

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible and light a candle beside it. Pray the litany below. Respond to each prayer statement: *Be with us now.*

**LEADER:** Samuel, child who becomes God's servant.

**ALL: Be with us now.**

**LEADER:** First Isaiah, voice of God's fidelity.

- Second Isaiah, voice of God's promise to restore Israel.
- John the Baptist, witness of the messiah's coming.
- Mary, ponderer of the Word.
- Andrew, seeker and finder of the Lamb.
- Simon, seeker and rock.

*Add people in your own life who call you.*

Dreaming of being a missionary, Dorothy Stang entered the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur after high school. In 1966, Dorothy became one of the sisters from her community who worked in Brazil among people who were poor. Her work led her into conflicts over land in the rain forests.

Dorothy worked among the settlers to bring the Church with them as they followed the PanAmazon Highway into the jungle. The government promised settlers small plots of land. Dorothy visited homes and drew people together as communities to build pastoral centers and schools, support teachers, and learn how to farm in the rain forests.

Time and again Dorothy moved up the road with the poor, deeper into the jungle. She put up her hammock with a family of 10 for two years in one outpost. Like the people Dorothy suffered worms from the water and episodes of malaria. In village after village she taught the people about Jesus, their dignity as children



Dorothy Stang

of God, and their human rights.

Some call the rain forests "the lungs of the earth" because trees transform sunlight into oxygen and nourish our atmosphere. Thousands of small farmers worked the land in sustainable ways until multinational corporations realized the potential profit in the trees. Big ranchers also wanted more land.

Dorothy was undaunted by the clearing of the forests. Her

education and faith, along with the support of her religious community, empowered Dorothy to speak out, to enable the small farmers to speak out, to protest deforestation, and to encourage sustainable farming. A born organizer, she helped form base communities throughout the region, assisting the people as they shared faith and prayer and ideas for resisting this takeover of their lands.

Dorothy often sat with coffee, a candle, and a cross, pondering the sufferings of Jesus and the sufferings of the people with whom she lived. She prayed for courage to keep walking with the people as threats escalated.

"It is faith that sustains me," Dorothy wrote to her family.

Pope Francis teaches "the natural environment is a collective good" (*Laudato Si'* #95). He quotes the bishops of Paraguay, "Every *compesino* has a natural right to possess a reasonable allotment of land" so the family can subsist (#94).

On Saturday, February 12, 2005, Dorothy's discipleship ended. A man hired by a rancher confronted her on her way to a meeting and shot Dorothy dead.

● **What call lives deep enough in you to commit your life to it?**

# GOSPEL

## Jesus calls disciples.



**NARRATOR:** After John's arrest, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God's reign.

**JESUS:** The time is fulfilled. The reign of God draws near. Repent and believe in the good news.

**NARRATOR:** As Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew, casting a fish net in the sea. They fished for a living.

**JESUS:** Come after me. I will make you fishers of people.

**NARRATOR:** Immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus went on a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in their boat getting their nets ready to fish. Immediately Jesus called out.

**JESUS:** Come. Follow me.

**NARRATOR:** They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers and went off with Jesus.

Mark 1.14-20

## Jesus calls us to become disciples.

Jesus' first words announce the profound significance of his ministry and person. God's promises have ripened into fulfillment. Jesus brings the reign of God near. His message is a call: Repent and believe in the good news.

The word *repent* in Greek is *metanoia*, which means *conversion*. In its Old Testament roots, the word means *turn back, turn around, turn toward*. In today's idiom, we might say: get a life, become a new person, change your mind, or change your attitude. But to whom shall we turn? Who shall we become?

Jesus' call goes beyond John the Baptist's call to a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Jesus' simple message makes clear he is the one to turn toward. He invites not only repentance but faith in him and his good

news. He is the one to follow.

Once Mark establishes the theme of Jesus' preaching, the narrative sets Jesus in furious motion. He strides the seashore, calls disciples, moves on, heals, casts out demons, preaches.

Mark's stories are short; he uses the word *immediately* to shift quickly to the next scene. With Jesus' every step, God's dynamic healing, liberating power breaks into the human community.

● **What word, phrase, or feeling touches you in hearing this gospel?**

Mark includes few details in the spare story of Jesus' calling four fishermen.

Jesus' call is direct; their responses, quick and decisive. They do not become full-

fledged disciples as fast as this, however.

Mark tells us these four disciples are among the 12 whom Jesus names as missionaries (Mark 3.13-19) and who go out to do what Jesus does—preach repentance, cast out demons, and heal the sick (Mark 6.7-13).

Mark foreshadows the cost of the work to which Jesus calls them. While the disciples are out doing their first ministering, Mark splices into the narrative the beheading of John the Baptist. It forebodes the cost of the ministry Jesus' disciples are beginning.

The writer of Mark's gospel cares about how faith matures. Jesus' disciples leave their old lives behind quickly but their faith journeys twist and turn as they walk with Jesus.

The four fishermen are among those in Mark 4.40 who are afraid and without faith in the storm and still afraid of storms in Mark 6.47-52. Peter is the disciple who recognizes Jesus is the messiah in Mark 8.27. But soon afterward Jesus has to rebuke him for trying to keep him from the danger of suffering and death in Jerusalem.

James and John are the pair who insist they can drink the same cup of suffering Jesus will drink. But they both fall asleep in the garden when Jesus prays that the cup of suffering pass him by.

Mark wrote in A.D. 70 for people who knew that both Peter and James gave their



lives for the gospel; both drank the martyrs' cup of suffering. What these later Christians and we ourselves would not know without Mark's gospel is the journey of these committed disciples through fear, flight, sleep, denial, failure.

These four fishermen really take up their work of fishing for people only after Jesus' death and resurrection. In the end they, like John the Baptist and Jesus, give their lives for the gospel.

- **What have you learned through persisting in a call?**
- **What has sustained you past flight and failure as a disciple?**

**M**ark writes the first gospel to call a new generation to faith in Jesus. Until the Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70, Jewish Christians prayed with other Jews at the temple, offered sacrifices, and joined pilgrimages for the great feasts.

For the early Christians this fracture in history happens

as Jesus' first-generation, eyewitness disciples are reaching old age or have already died. Peter was martyred in Rome in 66. James was martyred in the 50s. Anyone 30 years old in AD 30 is now 70.

The Christian community in Jerusalem fled the city during the rebellion. Mark writes for a hesitant generation that can't see the future, because the future is in such discontinuity with the past.

Interestingly, in Mark's gospel when Jesus calls Simon and Andrew, he doesn't say, "Follow me." He says, "Come after me." Succeed me; come after me in time. What Jesus is calling the four fishermen to do tells us what Mark intends the gospel to do for every generation that hears it—to believe in our turn, to continue Jesus' mission in our time.

Like the generation for whom Mark wrote the first

gospel, Catholics today also live our discipleship through a fracture in history. Fifty-nine years have passed since the Second Vatican Council began in 1962. Before the council we were a Church of the Council of Trent, the council that responded to the Reformation and ended in 1565. We were a medieval Church in the modern world.

Today we recognize the Spirit moves in all the baptized. We have obligations to the poor in this world. Catholics engage in ecumenical dialogue and reading the scriptures.

Two generations have grown up since the council. Our teens have grown up in a new electronic global community and not the neighborhood Catholic culture of small towns and neighborhoods of the Pre-Vatican II era. What will the gospel mean to them?

- **What is your experience of change in the Church? What has helped you grow as a Christian? What has held you back?**
- **What in your experience does the gospel mean to youth today?**

DO SOMETHING

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- **A year dedicated to consecrated life started with the new Church year. For help in preparing to celebrate sisters during National Catholic Sisters Week March 8-14, go to: [www.nationalcatholicsistersweek.org](http://www.nationalcatholicsistersweek.org). Click "participate" on the sidebar at left for resources.**
- **Add stories about sisters you know at: [SisterStory.org](http://SisterStory.org).**

## Jonah preaches repentance.

The word of the Holy One came to Jonah saying: “Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you.” So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to God’s bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it.

Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone out but a single day’s walk announcing, “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil ways, God repented of the threatened evils against them and did not carry them out.

Jonah 3.1-5, 10

## Jonah models narrow thinking.

Sunday’s first reading makes the prophet Jonah appear a successful preacher rather than the petulant, poor excuse for a prophet that he is. The book of Jonah is a spoof on religious thinking that is too small to include God’s mercy. When God calls Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and call them to repent from their wickedness,

Jonah jumps on a boat heading in the other direction.

A terrible storm comes up as the runaway prophet sleeps. The sailors throw cargo overboard to stay afloat. They cast lots to identify the cause of the storm and find Jonah the culprit. The sailors throw him overboard to save their ship.

A whale swallows Jonah, who prays and repents during three days in its belly. The whale spits him out on dry land and Jonah goes to Nineveh and warns the people God will destroy the city in 40 days. All the people and the king believe the warning; they fast and pray. They turn from evil and violence.

Their repentance angers the petulant prophet. His worst fears have played out; the people of Nineveh quickly repent, God forgives them, his warnings look foolish, and his enemies are in solid with God.

Jonah sulks and prays to die in the chapter that follows Sunday’s reading. God’s mercy bewilders and angers him. To teach him a lesson, God provides shade for the sulking prophet with a fast-growing bush that withers just as fast the next day. Jonah gets angry all over again. God makes a point: “You care about a bush that you didn’t even grow, and I’m not supposed to care about the whole people of Nineveh?” As Creator, God cares about all, including Jonah.

VISIT [GOODGROUNDPRESS.COM](http://GOODGROUNDPRESS.COM)

● Where is your own personal belly of the whale where you have had to turn to prayer?

● To what call are you reluctant to respond? What do you run from?

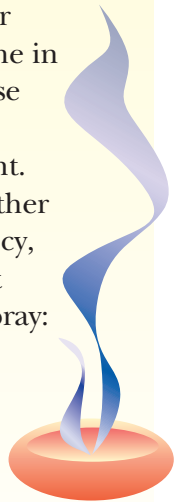
● Why prefer justice for our enemies rather than mercy?

● What can we learn with Jonah about not demonizing our enemies?

## PRAY

Place a symbol of your Christian commitment or a word describing your commitment beside the open bible. Take the lighted candle in your hands, state your name in turn, and add a phrase that describes your Christian commitment. For example, José, father of two children. Nancy, dry waller for Habitat houses. After each, pray:

**ALL: We know and believe in God’s love for us.**



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