

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, light a candle beside it, and display a parish directory or bulletin.

**LEADER:** Let us be mindful of those who have ministered to us in Jesus' name, and give thanks for the ways in which through them we have experienced the power of God's all-inclusive love. *Name these people aloud.*

**LEADER:** Would that all God's people were prophets!

**ALL:** The Spirit of God rests upon us all and urges us to communion.

Nelson Mandela insisted he didn't deserve people calling him a saint, unless, he said, "A saint is a sinner who keeps on trying." The word *trying* reflects the reality that human life is a process. We humans are social beings. We develop, change, and grow through care and interaction with others.

This insight is crucial to Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*, *The Joy of Love*, which summarizes the Church's two recent synods on the family. The pope teaches a pastoral approach of accompaniment.



Family is privileged place. It's is where most people live out their love for one another and their relationship with God. The Spirit of God accompanies all of us in the here and now of our lives and relationships, our joys and struggles.

"The Church has the responsibility not only to teach its doctrine on marriage, but must also learn from family's lived experience," explains Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago. He presented a paper supporting *Amoris Laetitia* at St. Edmund College in Cambridge, England. "It's not glimpses of perfection that reveal God's action but the imperfect attempts at love and compassion which permeate ordinary life."

"A new day demands a new paradigm," writes Cupich. *Amoris Laetitia* is a revolution in mercy, a paradigm shift that

recognizes Church laws can't fit every situation. Families come in varieties—divorced, second marriages, single people with children or elderly parents or disabled persons, partners, immigrant and refugee families.



Cardinal Blase Cupich

Rather than have the complexities of their lives separate people from the Church, Pope Francis wants the Church to learn and listen to those who live marriage day to day and respect the work of the Holy Spirit in the consciences of the faithful as they discern what God asks in their lives.

● What can the Church learn from your experience of marriage and family?

# GOSPEL

## Whoever is not against us is for us.

**JOHN:** Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.

**JESUS 1:** Do not stop him. No one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

**JESUS 2:** If any one of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

**JESUS 3:** If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to Gehenna, to the unquenchable fire. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.

**JESUS 4:** And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into Gehenna, where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

Mark 9:38-48



Kino Border Initiative,  
Nogales, Mexico

Jesus' response teaches his disciples not to box in his power. Jesus reasons that a person liberating another in his name cannot also speak evil of him. Jesus claims broad middle ground in this saying, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Such middle ground is fertile space for transformation. Often activists, liberal and conservative, reverse Jesus' saying and eliminate middle ground. In trying to mobilize advocates for change in public policies, they insist whoever is not for us is against us. For example, not to march for more humane immigration policy is to support deportation raids and the exploitation of workers.

Middle ground is valuable space to preserve. There we explore what we have in common with others, what they have experienced, why they think the way they do. Middle ground is where people share their stories. What is the experience of a suburban stay-at-home mom, a refugee from Somalia in a foreign culture, an undocumented immigrant working a minimum-wage job at a hotel, an African American nurse who has experienced

## What does Jesus really mean about cutting off a hand?

In Sunday's gospel Jesus and his disciples talk for the last time before Jesus sets off for Jerusalem. After all these disciples have witnessed him do and say, Jesus might expect deeper understanding of his message and mission. Instead Jesus' all-too-human followers have argued about who is greatest as they walk along.

Jesus, the teacher, sits the twelve down for an intense review. He demonstrates who is greatest by taking a child in his arms and insisting, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." In this statement Jesus

identifies with a child and calls the twelve to welcome and serve those, who like the child, are of little account.

Sunday's gospel passage begins after this lesson. The disciple John raises a question about who can act in Jesus' name. John sounds as if he is tattling, when he reports, "Teacher, someone is casting out demons in your name." John admits that he and the other disciples interfered to stop the man. They reason that because the exorcist is not one of their company, he should not act in Jesus' name.





people shunning his or her touch?

Middle ground is where real people replace stereotypes and liberate each other from the demons of prejudice and unexamined certainty. Middle ground is where someone else's lived experience can broaden and transform our own.

- What experience of middle ground becoming common ground have you had?
- What can you do to widen common ground in the Church?

In the second half of Sunday's gospel Jesus addresses his disciples, those of his company. These sayings lambaste them with harsh hyperbole. Jesus warns his disciples, who took it upon themselves to stop the exorcist, against being stumbling blocks to "little ones," to people who seek to become Christians and follow Jesus. Better to hang a millstone around one's neck and drown.

Hyperbole dramatizes a point. We use exaggerations similar to those in Sunday's gospel to express strong feelings. "I'd give my right arm for that." "I'd rather die than live in that neighborhood."

To understand that Jesus' sayings about chopping off a hand or plucking out an eye are extreme does not mean we should take them less than seriously. The hyperbole challenges us to get to the root of whatever causes us to stumble or to sin. The Greek

word translated either *to stumble* or *to sin* is a word familiar in English—*skandalizo*. Catholics today know the demoralizing power of the sexual abuse scandals.

The sayings call us to align our vision with Jesus' own. His sayings turn the tables on his disciples, who are too busy guarding their own insider status to open their hearts to all whom Jesus loves and seeks to liberate and lift up.

In Sunday's gospel Jesus asks us as disciples what attitudes we must change in order not to exclude others who seek entrance into God's reign. Jesus challenges us to embody his hospitality to all and become, as he is, the revelation of God's freeing and healing love to others. Like Christianity, every major world religion at its deepest teaches and challenges its followers to compassion.

- To what and to whom does the name *Christian* obligate us?

## DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Learn about the Kino Border Initiative and other Jesuit Refugee Service projects to accompany, serve, and advocate for migrants at the U.S. and Mexico border. "A border is not a place but a fierce line in people's lives," executive director Father Sean Carroll says.
- How do you or can you collaborate for the common good of your neighborhood, city, or state?

## What if all God's people are prophets?

What is it about us as human beings that we are so easily inclined to hog the good stuff for ourselves? Why are we jealous and resentful of the generosity of God who so willingly gives gifts to all who come along.

Like the disciples in the gospel, Joshua in the first reading feels compelled to stop two men from prophesying. They are not with the 70 elders when God distributes the spirit, which allows men and women to proclaim both the judgment and the compassion of God to God's people.

Moses retorts that he wishes God would have blessed all the people with this gift. From his perspective, Israel can never have enough prophets.

Perhaps today our global world helps us recognize that the same Spirit speaks inside the tent and outside in the camp. In our world God's Spirit has worked generously in the history of every religion and culture, inside our own Jewish Christian history and outside our boundaries. God's

Spirit speaks to us today also in the cry of the Earth that sustains us and the cry of the poor who don't benefit from its abundance.

### Eldad and Medad

Then the Holy One came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses (who was at the meeting tent) and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

Joshua, son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord, Moses, stop them!" But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all God's people were prophets. Would that the Holy One would put the spirit upon them all!"

Numbers 11.25-29

- Who speaks prophetically from outside the tent, according to where you stand?
- Who speaks prophetically within the tent?

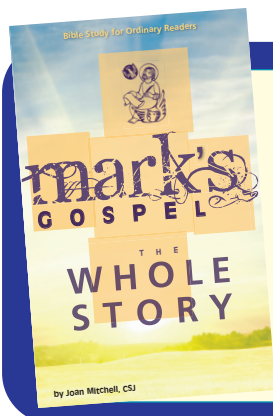
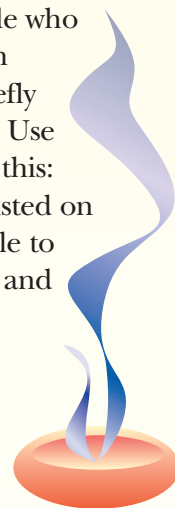
- To what kind of prophetic ministry is your parish or small Christian community called?
- How might you widen your ministry to link more globally with the Church?

## PRAY

Bring this scripture reflection to a close with a circle prayer. With joined hands and united hearts create a litany of thanksgiving for those prophets in our church and society who, because they are filled with God's Spirit, are able to announce and bring about the signs of the reign of God. Name people who are or who have been prophets and say briefly what they are doing. Use a litany form such as this: "Rosa Parks, who insisted on the rights of all people to enjoy human dignity and respect."

Respond to each name:

**ALL:** You show us the way into the company of God.



**Mark's Gospel: The Whole Story** shows how the bits and bytes of Mark we hear at Sunday Eucharist fit into the whole story of Jesus' life and ministry. Reflection questions make this book great for faith-sharing and bible study. Only \$10 at [goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com) or 800-232-5533.

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