

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Exodus = EK-suh-duhs

Sinai = SI-ni

Visually, the focus in this reading is Moses' ascent of the holy mountain to speak to God.

The content of the reading is focused on the promise of God conveyed in his speech to Moses. God's promise is uplifting and encouraging.

For meditation and context:

READING I Chapter 19 of the Book of Exodus, which we hear the beginning of today, begins the third part of Exodus and tells the story of God establishing a covenant with the children of Israel and bestowing upon them a code of law. It has taken the newly released exiles three months to journey out of Egypt beyond the Red Sea through the desert wilderness to finally arrive and set up camp at Mount Sinai, the holy mountain of God.

Upon their arrival, the first order of business is for God to speak individually to Moses. In revealing his covenant to the peo-

LECTIONARY #91

READING I Exodus 19:2-6a

A reading from the Book of Exodus

In those days, the Israelites came to the desert of Sinai and pitched camp.

While Israel was encamped here in front of the mountain, Moses went up the mountain to God.

Then the LORD called to him and said, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites:

You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself.

Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine.

You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5 (3c)

R. We are his people: the sheep of his flock.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
serve the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful song.

The LORD is good:
his kindness endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Know that the LORD is God;
he made us, his we are;
his people, the flock he tends.

ple, God will proceed to call Moses apart from them to instruct him and to foster the development of a relationship that symbolizes the one God will come to establish with the Israelite nation as a whole. The words God speaks to Moses here are meant to serve as a personal introduction that will remind the former slaves of how God has acted in the past on their behalf in order that they might expect his divine assistance in the future. God highlights his actions against the Egyptians as the care he showed the Israelites by stating that he "bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to

myself." Instead of belonging to Pharaoh and all of Egypt, they are now God's "special possession." God demonstrates here a preferential option for Israel, as he desires to make them a people set apart. The notion of being separated from other nations is made clear in choosing them to be a holy people. It is not simply that Israel is made sacred to God but that they are to perform the role of mediating on behalf of other peoples as priests are set apart to minister to others and be in God's presence.

Paul's letter makes a complex argument about reconciliation. Proclaim at an even pace to allow its subtleties to register with the assembly.

Even emphasis on "How much more."

Even emphasis on "now received reconciliation."

Jesus uses the image of sheep without a shepherd to instruct his disciples. Not only is Jesus their shepherd but the disciples themselves are shepherds as they go out.

READING II Romans 5:6–11

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

Christ, while we were still **helpless**,
yet **died** at the **appointed time** for the **ungodly**.
Indeed, only with **difficulty** does one **die** for a **just person**,
though **perhaps** for a **good person**
one might **even** find **courage** to **die**.

But **God** proves his **love** for us

in that while we were **still sinners** **Christ died** for us.

How much more then, since we are now **justified** by his **blood**,
will we be **saved** through **him** from the **wrath**.

Indeed, if, **while** we were **enemies**,
we were **reconciled** to **God** through the **death** of his **Son**,
how much more, once **reconciled**,
will we be **saved** by his **life**.

Not only **that**,

but we also **boast** of **God** through our **Lord Jesus Christ**,
through whom we have **now received reconciliation**.

GOSPEL Matthew 9:36—10:8

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

At the **sight** of the **crowds**, Jesus' **heart** was **moved**
with **pity** for them

because they were **troubled** and **abandoned**,
like **sheep** without a **shepherd**.

Then he **said** to his **disciples**,

"The **harvest** is **abundant** but the **laborers** are **few**;
so ask the **master** of the **harvest**
to send out **laborers** for his **harvest**." >>

READING II

This passage from Romans comes immediately after Paul's declaration of the justification by faith that Christians have through the grace of God. This is cause for the faithful to be filled with hope, even in times of persecution. Thus, Paul sets out to answer why Christians have reason to be hopeful. He begins by acknowledging that Christ chose to die for sinners not the righteous. The decision not to die for only the holy ones demonstrates God's immense love, since it would be far easier to die for those who do not dwell in sin.

Thus, for Paul, justification is the reconciliation of sinners to Christ through his death on the cross. But salvation is a different thing. Sin must first be remitted before salvation can be given. Paul will go on to say that this is precisely what baptism will ensure (Romans 6:1–11). Having been reconciled to God by the blood of the cross, Christians are baptized into Christ in order to look forward in hope to the fullness of the gift that is salvation.

GOSPEL

Jesus' words that "the harvest is abundant but the

laborers are few" serve as a transition between several public cures and demonstrations of Jesus' authority and his commissioning of the twelve apostles. Jesus has discovered in a very short time of proclaiming the kingdom of God that the people in the countryside are in desperate need of spiritual leadership. Matthew states quite clearly that Jesus "was moved with pity" for the people because they were "like sheep without a shepherd." He turns to his disciples and acknowledges the great amount of work that needs to be done. They are to

Don't rush through these names of the disciples. And don't give unnecessary emphasis to the name of Judas Iscariot.

Zebedee = ZEB-uh-dee

Bartholomew = Bahr-THAHL-uh-myoo

Alphaeus = AL-fee-uhs

Thaddeus = THAD-ee-uhs

Cana = KAY-nuh

Iscariot = ih-SKAYR-ee-uh

Samaritan = suh-MAYR-uh-tuhn

Here the image of the lost sheep returns.

Jesus provides instruction as clear and direct as possible as to what his disciples are to do. Proclaim these tasks forcefully.

Then he **summoned** his twelve **disciples** and gave them **authority** over **unclean spirits** to drive them **out** and to cure **every disease** and **every illness**.

The **names** of the twelve **apostles** are **these**:

first, **Simon** called **Peter**, and his brother **Andrew**;

James, the son of **Zebedee**, and his brother **John**;

Philip and **Bartholomew**, **Thomas** and **Matthew** the **tax collector**;

James, the son of **Alphaeus**, and **Thaddeus**;

Simon from **Cana**, and **Judas Iscariot** who **betrayed** him.

Jesus sent **out** these **twelve** after **instructing** them **thus**,

“Do not go into **pagan territory** or enter a **Samaritan town**.

Go rather to the **lost sheep** of the **house** of **Israel**.

As you **go**, make **this proclamation**: ‘The **kingdom** of **heaven** is at **hand**.’

Cure the **sick**, **raise** the **dead**, **cleanse** **lepers**, **drive out** **demons**.

Without cost you have **received**; **without cost** you are to **give**.”

pray for more people to assist with bringing people into the fold, or into God's kingdom.

After his honest assessment that the work to come will be arduous, Jesus gives authority to the twelve disciples—who are referred to by Matthew here as apostles, meaning those who are sent out—to heal people and combat the works of evil. Essentially, Jesus invites these disciples to share in his ministry in a particular way. He then names them and from this we have a list of the twelve apostles. Earlier in Matthew we have heard the names of five of them: Peter, Andrew, James, and John were

mentioned when Jesus called these fishermen away from their father, their boats, and their nets (Matthew 4:18–22) and Matthew was called away from his post as a tax collector (Matthew 9:9); the remaining seven names are listed here for the first time here.

Before releasing the disciples on to the world, Jesus provides them with instructions that begin with a caution to avoid the territory of the Gentiles and Samaritans and to focus exclusively on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Remember that Jesus has been ministering amongst this people and has come to pity them. For Matthew's audi-

ence, who is primarily a community of Jewish Christians struggling to understand their faith in a rapidly changing society where they are no longer accepted by the Jewish community, and in the wake of the Temple's destruction, this command by Jesus to minister within given boundaries would have been reassuring. But this is only the beginning of the work of the kingdom, as Jesus instructs them to announce that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This work of the harvest is still ongoing today as we take up the Christian mission and give in abundance without expecting to be repaid. S.W.