

ABIDING WORD

ABIDING WORD

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS FOR YEAR C

Barbara E. Reid, OP



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Ann Blattner. Illustration: Saint Luke. Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus. Theol. Gr. 240. Austrian National Library. Used with permission.

These reflections were originally published in *America* and are reprinted with the permission of America Press, Inc., americamagazine.org.

Excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (ICEL). All rights reserved.

Scripture excerpts in this work are from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States*. Copyright © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1992, 1986, and 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means and without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Other Scripture texts in this work are taken from the following:

The New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

The New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition © 1989, 1993, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2012 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John’s Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reid, Barbara E.

Abiding word : Sunday reflections for year C / Barbara E. Reid.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-8146-3313-7

1. Church year meditations. 2. Bible—Meditations. 3. Catholic Church—Prayers and devotions. 4. Catholic Church. Lectionary for Mass (U.S.). Year C. I. Title.

BX2170.C55R425 2012

242^l.3—dc23

2012014726

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
First Sunday of Advent	
<i>Promises Fulfilled</i>	1
Second Sunday of Advent	
<i>Rough Ways Made Smooth</i>	3
Third Sunday of Advent	
<i>God's Joy</i>	5
Fourth Sunday of Advent	
<i>Leaping for Joy</i>	7
The Nativity of the Lord	
<i>In God's Bosom</i>	9
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph	
<i>God's Family Reunion</i>	11
The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God	
<i>Named for Jesus</i>	13
Second Sunday after Christmas	
<i>Wisdom's Resting Place</i>	15
The Epiphany of the Lord	
<i>The Hidden Revealed</i>	17
The Baptism of the Lord	
<i>Love Enough for All</i>	19
First Sunday of Lent	
<i>Out of the Wilderness</i>	21
Second Sunday of Lent	
<i>The Face of Freedom</i>	23
Third Sunday of Lent	
<i>I Am Who I Am</i>	25

vi *Abiding Word*

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Claiming Our Inheritance 27

Fifth Sunday of Lent

The Finger of God 29

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Obedient unto Death 31

Easter Sunday

Beyond Hope 33

Second Sunday of Easter

Held Fast in Peace 35

Third Sunday of Easter

Arms Outstretched 37

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Washed in the Blood of the Lamb 39

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Love Commanded 41

Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Gift of Peace 43

The Ascension of the Lord

Clothed with Power 45

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Coming Home 47

Pentecost Sunday

Breath of God 49

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

What Is Mine Is Yours 51

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

My Body for You 53

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Bodily Spirituality 55

The Solemnity of All Saints

A Great Cloud of Witnesses 57

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Open Your Gift 59

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>"God Inside Out"</i>	61
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Fulfilled in Our Hearing</i>	63
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Seized by Grace</i>	65
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Blessed Now</i>	67
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Good Measure</i>	69
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Graced Speech</i>	71
Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Worthiness</i>	73
Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Given into Our Mother's Arms</i>	75
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Great Forgiveness, Great Love</i>	77
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Clothed in Christ</i>	79
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>The Path to Life</i>	81
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Laborers for the Harvest</i>	83
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>What to Do</i>	85
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>A Woman's Place</i>	87
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>A Forgiving and Giving God</i>	89
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Bigger Barns</i>	91
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	
<i>Obedient Faith</i>	93

- Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Unwanted Messengers 95
- Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Spiritual Training 97
- Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Earthy Wisdom 99
- Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Calculating the Cost 101
- Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
The God Who Seeks 103
- Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Grace-Filled Complexity 105
- Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
The Bridgeable Chasm 107
- Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
The Timely Vision 109
- Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Saving Gratitude 111
- Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Persistent Pursuit of Justice 113
- Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Incomparable Mercy 115
- Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Out On a Limb 117
- Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Angelic Legacy 119
- Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fearless Testimony 121
- The Solemnity of Christ the King
Royal Forgiveness 123

PREFACE

At the beginning of the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist watches Jesus walk by and exclaims to two of his disciples, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). The two disciples begin to follow Jesus. When he turns and sees them following, he asks, “What are you looking for?” They reply, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” to which Jesus responds, “Come and see.” So they do, and they remain with him that day (John 1:36-39). Staying, remaining, abiding (these are various ways that the Greek verb *menein* can be translated), is the primary response of a disciple. Different from the Synoptic Gospels, where disciples are more often seeking to understand who Jesus is, in the Fourth Gospel, the search is framed in terms of knowing where Jesus abides.

One of the key ways to abide in Jesus is through his word. Jesus tells those who believe in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Conversely, those who oppose him and look for an opportunity to kill him do so “because there is no place in you for my word” (John 8:31-38).

Another mode of abiding with Jesus is through Eucharist. After he feeds the multitude, Jesus tells his followers, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them” (John 6:56). This mutual indwelling, we in Christ and Christ in us, is deepened each Sunday through the word and at the table.

I offer this collection of reflections on the Scripture readings for each Sunday and solemnity for the Lectionary Year C as a weekly aid to enter more deeply into the abiding word, and to enable a renewed response to remain with Jesus. These reflections first appeared in *America* magazine, from November 23, 2009 to November 15, 2010 (vol. 201, no. 16–vol. 203, no. 14), and have been slightly edited for this volume.

I invite you to establish a pattern of dwelling with the word each day, if possible. Some suggestions for how to approach the word follow. Many find it helpful to set aside the same block of time each day, and to sit in one particular place, in a chapel, or in a favorite easy chair, claiming this as your sacred time and sacred space. Sit with your spine straight, feet flat on the floor, and concentrate on your breathing. As you breathe in, and breathe

out, invite the Spirit, whom Jesus promised will abide with us always (John 14:17), to open your mind, eyes, ears, and heart to the word that the Holy One wants to give you this day. Consciously set aside all other concerns, distractions, and worries. Imagine leaving them outside the door of your holy space. If they try to intrude into your prayer, tell them they have to wait until you have finished, and that you will pick them up again later.

Open the Scriptures and read the text slowly and contemplatively. Savor each word and phrase. Imagine yourself as one of the characters in the story if the text is a narrative. What do you see? hear? smell? feel? Read through the text again slowly and prayerfully. Is there a particular word or phrase that catches your attention? Stay with that word or phrase and let it take deeper root in you. Wait patiently for whatever it is that is being revealed to you in that word. Even if there is no clear insight or special meaning that emerges, trust that the word is abiding in you and unleashing its transformative power in you. Let yourself be led to see differently, for example, from the perspective of those made poor, of women, or of those not like yourself. Set aside what you “know” the text means and let yourself be surprised by the Spirit. Respond with thanks for what has been given to you by the abiding One. Hold on to a word or phrase from the Scripture and return to it throughout the day. Jot it down in your prayer journal, so you can return to it at another time. Let its meaning continue to unfold as you abide in it and it in you.

In the Gospel of John, as Jesus approaches his death, he tells his disciples that he prepares a dwelling place for each one, so that where he is they may also be. Thomas struggles, insisting he does not know the way. Jesus assures him that Jesus himself is the way, the truth, and the life. The abiding place, then, is not a special “room with a view,” so to speak, but is Jesus himself. Abiding in Jesus leads also to indwelling with the One who sent him and with the Spirit, as Jesus prayed for oneness, “I in them” and “they in us” and “I in them” and “you in me” (John 17:20-23).

The gift of abiding in Christ and Christ in the believer is a priceless treasure meant not only for oneself. It is a fruitful gift, one that is intended to be shared with others, producing a harvest of transformative love (John 15:1-8).

Barbara E. Reid, OP
Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2012

PROMISES FULFILLED

First Sunday of Advent

Readings: Jer 33:14-16; Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14;
1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy” (Luke 21:34)

How do people who fall in love sustain their hopeful expectation of one another throughout their lives? Some relationships begin to crumble after the infatuation wears off, the delight in mutual commitment fades, and routine life settles in. Some relationships don't make it through a lifetime. Others weather the passage of time with moments of renewed celebration of promises made and kept, and of crises faced together, strengthening the lifelong bond. Such experiences in human relationships reveal something of how God interacts with us.

As Advent begins, people in the Northern Hemisphere may be inclined to snuggle into the shortened dark days of approaching winter to calmly contemplate the coming of Christ. But the readings put us in a crisis-mode that is anything but restful. Jeremiah addresses the exiles who are undergoing great distress. He had earlier prophesied that the Davidic dynasty would be restored soon after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, the weary exiles have experienced disaster after disaster, and they are grasping for some sign of hope. “The days are coming” is an expression that in the Bible ordinarily introduces a pronouncement of judgment, instilling fear in the hearers. Instead, Jeremiah uses the phrase to startle the careworn exiles with an assurance that God will fulfill the promises made to Israel and Judah.

As partners whose relationship has hit the rocks may be able to recapture the initial fervor of their love when reminded of the joy and delight with which their promises of commitment were made, so God's beloved are wooed away from their woes to focus on the sure promise of redemption at hand. There is a wordplay: Israel's last king was Zedekiah, whose name derives from the Hebrew word for “justice.” While the people look for a

2 *Abiding Word*

new “just shoot” from David’s branch, Jeremiah proclaims that it is God’s own self who is “our justice.”

While Jeremiah’s hearers were waiting for fulfillment of God’s promises in an existing crisis, Luke and Paul’s hearers are waiting for an apocalyptic end time that seems long in coming. Luke’s warning is not to let one’s heart grow drowsy during the long wait. Like lovers whose passion fades and whose lives are lulled into routine, the people’s ardor may dim and they may be found unprepared for the coming crisis. Luke advises not letting our hearts go after things that satisfy only for a time, and not becoming weighed down with anxiety. Be always watchful, he says, so as not to be taken by surprise. Pray for strength, and do not be at all afraid. Stand tall, he says, raise your heads, and be ready for the embrace of the One who is Love Incarnate.

Paul tells the Thessalonians to strengthen their hearts. He prays, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all,” reminding us that it is God who initiates and sustains us in love, and that it is a love meant to be shared with all. Daily prayer and practices of loving outreach prepare us well for the crisis times, when disaster strikes, when jobs are lost, when illness or death turns our world awry, when violence rips at the fabric of our world. With hearts already strengthened by God’s love, we are able to withstand any assault.

The expectation of the birth of a child can often reignite the ardor of a flagging love relationship. So too in Advent, if our hearts are weary or drowsy, our preparation for the celebration of the Christ, who has already been born as one of us, can spark our love once again, not only toward the One who came as a child in our midst, but also to all God’s beloved children.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

1. How are you keeping your heart from becoming drowsy this Advent?
2. How has God strengthened your heart in times of crisis?
3. How have you experienced the God who fulfills promises?

ROUGH WAYS MADE SMOOTH

Second Sunday of Advent

Readings: Bar 5:1-9;
Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

“The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy” (Ps 126:3)

In some cultures, a woman who has been widowed or who loses a child wears black for a year or more, signaling her mourning. Her face too wears the marks of grief. The sparkle in her eyes gives way to ready tears and her gait becomes heavy from sorrow. Such is the image of the city of Jerusalem in today’s first reading.

Baruch, a disciple of Jeremiah, characterizes the devastated city as a woman in mourning for her exiled children who have been forcibly taken away from her. The prophet declares that it is now time for Jerusalem to exchange her robe of mourning and misery for a brilliant new mantle. Her new cloak is spun from justice and glory from God. If she despaired for her children, thinking God had forgotten them, the prophet insists that “they are remembered by God.”

The humiliation of their forced march into exile on foot will be undone by their being carried back aloft, as if they were royalty. The heights of despair and the depths of depression will be leveled out. It is not that the suffering is forgotten, or that anything could go back to being the way it was before the tragedy, but now the divine gift of joy settles over the grieving mother as rebuilding life out of the ruins begins. The returnees are led by God’s light, and their companions are mercy and justice.

Divine mercy embodies God’s motherly care, as she grieves with all who mourn and acts with compassion to bring relief for all who suffer. Divine justice is the setting aright of all relationships: with God, self, others, and the whole of the cosmos. With these two companions come healing, restoration, and the chance for a new beginning.

In the gospel, there is a similar invitation to a new beginning announced by John the Baptist. The narrative starts on an ominous note, as John’s

ministry is set against the backdrop of the Roman imperial rulers. Luke is not simply displaying an interest in history by naming Tiberius Caesar, the emperor; Pontius Pilate, the governor; Herod, Philip, and Lysanias, the tetrarchs; and finally, Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests who colluded with the Roman authorities. He is reminding his hearers of the omnipresent imperial power that kept the inhabitants of Palestine in fear and grief at many levels. He foreshadows the terror of John's execution and of Jesus' crucifixion by introducing Herod and Pilate before these two prophets have even spoken their opening words.

Luke's hearers already know the end of the story. It is in this context that we hear John's invitation not only to turn away from personal choices that impede God's coming but also to collective repentance and a turn toward divine mercy. Any desire for revenge, any attempts to try to retaliate with violence, must give way to forgiveness on the part of the victims. This forgiveness invites repentance on the part of the offenders. Using Isaiah's words, John first speaks in imperatives: prepare and make straight the way. But then the verbs shift to the passive voice, implying that it will be the Coming One himself who will do the filling in of the valleys and leveling of the mountains, straightening out winding roads, and smoothing the rough ways.

For them and for us, his coming does not eliminate these challenges along life's path but fills us with saving joy, justice, forgiveness, and mercy as we open ourselves to the great things God has done and continues to do for us.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

1. What robe of mourning does God wish to take away from you in order to clothe you with joy and splendor?
2. How has God's compassion carried you over the rough places of your journey?
3. What is being healed, forgiven, and restored in you as you prepare the way this Advent?

GOD'S JOY

Third Sunday of Advent

Readings: Zeph 3:14-18a;
Isa 12:2-3, 4, 5-6; Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

"The crowds asked John the Baptist, 'What should we do?'" (Luke 3:10)

"You will know." This was the sage advice I received from a wise mentor at a time when I was at a crossroads in making an important life decision. How much easier it would be, I thought, if someone could just tell me what was the right thing to do. I knew, however, that my mentor was right. No one else could answer the deepest questions for me about the choice to be made. She pointed me to the heart of wisdom residing within me, by which I would know what was the Spirit's prompting.

In today's gospel, one group after another wants John the Baptist to help them know what they should do. They have been touched by his invitation to repent and believe the good news and have been washed free of all their sinful choices from the past. But what's the next step? There is no one-size-fits-all response. John's advice is tailored to each according to his or her circumstances. Nothing he suggests is very dramatic or extraordinary: If you have extra clothing, then share it with those who have none. If you have food, then share it with those who are hungry. If you collect money, take only what you need. And if you have military might, do not abuse it. These admonitions seem obvious—they are things that "you will know" if you listen to the wisdom within. When Zephaniah declares, "God is in your midst," it is a reassurance that the divine guidance resides within each person and within each believing community when they allow their hearts to be turned toward the Holy One. The freedom and joy that well up from accepting God's forgiving love is, as Isaiah says in the responsorial psalm, like drawing water at a fountain of salvation. You can return to this fountain again and again to drink deeply of its saving power. A fountain circulates living, active water, always fresh and pure, not like a cistern that collects

“dead” water in a stagnant pool. At the fountain of salvation one drinks in joy, courage, and strength, which overflow in our actions toward others.

The theme of joy weaves throughout the readings and the liturgy on this Gaudete (Latin for “rejoice”) Sunday. The joy is not only our own, from the forgiveness and salvation that set us free, but God also rejoices and sings, delighting in renewing us in love (Zeph 3:17-18). This joy and mutual delight want to be shared in wider and wider circles. What shall we do to make that happen? You will know.

In the gospel John the Baptist speaks about a more advanced stage of turning toward God. Beyond the baptism of repentance and its freeing joy is a further “baptism” with “the Holy Spirit and fire” that the Christ brings. Followers of Jesus will be empowered by the Spirit, who emboldens them for all manner of ministries. They will also undergo a purification process, a winnowing away of any imperfections that impede God’s love and joy. The winnowing is not so much a process that separates out people who tend to do good and people who tend more to sin; rather, it is a refining for all who turn to Christ, a burning away of all that keeps us from experiencing God’s delight and from knowing how to share that with others. This, then, is what distinguishes joy from optimism. A cheery outlook is not necessarily a Christian virtue. But a radical joy that accompanies a refinement by fire is one of the paradoxical hallmarks of our faith.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

1. Sit with God and feel the joy of the Holy One who delights over you.
2. How do you answer the question, “What should we do?”
3. How has your joy grown through experiences of purifying “fire”?