

LIVING LITURGY™

for Lectors

Year B • 2024

Paul-Vincent Niebauer, OSB

with

Michele Dachtler Warner

M. Roger Holland, II

Jessica Mannen Kimmet

Kate Williams



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie. Art by Ruberval Monteiro da Silva, OSB.

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

Other Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

© 2023 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

ISSN 2831-5146

ISBN 978-0-8146-6810-8

Presented to

*in grateful appreciation
for your ministry*

(date)

DEAR READER,

Proclaimed well, the word of God can and does change the lives of the hearers. Ah, but “proclaimed well” is sometimes the challenge. That is what I want to humbly offer: helpful insights and technique to enrich your delivery of the word of God.

I come from the theater side of the street. In selecting a play for a successful production, one must always begin with a good script. In Scripture, we have one of the best, if not *the* best, “scripts” in the history of humankind. Even though many may have heard numerous times what will be proclaimed, when proclaimed well new insights can and do occur, both for the hearer and the reader. The gospels are the living word of God. If proclaimed well we never hear them the same way twice.

Here are a few practical, technical points to be considered when proclaiming the word of God:

1. Do you have an adequate sound system? Can everyone hear and understand all the words that are being read?
 - Sound systems can be intimidating. Might there be someone in the parish who can assist in delivering the best sound your system is capable of?
 - Get as comfortable as possible with your system and microphone. If you can't hear yourself over the sound system (or even a large room without a system) then there is a very good chance few others can hear you.
2. Is your diction as good as it might be? The following are some tips.
 - When you are speaking publicly are you pronouncing the end consonants? For example, try reading the following, pronouncing the underlined letter:
Indeed, religion with contentment is a great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)
 - Often when speaking publicly we think we are sounding the end consonants but in fact we are not. Don't be afraid to exaggerate.

Finally, taking care to pronounce the end consonants will almost always make you slow down.

3. Something that nearly all of us need to do is *slow down*. I am 70 at this writing and I have heard fewer people than I can count on one hand read too slowly. The opposite is usually the case: most people read too fast. When in doubt, slow down.
4. Do you understand what you are reading? Can you verbalize the sense of the reading in your own words?
 - When addressing the above questions, Saint Paul always comes to mind. A biblical commentary is indispensable in helping to understand what Paul—or any other Scripture author—is saying. Frankly stated, if you the reader, do not understand what you are reading then how can the listener be expected to understand what you are reading?
5. Rehearsing aloud will always help improve your reading. It will also lower your nervousness and help you keep from stumbling!
6. Is the reader's tone of voice fresh and accessible to the hearer?
 - When my theater voice teacher assigned our acting class to bring our Bibles to class to do a reading, we all failed miserably! Why? We all put on this churchy sort of voice—you know, a somber, stilted, monotone sort of voice. Our professor immediately said, "That is not your own voice! Why are you speaking like that?" We said, "Well, that was the way we thought you should read from the Bible." She said, "Well yes, if you want to put your listeners to sleep!" All this is to say, use your own voice. Don't try to sound "holy." Simply be *sincere* with your reading, taking great care that the listener hears and understands the written word of the Lord. This, after all, is the bottom line.

Brother Paul-Vincent Niebauer, OSB
Saint John's Abbey
Collegeville, Minnesota



Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “You do not know when the time will come.”

To the point: Few people understand the demands of watchful waiting like a woman in her last weeks of pregnancy. This waiting may look passive, but it is work. Both the extra weight her body carries and the extra vigilance her mind bears are exhausting. Labor, like Jesus’s coming, arrives when it will; there are ways to gen-

erally prepare, but the moment of its onset remains a mystery until it is upon her. There is one major difference: the physical demands of late pregnancy are such that many expectant women report that they are never not watching for labor to begin. It is far easier to forget to watch for Christ, which is why he reminds us so fervently in today’s gospel to do so. But since watchful alertness takes a great deal of energy and can wear us down over time, we need to also take care to make our spiritual practices sustainable.

Making Connections

Between the readings: The gospel reminds us to be alert; the first reading reminds us that even such alertness is a gift from God. The demands of Christian life may seem tedious at times, but everything we have and everything we are is owed to God. This debt is not an exacting transaction though; it is a warm call from the God who loves us more than we can imagine. God made us with the same care and tenderness of a potter shaping clay, and God promises to keep us, as the second reading says, “firm to the end.”

To experience: Those who claim to be spiritual masters often enjoin us to “live in the present.” There is a wisdom to this advice; becoming too caught up in looking ahead to the future can cause undue anxiety. But the things we hope for and wait for reflect something about who we are, and Advent is a time to look forward. This does not exclude living in the present though—looking for Christ’s coming is not just about looking to the future but also includes seeking and finding it here and now, in the realities of our lives as they are actually lived.

Prayer

God of our darkest days,
 You are the brightest light that burns deep in
 our hearts. Break open your heavens again,
 O God, and tear apart our own false ideologies
 of who you are and where you are and how
 you are. Work in us with a sense of urgency to
 bring your love to those who need it most.
 We ask this through Jesus, the one who is here
 already, the one who is yet to come. **Amen.**

First Reading (Isa 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7)

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

You, LORD, are our father,
 our redeemer you are named forever.
 Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your
 ways,
 and harden our hearts so that we fear you
 not?

Return for the sake of your servants,
 the tribes of your heritage.
 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and
 come down,
 with the mountains quaking before you,
 while you wrought awesome deeds we could
 not hope for,
 such as they had not heard of from of old.
 No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any
 God but you
 doing such deeds for those who wait
 for him.

Would that you might meet us doing right,
 that we were mindful of you in our ways!
 Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful;
 all of us have become like unclean people,
 all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
 we have all withered like leaves,
 and our guilt carries us away like the wind.

Take a nice pause between sections and a shorter pause at the end of each line. The last sentence is wonderfully poetic—enjoy it and take your time delivering it!

There is none who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to cling to you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us up to our guilt.
Yet, O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the work of your hands.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19)

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see
your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine
forth.

Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your
face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has
planted,
the son of man whom you yourself made
strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your
face and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right
hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself
made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your
name.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your
face and we shall be saved.

Second Reading (1 Cor 1:3-9)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul
to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always on your
account
for the grace of God bestowed on you in
Christ Jesus,
that in him you were enriched in every way,
with all discourse and all knowledge,
as the testimony to Christ was confirmed
among you,
so that you are not lacking in any spiritual
gift
as you wait for the revelation of our Lord
Jesus Christ.
He will keep you firm to the end,
irreproachable on the day of our Lord
Jesus Christ.
God is faithful,
and by him you were called to fellowship
with his Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel (Mark 13:33-37; L2B)

A reading from the holy Gospel according
to Mark

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in
charge, each with his own work,
and orders the gatekeeper to be on the
watch.

Pronunciation

Corinthians

kawr-IHN-thee-uhnz

Remember that this is an
actual letter from Saint
Paul to the church in
Corinth. This is why he
opens with the greeting
the way he does. Be com-
fortable reading it as such
followed with a pause.
The next two parts are
the contents of the letter.

This is a very short gos-
pel reading! Make sure
that those listening are, in
fact, doing just that or
this will be half over be-
fore they begin to really
listen. A surefire tech-
nique is to take a really
good pause before you
begin the actual reading.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Watch, therefore;
you do not know when the lord of the
house is coming,
whether in the evening, or at midnight,
or at cockcrow, or in the morning.
May he not come suddenly and find you
sleeping.
What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “John the Baptist appeared in the desert.”

To the point: At the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, John the Baptist simply appears. He suddenly and out of nowhere is there in the desert proclaiming repentance and preparing the way for Jesus’s coming. His childhood is completely invisible, but we who have also read Luke know what it took to get him here. We know the story of

Elizabeth’s unlikely pregnancy; we know her baby leapt in her womb, recognizing and revealing Christ’s presence before he was even born. God does not suddenly start working through John; God gave him a special mission and a special connection to Christ from the moment of his conception. We do not know much about John’s childhood, but we know he was raised by parents who were holy and faithful and also geriatric, likely unable to keep up with their boy, full as he was of the Spirit. Their labor, all that went into raising him, all they taught him, is overlooked here. Mark has him appear with nice dramatic effect. But John doesn’t really appear out of nowhere.



Making Connections

Between the readings: The many layers of meaning of the word “tender” make God’s charge to Isaiah a complex one. “Tenderness” can be kindness, sympathy, affection; it can also be sensitivity and gentleness. To speak tenderly and to offer comfort implies the invisible work of mothering. But Isaiah is also charged with going to a high mountain, to cry at the top of his voice. There is need for both kinds of speaking, for both whispers and shouts. Ministry is made up of both public preaching and intimate conversation. God relates to us both as a community and as individuals.

To experience: Mark’s Gospel does not give us John’s background, and neither does it tell us much about those affected by his ministry. It would be nice to know some individual stories, how the real people who made up his audience were changed by him. In ministry we very often don’t get to know these stories. We are rarely thanked. We scatter seeds in hopes something will take root. This reminds us that, like John, we are not the primary workers here; God is. We clear ways and create conditions in which God can work, but God is the real agent and actor here.

Pronunciation

Zion ZAI-uhn

Judah JOU-duh

This is such a beautiful reading that Handel used the text for part of his oratorio, the *Messiah*. Enjoy the poetic imagery. Follow each section with a good pause. Finally, emphasize the verbs where it feels appropriate.

Prayer

God our companion,
You are the source of True Comfort. Stay with us now, as we wait for your coming. Stay close, keep us company, for the way is often lonely. Help us to know that you are always beside us, even when we do not see you or do not hear you. Help us to feel the glimpses of comfort in this world, the ones that keep us on the path that leads to your beautiful, comforting kingdom.
We ask this through Jesus, the one who walks with us. **Amen.**

First Reading (Isa 40:1-5, 9-11)

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah
Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim
to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated;
indeed, she has received from the hand of
the LORD
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!
Make straight in the wasteland a highway
for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill shall be made low;
the rugged land shall be made a plain,
the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up onto a high mountain,
Zion, herald of glad tidings;
cry out at the top of your voice,

Jerusalem, herald of good news!
 Fear not to cry out
 and say to the cities of Judah:
 Here is your God!
 Here comes with power
 the Lord GOD,
 who rules by his strong arm;
 here is his reward with him,
 his recompense before him.
 Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
 in his arms he gathers the lambs,
 carrying them in his bosom,
 and leading the ewes with care.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14)

R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and
 grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;
 the LORD—for he proclaims peace to his
 people.

Near indeed is his salvation to those who
 fear him,
 glory dwelling in our land.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant
 us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;
 justice and peace shall kiss.
 Truth shall spring out of the earth,
 and justice shall look down from heaven.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant
 us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;
 our land shall yield its increase.

Justice shall walk before him,
 and prepare the way of his steps.

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant
 us your salvation.

Remember that the meaning of repentance is to *change*. This is what the whole reading is about—not feeling sorry for what we have done but to change our ways and not sin again. Deliver this reading with this meaning in mind. Remember to take a nice pause between sections and a slight pause at each comma and period.

Second Reading (2 Pet 3:8-14)

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Peter

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like a
thousand years
and a thousand years like one day.
The Lord does not delay his promise, as some
regard “delay,”
but he is patient with you,
not wishing that any should perish
but that all should come to repentance.
But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,
and then the heavens will pass away with a
mighty roar
and the elements will be dissolved by fire,
and the earth and everything done on it
will be found out.

Since everything is to be dissolved in
this way,
what sort of persons ought you to be,
conducting yourselves in holiness and
devotion,
waiting for and hastening the coming of
the day of God,
because of which the heavens will be
dissolved in flames
and the elements melted by fire.
But according to his promise
we await new heavens and a new earth
in which righteousness dwells.
Therefore, beloved, since you await these
things,
be eager to be found without spot or
blemish before him, at peace.

Gospel (Mark 1:1-8; L5B)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;

he will prepare your way.

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”*

John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River

as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist.

He fed on locusts and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed:

“One mightier than I is coming after me.

I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

I have baptized you with water;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Pronunciation

Judean jou-DEE-uhn

“John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.”

This John the Baptist must have been not just a sight to see but a prophet to hear! So many people followed him that, despite his appearance and behavior, he clearly was revered. How might the above quote be read with this in mind?