



a Kendall Hunt Company

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Exodus 19:2-6

Psalms 100:1-2, 3, 5

Romans 5:6-11

Matthew 9:36-10:8

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word that engages you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word in Liturgy

Chapter 19 of Exodus begins the story of the theophany on Mount Sinai, a story that continues throughout the remainder of this book, the entire book of Leviticus, and concludes at Numbers 10:10. The story is a substantial one, not only in terms of its literary size but also for its impact on Israelite history and identity. Today's beginning of that story captures the essence of its significance both for the Jewish people and for us in the Christian dispensation. The figure of Moses is established as the mediator between God and the people, and God's offer to enter into a covenant with the people is rooted in the events of the Exodus ("You have seen for yourselves . . ."). The conditions of the covenant are set forth (to listen to God's voice and to follow the prescriptions of the Law) as are the rewards of doing so ("You shall be my special possession . . . a kingdom of priests").

All of these themes are reworked in a Christian ecclesiology that sees the Church as the new Israel of God. Christ is the new Moses (an emphasis found especially in the gospel of Matthew), mediator between God and the new chosen people. The Passover of Jesus from death to life is the new Exodus which grounds our sacred history and forges our core identity. The demands and benefits of the ancient covenant with Moses are all reinterpreted in Christian terms by the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) of the baptized, who are still charged to hear God's Word and put it into practice (cf. Matthew 7:21-27, and the Beatitudes read earlier this year).

The opening verses of today's gospel reading provide us with the motivation (compassion) for the ministry of Jesus, a ministry which Matthew has described at length in the section just concluded (4:23-9:35) as consisting of teaching and miracles of healing. Beginning this new section at 9:36, Matthew establishes Jesus' will to share his ministry with his disciples, entrusting to those he has chosen a mission whose contours are virtually identical to his own.

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ministry. The restriction of their activity to the children of Israel may reflect the actual chronology of the Christian mission after the resurrection, or the particular missionary thrust of the community for which Matthew was writing. This week's catechetical focus on the mystery of the Church can certainly find in this rich ecclesiological text ample material for reflection. Matthew's description of the call of the Twelve and the mission entrusted to them has been highly significant for the self-understanding of every subsequent generation of Christians.

Catholic Doctrine

The Mystery of the Church

The Latin term for church, *ecclesia*, derives from the Greek (*ek ka lein*), which means "to call out of," referring to an assembly of people or a gathering together. While the term "church" can indicate a special building designated for worship, as in "St. Patrick's Church," the reality that we will explore in this doctrine essay is the deeper meaning of the word "Church," that is, the people of God who are constituted in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This Church is a visible reality, an organized society that can be seen and heard in this world and our history, and yet it is also a spiritual reality which transcends this world and time as the medium of divine life (CCC 770).

The Council described the Church as a sheepfold, the "sole and necessary gateway to which is Christ." It also used the image of a cultivated field or the tillage of God—a choice vineyard wherein Christ is the vine and we are the branches—to describe the Church. The Council described the Church as the building of God whose foundation is Jesus Christ, the stone rejected by the builders but which is now the cornerstone of the whole edifice of the house of God, the dwelling place of the divine among people, and the holy temple come down from heaven. Furthermore, the Council described the Church as that Jerusalem which is above, clearly referring to the spiritual nature of the new Jerusalem described in the book of Revelation, whose roots are embedded in the Old Testament people of God. Finally, the Council described the Church as our mother, the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb of God whom Christ loves and sacrifices himself for that we might be made holy (LG 6).

The whole purpose of the Church can be summarized as serving the plan of God to bring all people into communion with the divine. This missionary mandate is at the heart of the good news proclaimed by the Church in all its activities, sacraments, and outreach (CCC 849 and AG 1). Our Catholic understanding of the goal of the Church, therefore, is that it is called to make holy the members of Christ's body (CCC 772). Thus, the gift of love given to the Church by its spouse, Jesus Christ, is received and the members of the Church respond in love. This is also the reason why the Council and subsequent Church teaching refers to the Church itself as a kind of sacrament, for the grace of God is both contained within and communicated by the mystery of the Church (CCC 774).