

LITURGY & LIFE
THE EMMAUS JOURNEY

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

A Catholic Update Companion to the Sunday Readings

AUTHENTIC GREATNESS THROUGH HUMBLE SERVICE

Practice what you profess • Carry another's burden • Serve without seeking honor • Let greatness
become service

1: FOR THE HOMILIST/PCL OR OCIA CO-ORD.: CHRIST SPEAKS - WE LISTEN

Sunday Readings

Liturgical Color	Green — Ordinary Time
First Reading	Malachi 1:14b–2:2b, 8–10
Responsorial Psalm	Psalm 131:1, 2, 3
Second Reading	1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13
Gospel	Matthew 23:1–12

The Heart of This Sunday's Gospel

AUTHORITY THAT BECOMES SERVICE

Jesus warns against leaders who love places of honor, visible signs of importance, and titles that set them above others. Their failure is not merely pride; they place heavy burdens on people without helping to carry them. Christ offers a different pattern: one Father, one Teacher, one Master—and disciples who become brothers and sisters through humble service. “The greatest among you must be your servant.”

The Liturgical Thread

Malachi confronts priests who have turned from the way and caused others to stumble. Psalm 131 answers with the quiet humility of a child resting in a mother's arms. Saint Paul describes ministry not as self-promotion but as tender, self-giving care. In the Gospel, Jesus exposes religious leadership that seeks honor without service and teaches that greatness in His Kingdom is found in humility.

THE MOVEMENT OF THE READINGS

Unfaithful leadership causes others to stumble → Humility rests quietly in God → Ministry gives not only the Gospel but the self → Greatness becomes service

Listening With the Heart

Listen

Read Matthew 23:1–12 slowly. Listen for the contrast between those who “preach but do not practice” and Jesus' command: “The greatest among you must be your servant.” Notice what attracts recognition, what burdens others, and what quietly serves.

Reflect

Where is there a gap between what I profess and how I live? Do I use faith to appear important, or to become more available to others? Whose burdens could I help carry? What title, role, or recognition am I tempted to protect?

Pray

Ask Jesus to free you from hypocrisy, vanity, and the desire to be admired. Pray for clergy, catechists, sponsors, parents, and parish leaders. Ask for the grace to serve without needing attention and to practice what you teach.

Rest

Rest before the one Father and the one Teacher. Let Christ remove the pressure to prove yourself. Receive your dignity as a beloved child, then allow that security to become humble service.

Carry This Word

MATTHEW 23:11–12

“The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

2: FOR THE CATECHIST: THE CHURCH TEACHES - WE LEARN

Catechetical Focus

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Through Baptism, every Christian is called to holiness and mission. Authority, knowledge, gifts, and ministry are entrusted for the building up of Christ's Body. Jesus does not abolish leadership; He purifies it. Christian leadership becomes credible when word and deed agree, when burdens are shared, and when the leader points beyond self to the Father and to Christ.

Catholic Update Resources

PRIMARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C1209A | The Universal Call to Holiness: Empowering the Laity

This resource grounds the Sunday in the baptismal vocation shared by all Christians. Holiness is not a private achievement or a clerical specialty. Every member of the Church receives gifts, responsibilities, and a mission. The Update helps participants see that the remedy for status-seeking is not passivity but mature, grace-filled participation in the life and mission of the Church.

SECONDARY CATHOLIC UPDATE

C0104A | Parish Ministry Today: We're All in It Together

This resource translates the Gospel into parish practice. Ministry is not a stage for recognition but cooperation in Christ's work. Clergy and laity serve in distinct and complementary ways; each person's gifts matter, and every ministry must remain accountable to the Gospel, the communion of the Church, and the needs of God's people.

The Catechist's Companion

Key Teaching

Holiness gives ministry its soul. Shared ministry gives holiness a concrete form. The disciple does not ask first, "What title do I hold?" but "Whose burden can I help carry?"

Session Aim

Help participants recognize that every baptized person is called to holiness, that Christian authority exists for service, and that credibility grows when belief, speech, and action become one.

Formation Objectives

- Explain Jesus' criticism of religious hypocrisy in Matthew 23:1–12.
- Describe holiness as the vocation of every baptized person.
- Distinguish Christian authority from domination, status, or self-promotion.
- Identify Saint Paul's maternal image of tender pastoral care.
- Choose one hidden act of service that carries another person's burden.

Integrating This Week's Catholic Updates

C1209A establishes the universal vocation: holiness is not reserved for clergy or religious but belongs to every baptized person. C0104A supplies the parish application: ministry is shared service in which gifts are offered for the good of the whole Body. Together they move participants from status to discipleship, and from title to responsibility.

Expand the Conversation

- Why does Jesus condemn those who teach but do not practice?
- What makes authority credible in the Christian community?
- How does Saint Paul model tenderness and self-giving ministry?
- Where can lay people exercise humble leadership in parish and daily life?

Common Misunderstandings

- Jesus does not reject legitimate teaching authority; He condemns hypocrisy, vanity, and leadership that refuses service.
- Humility is not denying one's gifts. It is receiving them from God and using them without making oneself the center.
- The universal call to holiness does not erase different vocations or offices. It means every vocation is ordered toward holiness and mission.
- Lay ministry is not a substitute for ordained ministry. The gifts of clergy and laity are distinct, complementary, and directed toward the same communion.
- Service does not earn God's love. It is the fruit of grace and the outward sign of a life being conformed to Christ.

Church References

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 874–879; 897–913; 1809; 1936–1938; 2012–2016; 2039. Scripture connections: Micah 6:8; Matthew 20:25–28; John 13:1–15; Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–27; Philippians 2:3–11; 1 Peter 5:1–6.

OCIA Connection

OCIA participants may assume that “real ministry” belongs only to priests or experienced parish leaders. This Sunday reveals Baptism as a call to holiness, service, and mission. At the same time, it introduces the ordered communion of the Church: different roles exist, but no role exists for self-exaltation. Sponsors and catechists should model this by carrying burdens, listening patiently, and directing attention toward Christ rather than themselves.

Catechist's Insight

PASTORAL CARE

Keep the Gospel's challenge universal. Do not weaponize it against clergy, teachers, parents, or

parish leaders. Every Christian can seek admiration or place burdens on others. Affirm legitimate authority while showing that all authority in the Church is accountable to Christ's pattern of service.

Avoid turning this Gospel into an attack on clergy or religious institutions. Jesus speaks first to every disciple who enjoys being noticed, praised, consulted, or obeyed. Invite honest examination while affirming the Church's need for faithful authority. The central pastoral question is not "Who is at fault?" but "Does my manner of leading make Christ easier to encounter?"

3: FOR THE CANDIDATE/CATECHUMEN: THE DISCIPLE RESPONDS - WE LIVE

Living the Gospel This Week

- Do my actions confirm or contradict the faith I profess?
- Where do I seek recognition, titles, or control?
- Whose burden could I help carry this week?
- Do I listen before I instruct?
- How do I use my gifts for the good of the parish or household?
- What hidden service would help me grow in humility?

Choosing to Be an Intentional Disciple

WHAT IS CHRIST ASKING OF ME TODAY?

Where am I being called to make my faith more credible through humble, practical service?

Intentional discipleship refuses the split between appearance and reality. The disciple learns from Christ, receives every role as stewardship, and measures greatness by service. Holiness becomes visible in consistency: prayer shapes conduct, authority protects the vulnerable, knowledge becomes patience, and gifts become responsibility.

Holy Habit

THE SERVANT-LEADER EXAMEN

At day's end ask: Did my words and actions agree? Did I make someone's burden heavier or lighter?
Did I use my role to serve, protect, encourage, and point toward Christ?

Faith Into Practice

- Perform one necessary task without announcing it.
- Thank someone whose service is usually unnoticed.
- Offer practical help to a person carrying a heavy responsibility.
- Examine whether your words and actions are consistent.
- Volunteer for a parish need that does not bring prestige.
- Pray for a leader before criticizing that person.
- Use one personal gift to strengthen another member of the community.

Personal Reflection

If the greatest disciple is the servant, where is Christ asking me to step down from recognition and step into responsibility?

4: FOR THE SPONSOR: THE CHURCH SENDS - WE WITNESS

Sponsor's Path of Accompaniment

Share Your Faith	Describe a time when someone's quiet service made faith credible to you, or when a responsibility taught you that leadership is more about carrying burdens than receiving recognition.
Walk Together	Ask: "Where do you feel called to contribute?" Listen for gifts, fears, and prior experiences of leadership. Help the participant distinguish a genuine call to serve from pressure to perform.
Pray Together	Read Matthew 23:8–12 and Philippians 2:3–8. Pray for humility, integrity, and the grace to use every gift for the good of others.
Experience the Church	Meet or observe a parish minister whose work is mostly unseen—sacristan, catechist, visitor to the homebound, maintenance volunteer, or bereavement minister. Ask what faithful service has taught them.
Continue the Journey	Each person chooses one hidden act of service and one concrete way to encourage a parish leader or volunteer during the week.

Faith at Home

Create a household "hidden service" practice. Each person quietly performs one helpful action during the week without claiming credit. At the next family meal, discuss how unseen service changed the atmosphere of the home. Conclude by praying for parents, teachers, clergy, civic leaders, and all whose decisions affect others.

Parish Life

Invite parish leaders and members to examine the culture of ministry. Are responsibilities shared? Are volunteers formed and thanked? Are titles treated as privileges or as calls to service? Can newcomers discover and offer their gifts? Choose one concrete way to recognize hidden service and one way to make participation more accessible.

Go Forth This Week

Practice what you profess, carry another person's burden, and let every role become service.

Prayer for the Week

Father of all, You alone are the source of every gift and every vocation. Free me from the desire to appear important. Make my words truthful, my actions consistent, and my service generous. Teach

me to carry burdens rather than add to them. Bless the clergy, lay ministers, parents, teachers, sponsors, and leaders who serve Your people. Form us into one Body in which every gift points to Christ and every responsibility becomes love. Amen.

Emmaus Insight

Holiness becomes credible when the disciple stops reaching for honor and begins carrying the burdens of others.