the Sunday Gospel readings follow a three-year cycle. This book covers the third year of that cycle, called cycle C. In cycle C most of the Gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of Luke.

Here's how you use this book, then. Look at the chart that follows this introduction. Look up the date of the coming Sunday in the chart, and you will find the correct reflection. Commit to spending twenty minutes each week reflecting on the Gospel before you go to Mass. Use the book's reflection process or create your own. Then go to Mass on Sunday and compare your reflection to the homily. You might even want to get a few friends together over coffee or snacks during the week to compare thoughts on the readings.

Because of space limitations, I've edited a few lines out of some of the Gospel passages. The Scripture citations at the top of the page indicate the complete Gospel passage for that Sunday. If I've shortened the passage, you will see a second citation immediately following the passage, indicating the exact verses I used.

All but a few of the names in the reflections are made up, though all the people I mention are real people I've come across in life and ministry.

Reflection Chart

Sunday Gospel Reflection	Page No.	2006–2007	2009–2010	2012–2013
1 st Sunday of Advent	14	Dec. 3	Nov. 29	Dec. 2
2 nd Sunday of Advent	16	Dec. 10	Dec. 6	Dec. 9
3 rd Sunday of Advent	18	Dec. 17	Dec. 13	Dec. 16
4 th Sunday of Advent	20	Dec. 24	Dec. 20	Dec. 23
Christmas Day	22	Dec. 25	Dec. 25	Dec. 25
Holy Family	24	Dec. 31	Dec. 27	Dec. 30
Mary, Mother of God	26	Jan. 1	Jan. 1	Jan. 1
Epiphany Sunday	28	Jan. 7	Jan. 3	Jan. 6
Baptism of the Lord	30	Jan. 8	Jan. 10	Jan. 13
2 nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	32	Jan. 14	Jan. 17	Jan. 20
3 rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	34	Jan. 21	Jan. 24	Jan. 27
4 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	36	Jan. 28	Jan. 31	Feb. 3
5 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	38	Feb. 4	Feb. 7	Feb. 10
6 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	40	Feb. 11	Feb. 14	
7 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	42	Feb. 18		
8 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	44			
1 st Sunday of Lent	46	Feb. 25	Feb. 21	Feb. 17
2 nd Sunday of Lent	48	Mar. 4	Feb. 28	Feb. 24
3 rd Sunday of Lent	50	Mar. 11	Mar. 7	Mar. 3
4 th Sunday of Lent	52	Mar. 18	Mar. 14	Mar. 10
5 th Sunday of Lent	54	Mar. 25	Mar. 21	Mar. 17
Palm Sunday (The Passion)	56	April 1	Mar. 28	Mar. 24
Easter Sunday	58	April 8	April 4	Mar. 31
2 nd Sunday of Easter	60	April 15	April 11	April 7
3 rd Sunday of Easter	62	April 22	April 18	April 14
4 th Sunday of Easter	64	April 29	April 25	April 21
5 th Sunday of Easter	66	May 6	May 2	April 28
6 th Sunday of Easter	68	May 13	May 9	May 5
7 th Sunday of Easter	70	May 20	May 16	May 12

Sunday Gospel Reflection	Page No.	2006–2007	2009–2010	2012–2013
Pentecost Sunday	72	May 27	May 23	May 19
Trinity Sunday	74	June 3	May 30	May 26
Corpus Christi Sunday	76	June 10	June 6	June 2
9 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	78			
10 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	80			June 9
11 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	82	June 17	June 13	June 16
12 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	84	June 24	June 20	June 23
13 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	86	July 1	June 27	June 30
14 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	88	July 8	July 4	July 7
15 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	90	July 15	July 11	July 14
16 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	92	July 22	July 18	July 21
17 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	94	July 29	July 25	July 28
18 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	96	Aug. 5	Aug. 1	Aug. 4
19 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	98	Aug. 12	Aug. 8	Aug. 11
20 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	100	Aug. 19	Aug. 15	Aug. 18
21 st Sunday in Ordinary Time	102	Aug. 26	Aug. 22	Aug. 25
22 nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	104	Sept. 2	Aug. 29	Sept. 1
23 rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	106	Sept. 9	Sept. 5	Sept. 8
24 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	108	Sept. 16	Sept. 12	Sept. 15
25 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	110	Sept. 23	Sept. 19	Sept. 22
26 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	112	Sept. 30	Sept. 26	Sept. 29
27 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	114	Oct. 7	Oct. 3	Oct. 6
28 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	116	Oct. 14	Oct. 10	Oct. 13
29 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	118	Oct. 21	Oct. 17	Oct. 20
30 th Sunday in Ordinary Time	120	Oct. 28	Oct. 24	Oct. 27
31 st Sunday in Ordinary Time	122	Nov. 4	Oct. 31	Nov. 3
32 nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	124	Nov. 11	Nov. 7	Nov. 10
33 rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	126	Nov. 18	Nov. 14	Nov. 17
Christ the King	128	Nov. 25	Nov. 21	Nov. 24

Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings

Freedom Is Coming

Take :05 Examine

How did I live out last week's Gospel message? What was tough? What was rewarding?

Take :05 Read

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."

I remember my first day of high school. I was scared. We had just moved into town and I didn't know anyone in the freshman class. I was scared the seniors might beat me up. I was scared of not making friends. I was scared of looking foolish.

Many teens struggle with fear today. I know teens that are afraid of failing tests and teens that are afraid of losing friends. I know teens that are afraid of gangs and violence. Fear is pretty normal, so don't feel ashamed if you feel it.

Just think about Luke's Gospel. Early Christians knew fear. Many were persecuted. Many thought the world might end any day. So Luke wanted them to remember Jesus' words when he wrote his Gospel.

When you feel fear "stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand." Where can you get this courage? Luke tells us to pray and be vigilant, which means we must think carefully about a Christian response before important decisions.

So this Advent, remember Luke's confidence. He knew that disciplined Christians could stand proudly, face their fears, and not be controlled by their fears. God might not remove that which scares us, but God gives us courage to live with integrity. The courage to live without surrendering to the "anxieties of daily life," whether those anxieties come from tests, family, gangs, or friends.

Jesus is coming again this holiday season to free you from the fears that can control you. Spend extra time in prayer. Be more vigilant about the way you follow Jesus in your daily life. Do these things, and you'll know God is with you.

Take :10 Reflect

If a word or phrase from the Gospel grabs your heart, sit quietly for several minutes, repeating it to yourself and asking God to show you how it applies to your life. Or, reflect and possibly journal on the following questions:

- What worries do I most need Jesus to free me from? What can I do this Advent to let Jesus come closer to me?

Get Out of That Mainstream!

Take :05 Examine

How did I live out last week's Gospel message? What was tough? What was rewarding?

Take :05 Read

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.

Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

I remember a senior in high school telling me one day that everyone at school knows she doesn't drink, do drugs, or have sex. I can't remember our exact conversation, but I do remember her confidence in the way she chose to live. She was a popular student too, but she was “out of the mainstream,” according to some.

In many ways, she was like John the Baptist, “a voice . . . crying out in the desert.” John, like many religious leaders through history, removed himself from society’s mainstream to promote a different message—a message that wasn’t popular but was good for the people. “Change your lives,” he was calling out, “You’re on the wrong paths, even though it doesn’t seem like it and even though those paths are leading you away from God.”

Today, just like in John’s time, there are a lot of paths out there. And many paths that are promoted for teens just lead teens away from God. Drug and alcohol use. Sex before marriage. Gang lifestyle. Those are a few paths some people promote or accept. Each one can lead to what seems like good things at first. But eventually, statistics show, these paths lead to dead ends like broken relationships, single teen parenthood, addiction, violence, or jail.

God wants much more for you. So God has sent you people like John the Baptist. People that can live happy and healthy lives while changing the world. People that point to paths that will lead you to be all God knows you can be, if you watch or listen to them. My friend the senior in high school was such a voice. I don’t know how many people she influenced. But I do know she was proud of her values. They helped her build strong self-esteem.

Can you be a voice in the wilderness this Advent by showing your peers the path to God? If not, can you listen closely this Advent for the voices pointing out new paths for you?

Take :10 Reflect

If a word or phrase from the Gospel grabs your heart, sit quietly for several minutes, repeating it to yourself and asking God to show you how it applies to your life. Or, reflect and possibly journal on the following questions:

- Is your life on a path you’d like to change? What people do you admire for following the Christian path?