



31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

RESPONSE: Psalm 131

Like a child rests
in its mother's arms,
so will I
rest in you.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

If you are humble,
God will reward you.
If you are humble,
you will be blessed.
Alleluia, alleluia!



EVALUATION

We are providing this brief evaluation form for use after you have celebrated this Sunday's liturgy with the children.

Notes for future reference:

What went well?

What needs improvement?

LITURGICAL SEASON BACKGROUND

During these last weeks of Ordinary Time we turn our thoughts to the end of time. In the previous weeks we have been reflecting on life in the kingdom of God and our share in building that kingdom here on earth.

Last Sunday the Gospel focused on the heart of the teachings of Jesus: we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and body . . . and our neighbor as ourselves. This Sunday, Jesus advises us again, as he did on the 29th Sunday, to serve only one Master. Those who are servants will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus at the end of time, as a King on clouds of majesty, we examine how well we have sought to serve rather than be served. In our reflections, we recall the way in which our God — the God of all creation — came to walk with us, not to be served but to serve us. How can we feel anything but gratitude and awe in the presence of such a loving God? Should we not be honored to be a servant?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND

“Practice what you preach” is an aphorism that aptly sums up the readings for this Sunday. It is almost the rule rather than the exception that leaders of the people of God have failed, fallen to the temptations of their profession. Worldly wise corporate managers would probably wonder whether God could not use some help in choosing leaders. The wisdom of God, however, is not that of the world. God can turn total failures into even greater successes.

When leaders failed and strayed, God always raised up someone who would bring people back to the right path. So did God send the prophet Malachi to rebuke the faithless leaders of God's people who were preaching the law of Moses but doing what served themselves rather than God. Similarly, Jesus made it clear to the Jewish religious leaders that they, too, were phonies when they said one thing but did another. Their interests were to be served, to lord it over others, rather than to serve, to humble themselves before others and God.

Jesus demonstrated in his life and particularly in his death, the way of the servant. A true leader in the eyes of God is not someone who lords it over others and is self-serving; rather, such a person is self-giving as a servant in the presence of the master.

To be a servant is a no small challenge in our society where we are taught to seek position, power, and possessions for our self-serving needs. Our children are particularly susceptible to this influence. That is why it is so important that we — the significant adults in the lives of our children — practice the Gospel that we preach.

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LITURGICAL ENVIRONMENT

The environment for Ordinary Time is simple, featuring a candle, a plant or group of plants, and perhaps some incense. The liturgical color of the season is green.

You might display the *SUNDAY Scripture Poster* which, this week is an illustration of the Gospel, showing children and adults serving one another in various ways. The poster could be sent home with a different family each week to color for the next celebration. The book of God's word, displayed facing the assembly, is the focal point of the gathering space.

CENTERING / PROCESSIONAL SONG

You might use the same centering/gathering song for several Sundays during this season. Suggestions:

- "To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King" (*Vol. 2 Sing God A Simple Song*, #46, Treehaus Communications). You might follow the gestures suggested in *Sing God A Simple Song*.
- "Song of the Body of Christ" (*Vol. 1 Sing God A Simple Song*, #30, Treehaus Communications). This would be an appropriate song for the closing Sundays of the liturgical year. When used as a centering song, rather than as a processional, you might use the movement and gestures suggested in *Sing God a Simple Song*.
- "Psalm 100: We are God's People" (*Vol. 1 Sing God A Simple Song*, #38, Treehaus Communications). When used as a centering song rather than as a processional, the children can follow the movements suggested in *Sing God a Simple Song*.

We are God's people . . . (*Children stand in a circle and hold hands. When they sing the first phrase, they move clockwise.*)

the flock of the Lord. (*Children stop and raise their held hands.*)

(For the second phrase, children do the same gesture, moving in the opposite direction. While the verses are sung, children simply hold hands in a circle.)

FIRST READING *Malachi 1:8-10*

The reader may be either a child or an adult; in either case, the person should know ahead of time in order to prepare carefully. This passage might be read slowly in a tone of disappointment rather than anger.

PSALM RESPONSE

The psalm is not only a response to the first reading; rather, "responsorial" is descriptive of the way the psalm is prayed, with the children responding to the cantor or leader. You might use the same psalm through several Sundays. *Suggestions:*

- "Psalm 131: Like a Child Rests" (Walker, *SUNDAY Book of Readings/Lectionary Adapted for Children and SUNDAY Weekly Leader's Guide*, Year A, page 126, Treehaus Communications; *Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word*, Cycle A, Treehaus Communications/O.C.P. Publications).
- "Psalm 100: We Are God's People" (*Vol. 1 Sing God A Simple Song*, #38, Treehaus Communications).
- "Psalm 103: Bless the Lord, My Soul" (*Vol. 2 Sing God A Simple Song*, #36, Treehaus Communications).
- "Psalm 122: I Rejoiced" (*Vol. 2 Sing God A Simple Song*, #6, Treehaus Communications).

You might follow the gestures as recommended in *Sing God a Simple Song*.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Suggestions:

- "If You Are Humble" (Walker, *SUNDAY Book of Readings/Lectionary Adapted for Children and SUNDAY Weekly Leader's Guide*, Year A, page 126, Treehaus Communications; *Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word*, Cycle A, Treehaus Communications/O.C.P. Publications).
- "Alleluia" (*Vol. 1 Sing God A Simple Song*, #42, Treehaus Communications). You might follow the gestures as recommended in *Sing God a Simple Song* which suggests simply swaying back and forth for each "alleluia."
- "Peace Is Flowing Like A River" Alleluia verse. (*Vol. 2 Sing God A Simple Song*, #51, Treehaus Communications). You might follow the gestures suggested in *Sing God A Simple Song*.

GOSPEL *Matthew 23:1-12*

Usually the presider reads the Gospel. Jesus is disappointed with the Jewish leaders, so the text might be read to convey that disappointment. Avoid a tone that would suggest Jesus is ridiculing them or putting them down.

HOMILY OUTLINE

See the SUNDAY Weekly Leader Guide, Year A, pages 126 and 127, for "Focus of the Readings" and "Reflecting on the Readings With Children." When reflecting on the scriptures with children we take our cues from the children's responses. In so doing, you might use some of the questions below to enrich their appreciation of God's word.

WE LISTEN TO GOD SPEAK

- What might the children in the assembly hear God saying to them in today's readings?
- How might you engage the children in the biblical experience with open-ended questions?

Examples for this week's readings:

Concerning the first reading:

- How do you think the priests of Israel felt when they heard what God said to them?
- How do you think God will let the people see "how wrong (the priests) are"?
- How do you think the priests might have failed God?
- What do you think will happen to the leaders when the people see how dishonest they have been?
- Malachi asks the people why they were dishonest with each other and why they hurt one another. What do you think they responded?
- How do you think Malachi felt when he confronted the people? What kind of person would be able to do this?
- What do you think is "the covenant of our family" that Malachi mentioned?

Concerning the Gospel:

- How do you think the disciples felt toward what Jesus told them about the dishonesty of the religious leaders? Why do you think Jesus called this to their attention? Might he have thought they could not see this for themselves?
- If some of the religious leaders were in the crowd, how do you think they might have felt when they heard what Jesus had to say about them?
- Why do you think the Jewish religious leaders said one thing but did another?
- What do you think made it possible for Jesus to see the dishonesty of the religious leaders?
- What do you think Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples that they must be servants of one another?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "If you try to make yourself important, you will stumble"?

WE REFLECT

ON THE REIGN OF GOD

- How can you invite the children to look out of the biblical experience at their lives today?
- How can you use the biblical imagery of today's readings to explore God's presence in our lives today?

Examples for this week's readings

Concerning the first reading:

- In what way have you today turn away from God? In what way does God protect us today from such leaders?
- Why do you think some powerful positions want and not the whole truth to teach only what they want?
- What is it like for you want God to protect you to be misled? How would you people who have a covenant of our family." How do who have a covenant with God keep or break that covenant in the way we treat one another?
- How do you think people and their leaders, all of whom are created by the same God, are expected by God to treat one another?

Concerning the Gospel:

- In what way do people today say one thing but do another? In what way is this dishonest?
- Who are the important people today? What makes them important? How are they treated?
- How have people today, who have made themselves important, stumbled?
- How do people who are humble act? How do you think God will make them great?
- How are people who serve others, as Jesus served, treated in our society?
- What is it like for you to be a servant? What do you do? How do you feel inside, in your heart? In what way does serving others give you a sense of importance?
- What is it like for you to feel important? What happens to you when you have feelings of being important?
- What is it like for you to feel unimportant? What happens when you have these feelings?
- How would you describe a humble person? In what way are humble people also honest people, about themselves and about others? What is it like for you to be humble?

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WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- How might you attune yourself to encourage the children's own creative responses to God's word?
- How might the Spirit be moving the children to respond to God's word in praise and thanksgiving?

Examples for this week's readings:

Concerning the first reading:

- What can we do to tell the whole truth, to be honest in our relationship with one another and with God?
- What can we do to heal our broken relationships with one another and with God?

Concerning the Gospel:

- What can we do to be better servants?
- What can we do to be humble?
- What can we do to avoid being misled by leaders and other people who preach one thing but do another?

CREED

Invite the children to profess their faith by creedal statements that echo the readings. Reflect on what the readings say about God as Creator, Jesus as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life. Express these statements so that the children can give their assent to them. This week's readings, for example, offer these options:

- God, who protects us from people who are dishonest; who sent Jesus to show us how to serve as God has served us.
- Jesus, who is the Master teacher and servant; who teaches us the way to be humble; who shows us how to serve.
- Holy Spirit, who fills us with the power to love as Jesus loves; who helps us to be humble and to see ourselves as God sees us.

PRAYERS OF FAITHFUL

The proclamation of the word leads us to change our lives and express our gratitude in the celebration of the Eucharist. After the children have offered their prayers and concerns, you might also offer petitions based on the scripture texts. See notes for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time for guidelines on preparing petitions.

In formulating the prayers, you might draw from the verbs or "action words" and biblical images in this week's readings. For example: *teach, serve, tell the truth, see, be humble.*

NOTE: Arrange to have the Sunday Scripture Leaflets given to the children as they are leaving Mass. Encourage the children and parents to use these leaflets through the week to continue reflecting prayerfully on God's Word. In addition, emphasize the use of the Light of the World, Our Family Spiritual Life Journal, pages 132 and 133, (Treehaus Communications, Inc.) as a way of assisting the family's deeper reflection on God's word at home.



CENTERING / PROCESSIONAL SONG

• "To Jesus Christ Our Sovereign King" (Vol. 2 Sing God A Simple Song, #46, Treehaus Communications).

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

OPENING PRAYER

Presider: O God, you are so good to us. You protect us and want us to watch out for each other. You are always honest with us and expect us to be honest with one another. You have always served our needs and sent Jesus to teach us how to serve one another not for our sake but for your greater honor and glory. So do we gather now to praise you and pray to you in the name of Jesus that you will guide us always in your ways.

All: Amen.

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

FIRST READING Malachi 1:8-10

Today's Reader: _____

Presider: The prophet Malachi tells us how our God protects us from being misled.

PSALM RESPONSE

Presider or Leader of Song: Our God guards over us with loving care, so we sing in praise:

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

• "If You Are Humble" (Walker, SUNDAY Book of Readings/Lectionary Adapted for Children and SUNDAY Weekly Leader Guide, Year A, page 126, Treehaus Communications; Music for Children's Liturgy of the Word, Cycle A, Treehaus Communications/O.C.P. Publications).

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

GOSPEL Matthew 23:1-12

Today's Reader: _____

Preliminary Comments: Jesus tells us who is the greatest among us.

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HOMILY

Focal Points: Our God protects us from people who try to lead us astray. God is always honest with us and expects us to be honest with one another. God has always served the needs of people and, in Jesus, personally became a servant of people. Jesus shows us the way to avoid being misled. He helps us to see ourselves as God sees us, not as we appear to be but as we are in our hearts. Jesus shows us the way to serve one another as God has served us, not for our glory but for God's greater honor and glory. So are those who serve considered important in God's kingdom.

Outline:

CREED

Presider: Let us proclaim our faith in the God of love.

• Do you believe in God, who is always honest with us and protects us from being misled.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in God, who . . .

• Do you believe in Jesus, who came to serve us and to show us God's way of honesty and humility.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in Jesus, who . . .

• Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who helps us to see ourselves as God sees us.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, who . . .

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: Our God protects us and never misleads us. So do we trust in God when we pray. (After the children have offered their prayers, you might also add prayers based on today's scripture texts. For example:)

+ May the leaders of nations and all peoples know that we are all created by the same God who loves us all and wants us all to care for one another; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

+ May the people of our churches and our leaders serve God with honesty and humility; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

+ May we in our families and neighborhoods protect one another and serve one another as brothers and sisters in God's family; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

CLOSING PRAYER

Presider: O God, you show us the way to be honest, truthful, and loving servants. You have come yourself, in Jesus, to be our servant. Now you gather us at your Table to serve us the Sacred Food of life everlasting. In gratitude we give you all that we have: our hearts filled with praise and joy everlasting.

All: Amen.

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

NOTE: Arrange to have the *Sunday Scripture Leaflets* given to the children as they are leaving Mass. Encourage the children and parents to use these leaflets and the *Light of the World, Our Family Spiritual Life Journal* throughout the week.

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God, our Maker, all people are important to you and you despise no one. Do not let us think we are more important than others, but make us more like Jesus, who loved especially those who were rejected. May we understand better that to know we really need you is to be filled with your gifts. We pray this prayer to you through Christ, our Lord.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

The scriptures give us many images of God: shepherd, king, eagle with her young, and so forth. Today's readings suggest the image of God as creative parent.

The reading from *Malachi* is a plea for unity, both in what is taught and in the relationships among the believers. The motivation for this unity is we have all been created by the same God.

Our Gospel for today presents the same, with a little more expansion. Malachi rebukes the priests of his time for not teaching the truth. Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who don't practice what they teach! His lesson ends with the same call to unity we find in *Malachi*. We are to call no one on earth master because we all have one Master. That truth motivates our equality.

If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else.

FIRST READING: *Malachi 1:8-10*

This is a reading from the prophet Malachi.

This is what God says to the priests of Israel:

“You have turned away from my ways. You have led my people away because of the things you teach. You have not kept my covenant, and you teach only what you want to teach and not the whole truth. So I will let the people see how wrong you are, and they will turn away from you.”

The prophet Malachi said to the people:

“We have all been created by the same God, haven't we? Then why are we dishonest with each other? Why do we break the covenant of our family and hurt one another?”

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: *Psalm 131*

REFRAIN:

Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in you. Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in you.

VERSES 1-3: to Refrain

1. My God, — I am not proud. I do not look for things too great.
2. My God, — I trust in you. You care for me, you give me peace.
3. O Is-ra-el, — trust in God, — now and al-ways trust in God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

1. If you are hum-ble, God will re-ward you.
2. Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia!

1.-2. If you are hum-ble, you will be blessed.

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HOMILY

Focal Points: Our God protects us from people who try to lead us astray. God is always honest with us and expects us to be honest with one another. God has always served the needs of people and, in Jesus, personally became a servant of people. Jesus shows us the way to avoid being misled. He helps us to see ourselves as God sees us, not as we appear to be but as we are in our hearts. Jesus shows us the way to serve one another as God has served us, not for our glory but for God's greater honor and glory. So are those who serve considered important in God's kingdom.

Outline:

CREED

Presider: Let us proclaim our faith in the God of love.

• Do you believe in God, who is always honest with us and protects us from being misled.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in God, who . . .

• Do you believe in Jesus, who came to serve us and to show us God's way of honesty and humility.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in Jesus, who . . .

• Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, who helps us to see ourselves as God sees us.

All: Yes, we believe! *Or:* Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, who . . .

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Presider: Our God protects us and never misleads us. So do we trust in God when we pray. (After the children have offered their prayers, you might also add prayers based on today's scripture texts. For example:)

+ May the leaders of nations and all peoples know that we are all created by the same God who loves us all and wants us all to care for one another; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

+ May the people of our churches and our leaders serve God with honesty and humility; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

+ May we in our families and neighborhoods protect one another and serve one another as brothers and sisters in God's family; we pray.

All: Hear us, O God.

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

CLOSING PRAYER

Presider: O God, you show us the way to be honest, truthful, and loving servants. You have come yourself, in Jesus, to be our servant. Now you gather us at your Table to serve us the Sacred Food of life everlasting. In gratitude we give you all that we have: our hearts filled with praise and joy everlasting.

All: Amen.

Substitutions/Additional Notes:

NOTE: Arrange to have the *Sunday Scripture Leaflets* given to the children as they are leaving Mass. Encourage the children and parents to use these leaflets and the *Light of the World, Our Family Spiritual Life Journal* throughout the week.

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GOSPEL: *Matthew 23:1-12*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

One day Jesus said to his disciples
and all the people who were there with them,

“The Pharisees and teachers of the law
are important people.

They are teachers of the law of Moses.

So do whatever they tell you.

But don't do what they do,

because they say one thing

and do something else.

They don't do

what they teach other people to do.

“They do everything

so that people will notice them.

They want everyone to see what they do.

For example, when they pray,

they wear clothes

that call attention to themselves,

and they always take the places of honor

at celebrations or in the synagogues.

They love to have people

pay special attention to them

and to call them, ‘teacher.’

“I don't want anyone to call you,

‘teacher’ or ‘master,’

because you have only one teacher

and one master—the Christ.

The one who is greatest among you

is the servant.

If you try to make yourself important,
you will stumble.

But if you are humble,

God will make you great.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
WITH CHILDREN:

Both points of today's focus should be discussed. Help the children see that God is beyond *all* images. We can't see God. We don't know really what God is like. But we see what God does. So we say God is *like* (acts like) a shepherd because God guides and cares for us. God is also like a mother, a king, an eagle, a father, and so forth. These images help us to know God better. But God is not really any of those things. God acts like those things. This notion of images for God is extremely important in order that the children not be fixated on any one image. The multiple images of God in scripture give us a wonderful freedom in relating to God. Each of us finds in scripture those images most helpful to ourselves. We can, by presenting many images, help children grow in their relationship with God.

Ask the children:

- How is God like a mother or father?

Lead the discussion along these lines (if possible in your situation.) Children who have the same father or mother are brothers and sisters. Malachi and Jesus tell us that because we all have the same God, who is like a father or mother, we are brothers and sisters. Explore that image (brothers and sisters) with the children. How do brothers and sisters act toward one another? Help them see that this is what Jesus means by “If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else.” For Jesus, no one is better than anyone else. We are all equal and should serve one another.