

JANUARY 31, 2021 •
ORDINARY TIME •
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



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Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his
presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

Psalm 95:1-2

Feast of Faith

I Confess

One form of the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass is the traditional Confiteor, or “I confess,” a prayer that was formerly prayed by the priest alone at the foot of the altar, but which is now prayed by the entire assembly. The Confiteor is at once personal—“I confess”—and communal, prayed aloud, together. We recognize that sin does not just separate us from God; sin comes between us and others, isolating us. We acknowledge that sin has many dimensions, individual and communal: sins of thought, sins of speech, sins of action, sins of omission. Sin is not something that happens to us; sin is something we do. In the Confiteor, we take responsibility for our own actions. The repeated insistence on our “fault,” with the ritual gesture of striking the breast, an ancient sign of penitence, is not meant to lower our self-esteem. Rather, it acknowledges our human instinct to transfer the blame whenever we can (“The devil made me do it!”). This prayer stops us short. We take responsibility for ourselves, our actions, our failure to act. Then we cry out to God in those ancient words, Kyrie, eleison—Lord, have mercy. For the sinner who repents, there is mercy. This truth is at the heart of our faith, and it is where the Mass, our feast of faith, begins.

—Corinna Laughlin, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

False Prophets, True Prophets

In Deuteronomy today we hear that God’s very words will fill the mouth of a true prophet, but a false prophet will, in a manner of speaking, put mere mortal words into God’s mouth. In Mark’s Gospel, we see Jesus teaching and healing as a true prophet, one filled with the authority of God’s own voice, the Holy One of God. The whole history of our church is filled with both true and false prophets. But in today’s Gospel we learn that Jesus’ fame spread because he taught with authority; he wasn’t an authority because he was popular or famous. We also learn from him, in his desert temptation confrontations with Satan, that anyone can quote scripture, even against God’s purposes. And today we hear that his authority was not like that of the scribes, who held the official positions of religious authority in his day. Our work is to do our best to discern the true prophets in our midst, and to be true prophets as well. The psalmist tells us how to do this: by not hardening our hearts when God speaks. If we truly listen to God, it will be God’s very words filling our mouths.

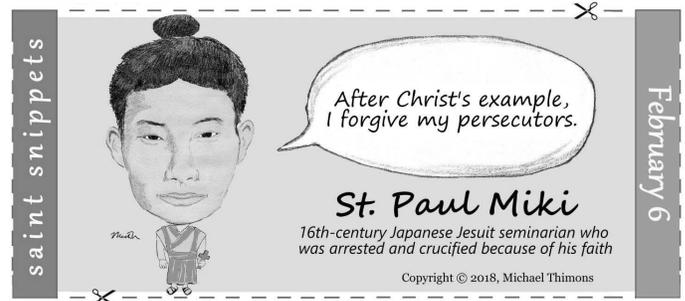
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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Heb 11:32-40; Ps 31:20-24; Mk 5:1-20
Tuesday:	Mal 3:1-4; Ps 24:7-10; Heb 2:14-18; Lk 2:22-40 [22-32]
Wednesday:	Heb 12:4-7, 11-15; Ps 103:1-2, 13-14, 17-18a; Mk 6:1-6
Thursday:	Heb 12:18-19, 21-24; Ps 48:2-4, 9-11; Mk 6:7-13
Friday:	Heb 13:1-8; Ps 27:1, 3, 5, 8b-9; Mk 6:14-29
Saturday:	Heb 13:15-17, 20-21; Ps 23:1-6; Mk 6:30-34
Sunday:	Jb 7:1-4, 6-7; Ps 147:1-6; 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; Mk 1:29-39

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time; Catholic Schools Week
Tuesday:	The Presentation of the Lord; Blessing of Candles; Groundhog Day
Wednesday:	St. Blaise; St. Ansgar; Blessing of Throats;
Friday:	St. Agatha; First Friday
Saturday:	St. Paul Miki and companions; First Saturday



Today's Readings

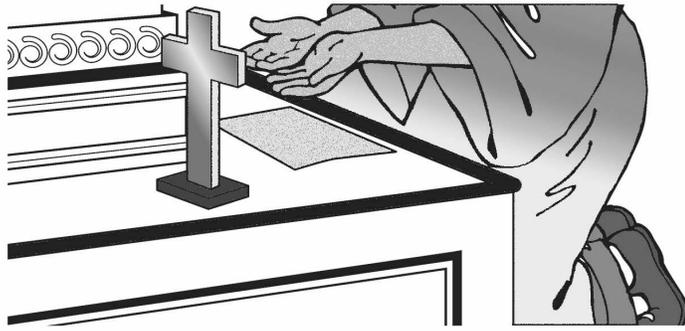
First Reading — Moses spoke to all the people, saying: “A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you” (Deuteronomy 18:15-20).

Psalm — If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Psalm 95).

Second Reading — Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Gospel — The people were astonished at Jesus’ teaching; he taught them as one having authority (Mark 1:21-28).

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Fourth Sunday In Ordinary Time January 31, 2021

**Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the Lord
who made us.**

—Psalm 95:6

Treasures From Our Tradition

Forty days after Christmas, this week's ancient feast of the Presentation of the Lord is an extension of the shining days of Christ's coming into the depths of winter. This is the day when, for a thousand years, the Church has blessed a year's supply of candles. In many places, a procession forms outside the church. The core memory is of Simeon and Anna's meeting with the infant Jesus and his parents outside the temple on the fortieth day after the child's birth, and the delight of going to the table of the Lord for the Eucharist, a foretaste of our final meeting with Christ.

For some Christians, today is known as "The Meeting," suggesting not only the encounter in the temple, but also our assembly at the Lord's table and our longing for the kingdom. One story suggests that the commotion made by so many candle-bearing, hymn-singing faithful in the wintry fields of Germany on their joyful way to Mass stirred the badger from hibernation to examine this promise of springtime. The interrupted nap of the groundhog is amazingly linked to the light of Christ driving away the shadows of the world's darkness. This beautiful feast only rarely falls on a Sunday.

What better reason could there be for candles at dinner tonight?

—James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Thunderbolts and Lightning

One of the most difficult duties of a disciple is to follow the command of Jesus to spread the gospel to all nations. (Lk 24:47, Mk 116:15, Mt 28:19) I think one reason may be that we don't feel we have the authority to tell someone else what to believe. Most of us don't think we know the gospel well enough to preach it. Or we are so afraid of offending atheists, that we use that fear as an excuse to say nothing. But being a disciple means following Jesus. The gospel this Sunday mentions twice that Jesus taught with more authority than any of religious leaders of Israel. So how can we get such authority?

First, Jesus didn't get his authority from winning a Messiah election. And he didn't threaten people with thunderbolts and lightning. He certainly didn't impress people by saying what they wanted to hear. He spoke the truth that he heard from his Father. His two main actions in his ministry were curing and forgiving people. Since the Jews thought sickness was a punishment for sins, by curing the sick and forgiving sins, Jesus showed that God loves even sinners. And those actions showed that Jesus got authority from his Father.

"But you still haven't answered the question: How do we get that authority?" We get it from the Holy Spirit, in Baptism and Confirmation. And like an athlete, who may be born with strength and abilities, yet has to work-out and practice to be any good, we still need to grow in that authority. One way is to read the scriptures and pray with them, so that we get to know God through his Word and begin to listen to him in our prayers. We can consciously decide to see God in other people, not just those we love, but everyone, even the ones who annoy us. (And especially the ones who challenge us to be more loving, patient and forgiving.) Most parishes have programs that encourage sharing your faith, such as RCIA, Christ Renews his Parish, etc. And of course, the Eucharist and other sacraments strengthen God's life in us. You'll know you have that authority when you can talk about your faith with confidence instead of hesitation, because you will be speaking from experience, not second hand knowledge.

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