

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. 2026

It seems to me that there are actually four “doses” of “Ordinary Time”, each with a distinctive flavor. The first dose extends from the end of the Christmas Season to February 2. This post Epiphany “dose”, it seems to me, reflects the freshness of the Lord Jesus public mission as He began His teaching and healing ministry. At the start of His public mission, people admired what He said and did. Controversy came inevitably, but it came later. Thus, in today’s Gospel (John 1:29-34) we hear John the Baptist joyfully point Jesus of Nazareth out as “The Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.” In next Sunday’s Gospel (Matthew 4:12-23), we find Jesus “teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.” In the Gospel for February 1 (Matthew 5:1-22), we hear the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, with Jesus’ deeply consoling Beatitudes, Blessed are the poor in spirit, etc.

There is another “dose” of “Ordinary Time” extending from February 2 to Ash Wednesday (February 18 this year), and two more “doses” of “Ordinary Time” after Pentecost, but all of those can wait for another homily. For now, I want to focus on the first “dose” of “Ordinary Time”, the one we are now imbibing. In this “dose” we are given the opportunity to relive to some degree the freshness of the start of the Lord Jesus’ Ministry, the freshness that enabled His proclamation to be called “The Good News.” John the Baptist testifies to this freshness in today’s Gospel. He testifies to Someone whose like the world has never seen before, nor ever will see again, to “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)

That freshness of the “Good News” is hard for us to relive. We have heard and read all of the Gospels, many of us many times. This might be a good time to hear and read the Gospels with an awareness that they contain all that we truly need to know about Jesus’ mortal life and work. Out of a mass of early Christian sayings, and recollections, the Holy Church, under divine inspiration, selected those we call “The Four Gospels” to tell us everything that any and every generation of Christians NEEDS to know about the teaching, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ. We might be curious about things the four Gospels don’t mention, but as St Peter Damien pointed out back in the 11th Century, such curiosity, while not inherently sinful, is spiritually useless. What has been given us, by God, in the four Gospels, through the Church, is what we need to know about the life, teachings, and work of Jesus Christ, what is essential for living as a good Christian in this world, and what we need to enter Eternal Life.

With that in mind, we should read the Gospels fresh, trying to forget all other private revelations, reflections, or pious statements. Simply from the texts of the four Gospels, handed on to us by Holy Church, what do we NEED to know about Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God?

That is too much for one homily, really. It is too much for four. What I want to do in the next four homilies is suggest, appropriately for Year A of the three year cycle of Sunday Gospel readings, a few things about Jesus Christ that seem to leap out of the Gospels when, God helping, we hear and read them with fresh ears.

One thing we discover is that Jesus Christ is merciful, but not at all mild mannered. He loves human beings, but sometimes it is definitely a “tough love”.

Now, most people, most of the time, do not need His tough love. Most people are basically poor, making their way in the world without much margin for error and misfortune,

constantly prey to anxiety, and always somewhat at the mercy of masters, lords, or government agencies (lords at least had faces!) Most people are basically weak in worldly terms, not able to influence even local events, let alone national ones, and dependent on somebody else, whether master, lord, or boss, for a livelihood. Most people, poor and worried, need to hear from Jesus Christ that His Father loves them, and is full of compassionate mercy for their mistakes. Jesus Christ shows that God's compassion for the poor, the weak, the broken, and the confused, is boundless, reaching far beyond the narrow bounds of human patience. The shattered husband whose wife left him and took the kids; the weary woman whose husband hasn't had a kind word for her in 30 years; the man whose career is wrecked beyond repair, and in middle age has to find the hope and courage to reinvent himself; the family without a bank account or valid identification (this can happen much more easily than we realize to native born citizens, if they are a little stupid and very unlucky) who are facing homelessness - all of these desperately need to hear about the humanly incredible compassion of the Heavenly Father for all of their misfortunes and mistakes.

While beautifully revealing the mercy and compassion of God, Jesus Christ is not shown in the Gospels to be "meek and mild." I hope I never again have to hear the unscriptural words "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." The same Jesus Who knew with painful tenderness how much the poor, the weak, the broken, and the blundering, need to hear of the Heavenly Father's mercy and compassion, spoke in quite a different way to the rich, the powerful, the complacent and the successful. Hypocrite! Brood of vipers! Those are fighting words; and I can almost see the look on his face as He speaks them. It is a fighting look. He is furious at the automatic contempt of the rich for the poor. He hates the way the powerful exploit the weak. He is furious with the indifference of the complacent to those who are struggling to survive this day, this week. He can't stand the way the successful despise the world's blunderers, the "losers." "Pick on someone more your size", He seems to say. Pick on Me.

They did, of course.

Beyond those infuriating people, infuriating not because they were mistaken but because they refused to imagine that they could be mistaken, He saw the real enemy. He saw Satan. Another thing that leaps out from the Gospels about Jesus Christ is that He came to fight Satan to the finish. To the annoyance of such ultra-refined critics as poor old T. Jefferson, the Gospels are full of exorcisms. To the disappointment of people raised on the bizarre junk food diet of modern movies, these exorcisms are not very dramatic. "Be quiet. Come out of him." Basically, Jesus tells the demons "Shut up and go away." And they do. While deadly dangerous to mere human beings, they pose no danger to Him. He commands, and even they must obey. Such power! How good it is that He is on our side.

And so He is.

He is on the side of sinful, hopeful, struggling, stumbling, often bumbling, and sometimes heroic humanity. He is even on the side of the rich, the powerful, and the successful, if they are willing to admit that they are part of sinful, hopeful, struggling, stumbling, often bumbling, and sometimes heroic humanity, like England's Henry III, who insisted on calling the thousands of poor people he helped not "Beggars" but "Brothers." When our arrogance requires it, He, not meek and mild, can be tough with us. Most of the time, when our need, sometimes desperate, calls out for it, He tenderly reaches down to us with the mercy and compassion of God.

Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest.

