

ORDINARY GRACE

Weeks 1–17

Daily Gospel Reflections



by the Daughters of St. Paul

Monday of the First Week of Ordinary Time



Lectio

Mark 1:14–20

Meditatio

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Now is the time. Mark uses the Greek word *kairos*, which means the appointed time or the favored time. The reading for today, the first day of Ordinary Time, reminds me of a professor who walks into the first class of the year and immediately launches into an overview of the course. The first twenty minutes of the lecture telegraph that this semester will move along at a good clip. Looking for a blow-off course? Here’s your cue to look elsewhere. Resolve to keep up with the readings and assignments, and you’ll learn something worthwhile.

Today’s Gospel has a sense of urgency. Today, in this moment, the kingdom of God draws near. God’s Good News—the Gospel—demands a response, and it will not leave us unaffected. God’s call is magnetic. Simon, Andrew, James, and John drop everything to follow Jesus. Matthew’s parallel account of this scene (4:18–22) gives us a sense that more was involved in the call of the first disciples, but Mark

stresses that the kingdom of God is at hand *now*. Do something about it *now*.

The endless stream of ordinary “now” moments is the setting for the kingdom of God in our real world. This present moment is the place of God’s gift to us, and our gift to God. Neither the past with its mistakes or triumphs, nor the future with all its variables, concerns us now. We can play the game of *should-have-been* and *could-have-done*, but it doesn’t change reality. We can imagine ourselves in wonderfully ideal circumstances or cringe at foreseeable calamities, but the future is never as rosy or bleak in the way that we’ve imagined it. All we have is today. God calls us today. Jesus passes by this morning, and he proclaims the Good News: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Oratio

Lord, the spotlight of holiday festivities is over, and now it is back to the day-to-day routine. Welcome to the “ordinary time” of my life. This present moment is where we meet. You are fully here. Am I fully here too? Lord, you know how much time and energy I spend rehashing past events as well as dreaming of or dreading the future. Help me to live this moment to the full. I want to be here with you—now. May your kingdom come in the midst of my daily routine.

Contemplatio

May your kingdom come in the midst of my daily routine.

Tuesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time



Lectio

Mark 1:21–28

Meditatio

“The people were astonished at his teaching. . . .”

Interesting words: *the people were astonished*. They don't clap. They aren't taken aback. They don't have an animated discussion after his proclamation. Rather they are stunned into silence. The people are excited that they have finally found a teaching that answers the deepest questions and hungers of their heart.

We *want* to be taught. We look for a master at living. No matter how smart we may feel ourselves to be, we still are gratefully amazed when we encounter preaching that reveals a dimension of life or truth beyond the commonplace. We long to know there is something more to our lives, a deeper, ultimate meaning to the daily grind, something that makes it all worthwhile.

The astonishment of the crowds listening to Jesus is all the more intriguing when we recall that Jesus preaches values that turn the conventional wisdom of the world upside down, often uncomfortably so. The world's values don't

astonish. For all their glitter, they tire and bore us, exhaust, confuse, and defeat us.

The values taught by Jesus, on the other hand, even today bring light, hope, and the welcome element of surprise. They almost always point out an unexpected path, one that is inexplicable and incomprehensible, one that reduces us to reverent tears and quiet homage when we encounter it.

Jesus teaches you and me personally. His classrooms are myriad because he understands his students well and knows just how to get a word or light through the slightest crack we sometimes leave open. We find him teaching us in homilies and movies, in the teachings of the Church and the suggestions of a neighbor, in a magazine article or in the innocent prayer of a child. The movie theater becomes a “sanctuary,” and the place where we read a document becomes a chapel. We meet Jesus, personally, like the men in the synagogue or the man with the unclean spirit in today’s reading.

Oratio

Jesus, speak to me a word that will bring water to my parched spirit. A word that will point out an unexpected direction for me in some difficulty I am experiencing.

Contemplatio

Master, I am waiting on your word.

Wednesday of the First Week of Ordinary Time



Lectio

Mark 1:29–39

Meditatio

*“Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off
to a deserted place, where he prayed.”*

In this passage, Mark recounts a whirlwind of activity on the part of Jesus in Capernaum. Having taught in the synagogue the previous morning and expelled a demon, Jesus then subdues the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law. At sunset—once the Sabbath is over—Jesus responds to the needs of the crowds swarming around the door of the house where he is staying. Before sunrise, he is on the move again—but in a different way. He is going to a lonely spot to commune with his Father before departing for other towns to teach and heal there also.

In these lines, Mark shows us Jesus’ compassion, dedication, prayerfulness, and zeal. He also shows us another quality—Jesus’ balance. Jesus slept and prayed before resuming his work.

It’s good to consider Jesus’ balance, because sometimes we can get out of kilter. Our lives can become so busy that our

rest and our prayer life often suffer. As a result, our whole being suffers.

Admittedly, balance is hard to achieve in our society, especially for breadwinners. Yet without balance, life grows frustrating, and burnout becomes a real possibility. *Homo sapiens* are supposed to be wise. Each of us should be able to schedule short breaks for rest and/or prayer. Even a five-minute break can be refreshing. A fifteen-minute break is even better.

Once, while I was visiting a friend in a coastal town, she gave me a tour of the area and then pulled up to an overlook that offered a breathtaking view of the sea at sunset, with the surf breaking on the shining rocks. We stayed there for a while, silently contemplating the scene. “Every evening after work, I spend a few minutes here,” she told me. “You’d be surprised how many others do the same.”

Perhaps each of us can find our own “overlook,” even if it’s within us.

Oratio

Jesus, teach me how to *live my life*. Help me to delight in a vista; savor a meal; enjoy the company of family and friends; relax during break time; walk, jog, or run; and hold brief conversations with you as I go about my daily routine. Don’t let me become (or remain) a workaholic. Your gift of life is too precious to be lived only partially.

Contemplatio

Lord, teach me to live!