

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
2021—B Cycle



Image by [Rachel Strong](#) via Unsplash.com

Opening Prayer

(edited for use here)

God's Nearness and Goodness

Father, you don't promise
I won't experience floods and torrents,
fires and flames.

You do promise to *be* with me.
To know you are near
and that you are good
is all I really need.

I will go anywhere and do anything,
convinced you will never leave me . . .
forsake me . . . abandon me . . .
shame me . . . or reject me.
Amen

Source: [The Gospel Coalition](#)

Scripture Readings

Book of Deuteronomy 4: 1-2, 6-8 "Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees I am teaching you to observe."

Psalms 15: 2-5 "Who does these things (keeps the commandments) shall never be disturbed."

Letter of James 1: 17-18, 21-22, 27 “Religion pure and undefiled . . . is this: to care for orphans and widows and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Mark 7: 1-8 14-15, 21-23 “All evils come from within and they defile.”

A Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy (4: 1-2, 6-8)

“And now, Israel, listen to the norms and laws which I teach that you may put them into practice. And you will live and enter and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, gives you. Do not add anything to what I command you nor take anything away from it. But keep the commandments of Yahweh, your God, as I command you.

“If you observe and practice them, other peoples will regard you as wise and intelligent. When they come to know of all these laws, they will say, ‘There is no people as wise and as intelligent as this great nation.’

“For in truth, is there a nation as great as ours, whose gods are as near to it as Yahweh, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? And is there a nation as great as ours whose norms and laws are as just as this law which I give you today?”

Personal Reflection

The term Deuteronomy means “Second Law,” because in the order Hebrew Scriptures, it came *after* the laws found in the Books of Leviticus and Numbers. In fact, most biblical scholars agree it dates from a time before these other books appeared. The first actual collection of these fragments into a single book took place more than five hundred years after Moses’ encounter with God. In what became the Book of Deuteronomy, we find the first attempt at unifying commands and customs. The book’s purpose? To present Israel the Law in which it found life.

Moses drew a lesson from past experience to convince the escaped slaves to observe God’s law: “Is there a nation whose norms and laws are as just as this Law?”

Yet, there are times in life—as we know from our own personal experience—when temptations are strong, and it may seem that abandoning the divine order will lead to greater happiness. But happiness results from living by God’s law, not mine.

In verse 2, Moses says, “Do not add anything to what I command you nor take anything away.”

— *When have I decided to make my own rules for living, rather than follow God’s way? How did that work out for me? What is my current spiritual life-plan?*

Responsorial Psalm 15 (2-5)

(edited for use here)

Who shall abide in God’s sanctuary?

*The one who does justice
will live in the presence of the Lord.*

Walk blamelessly and do what is right;
Speak truth from your heart
and control your words.
The one who does justice
will live in the presence of the Lord.

Do no harm to your neighbors;
and cast no discredit on your companions.
Look down on evildoers
but highly esteem God's servants.
The one who does justice
will live in the presence of the Lord.

At all costs, stand by a pledged word.
Do not lend money at interest
and refuse any bribe against the innocent.
Do this, and you will not be shaken.
The one who does justice
will live in the presence of the Lord.

Personal Reflection

In this psalm, David longs to be with God, to be one with Yahweh. He counsels those who seek this same kind of passionate desire to choose a life of honesty, sincerity, and virtuous living. David references in song and poetry the values of the Ten Commandments. He lays out three general conditions related to a Jew's conduct toward the neighbor: (1) stand on the side of the friends of God, (2) oppose the enemies of God, and (3) respect the Covenant promises. Unfortunately, Jewish religious leaders limited "neighbor" to its *narrowest* meaning, fellow Jews . . . only. When Jesus arrived, he fought to broaden "neighbor's" meaning to . . . all people of any nationality and race.

The above three injunctions join God and neighbor together. Keeping these commands without genuine love results in the worst kind of religion—mechanical (external) faith, devoid of whole-hearted personal commitment. Sadly, David did not always live by his own advice. This caused him all kinds of sorrow and grief in his older years.

— *What examples from my own life indicate that I am "on the side of the friends of God"?*

— *In what ways do I stand against the "enemies of God"?*

A Reading from the Letter of Saint James (1: 17-18, 21-22, 27)

"Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of Light, in whom there is no change, or shadow of a change. By his own will, he gave us life through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of offering to him, among his creatures.

“So get rid of any filth and reject the prevailing evil. Welcome the word that has been planted in you and has the power to save you. Be doers of the word, and not just hearers, lest you deceive yourselves.

“In the sight of God, our Father, pure and blameless religion lies in helping orphans and widows in their need and keeping oneself from the world’s corruption.”

Personal Reflection

Who is this James who wrote the letter preserved for us in the New Testament? He is the Apostle referred to as the “brother of the Lord.” Though barely mentioned in the Gospels and Acts, James clearly held a high position in the post-Pentecost church, particularly as leader of the Jerusalem church and all Christian communities in Palestine. Living out his ministry within the borders of Israel, James held closely to the best of Jewish traditions. Although Paul criticized James’ disciples, he had great respect for James himself. Most impressive in this letter is the author’s firmness of faith and his conviction that God bestows divine gifts on everyone.

According to theologian [Peter Nathan](#) on [vision.org](#), “More careful study of James shows that his understanding of the relationship between faith and works is not in opposition to Paul’s, but simply focuses on a different aspect of the believer’s life. Both men’s approaches, in fact, are firmly grounded in examples drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures.”

“Blameless religion lies in helping orphans and widows in their need.”

— *Since the beginning of this year, what have I done to aid or assist today’s “orphans and widows,” meaning anyone tossed by the wayside of modern society? If I answer, “Not much,” what might I do differently over the next months?*

The Apostle James says, “Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of Light, in whom there is no change or shadow of a change.”

— *How can I reconcile James’ “changeless” God with the hundreds of Old Testament examples of Yahweh being at times pleased with the chosen people, then, at other times being furious with them, even vengeful and jealous?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23)

“One day, the Pharisees gathered around Jesus. With them were teachers of the law who had just come from Jerusalem. They noticed some of his disciples eating their meal with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. Now the Pharisees, and in fact all the Jews, never eat without washing their hands, for they follow the tradition received from their ancestors. Nor do they eat anything, when they come from the market, without first washing themselves. And there are many other traditions they observe; for example, the ritual washing of cups, pots, and plates.

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but eat with unclean hands?’

“Jesus answered, ‘You shallow people! How well Isaiah prophesied of you when he wrote: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

The worship they offer me is worthless, for what they teach are only human rules. You even put aside the commandment of God to hold fast to human tradition.'

"Jesus then called the people to him again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you. Try to understand. Nothing that enters a person from the outside can make that person unclean. It is what comes from within that makes a person unclean. Let everyone who has ears listen. Evil designs come out of the heart: theft, murder, adultery, jealousy, greed, maliciousness, deceit, indecency, slander, pride, and folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'"

Personal Reflection

Since the end of the first century or at the beginning of the second century, texts of Mark's Gospel existed that predated the other gospels and to some degree formed the foundation of those other writings, especially those of Matthew and Luke.

Mark was not one of the twelve apostles but accompanied Peter and put the lead apostle's memories and teaching into writing. Arriving with Peter in Rome, Mark probably met Paul. Unlike Peter and Paul, Mark did not die during the persecution in Rome. He went on to establish the Church of Alexandria, Egypt. Mark died around 68 AD/CE, a few years after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.

Who were those Pharisees? They were legal experts in the Jewish scriptures and traditions. They belonged to a branch of Judaism that believed in the resurrection of the dead. They went off track by mistaking the man-made traditions that had multiplied over the centuries as having greater authority over Jewish life than the original Ten Commandments and the commandment-based teachings of Moses. Thus, they berated Jesus and his disciples for their emphasis on *internal* conversion of mind, heart, and body.

— *Where do I place the greater emphasis in my own practice of Catholicism—on rule keeping or on deep internal conversion to Christ? What standards or principles will I use in making this assessment? (Pondering my answer demands that I step back and examine myself honestly in light of Jesus' teaching in this gospel passage.)*

— *In my early years as a Catholic (childhood for most of us, later conversion for others), what principles guided the way I lived my Catholic faith at that time? In what ways have I matured as a believer since then? In what ways might I have "backslid" from my early years of faithful participation in the worship and life of my Church?*

— *Who has had the most influence on the way I live my faith? (Offer a prayer for them as they come to mind.)*

For Inspirational Viewing/Listening

Video:

Mark 7:1-8,14-15, 21-23 [homily](#) by Episcopal priest [Lauren McLeavey](#)

Music:

A song for those us who have lost a loved one, spouse, or life partner.

“[Jealous of the Angels](#)” sung by [Katherine Jenkins](#) and written by singer-songwriter [Jenn Bostic](#)

The Week Ahead

Journaling Prompts

— *Based on this weekend’s Scripture readings, what does the Risen Christ ask me to do TODAY regarding . . .*

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God’s love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

Who this week needs to hear from me some expression of love?

Who needs to receive from me a moment of laughter and personal concern?

Why do I hesitate?

In the light of this weekend’s Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Week’s Scriptures

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 35: 4-7 “Say to those whose hearts are frightened: ‘Be strong, fear not.’”

Psalms 146: 6-10 “The God of Jacob . . . secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry.”

Letter of St. James 2: 1-5 “Show no partiality as you adhere to the faith.”

Mark 7: 31-37 “People brought to Jesus a deaf man who had a speech impediment.”

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Recovering Pharisee

Music and lyrics by [Buddy Greene](#)

Album: [Re: Sinners & Saints](#)

I need you God of all grace
each and every day,
if I’m to run your race,
if I’m to walk in your way.

I don’t have to be a slave to sin;
don’t have to let evil win,
because the Son of God lives in me
and promises to set me free.

So, Jesus, help my unbelief
so I can follow you faithfully.
You're the Shepherd, I'm the sheep,
and you're helping me,
a recovering Pharisee,
to be honest with you.

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

The Sunday readings are from [*Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition*](#)

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Follow this link to my spiritual novel, [*Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*](#).

Coming soon!! *Inspector Javert: At the Gates of Hell*

(a novel exploring "what happens next?" after we die)