

## FIRST READING – ORDINARY 10 B

A reading from the book of Genesis.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

After the woman and the man had eaten from the tree,  
they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden  
at the time of the evening breeze,  
and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God  
among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him,  
“Where are you?”

He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden,  
and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

God said, “Who told you that you were naked?”

Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me,  
she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman,  
“What is this that you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – ORDINARY 10 B

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

just as we have the same spirit of faith  
that is in accordance with Scripture –  
“I believed, and so I spoke” –  
we also believe, and so we speak,  
because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus  
will raise us also with Jesus,  
and will bring us with you into his presence.  
Yes, everything is for your sake,  
so that grace, as it extends to more and more people,  
may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart.

Even though our outer nature is wasting away,  
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.  
For this slight momentary affliction  
is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,  
because we look not at what can be seen  
but at what cannot be seen;  
for what can be seen is temporary,  
but what cannot be seen is eternal.  
For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,  
we have a building from God,  
a house not made with hands,  
eternal in the heavens.

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PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – ORDINARY 10 B

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Jesus went home and the crowd came together again,  
so that they could not even eat.  
When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him,  
for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.”  
And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said,  
“He has Beelzebul,  
and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”  
And Jesus called them to him, and spoke to them in parables,  
“How can Satan cast out Satan?  
If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.  
And if a house is divided against itself,  
that house will not be able to stand.  
And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided,  
he cannot stand, but his end has come.

But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property  
without first tying up the strong man;  
then indeed the house can be plundered.  
Truly I tell you,  
people will be forgiven for their sins  
and whatever blasphemies they utter;  
but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit  
can never have forgiveness,  
but is guilty of an eternal sin” —  
for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”  
Then his mother and his brothers came;  
and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.  
A crowd was sitting around him;  
and they said to him,  
“Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside,  
asking for you.”  
And Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”  
And looking at those who sat around him, he said,  
“Here are my mother and my brothers!  
Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### **Reading I: Genesis 3:9-15**

The man and the woman had been tempted by the serpent and, contrary to God's command, had eaten of the forbidden tree. Note that in Genesis the serpent is not identified with Satan. That interpretation was developed in later Judaism and taken over into Christian theology. Our Lectionary assumes this later identification by coupling this reading with the Beelzebul controversy ([Gospel](#)). Originally, the serpent stood simply for the power of temptation. After the man and the woman have succumbed to temptation, God calls them to account and passes sentence on all three parties, including the serpent.

The story is in part a profound expression of the psychology of temptation and in part a primitive etiological myth, that is, a story explaining why things are as they are—why a serpent, unlike other animals, crawls on its belly, eats dust, and is hostile to humanity; why human beings, unlike animals, wear clothes and have a sense of shame. By the time of the book of Wisdom, the serpent had come to be identified with the devil ([Wis 2:24](#)). In early Christianity (perhaps as early as [1 Tim 2:13-15](#)), the seed of the woman was identified with Christ. Only in the most general way can the original text support this later development. What it tells us is that in the conflict between evil and humanity, humanity will finally win. It does not tell us how (we know that it happened in the Christ event). The text shows “at the outset of redemptive history the note of promise and hope”(Ottley).

Having acquired this later interpretation, the text became known as the protevangelium, the first proclamation of the gospel in the Bible. That is why it is the first of the lessons read in the service of nine lessons and carols broadcast from the chapel of King's College, Cambridge, every Christmas Eve.

RCL's addition of verse 8 sets the context of the scene—the man and woman were hiding from the Lord God because of their guilt and shame.

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### **Responsorial Psalm: 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8**

This psalm is both the cry of the individual in the depths of sin and death and also the cry of the people of God (note the shift at the end of the third through the fourth stanza from the individual to the community) for restoration from exile in the land of darkness and the shadow of death. This hoped-for corporate redemption occurred in the restoration from exile. As a response to the story of the Fall, the psalm is read today as a universal cry for salvation.

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### **Reading II: 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1**

This passage, like those of the two previous Sundays, comes from the section of 2 Corinthians in which Paul is defending his apostleship against the attacks of the false apostles who showed up at Corinth. The false apostles relied on their own personal qualifications and achievements, such as they were. Paul relies only on his faith and that in which he believes. Paul first believes the gospel himself before he preaches it to others.

The faith of which Paul speaks is very simple: it is faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead, a faith that also carries with it the hope that God will raise both Paul himself and his converts. This hope is what makes Paul's sufferings as an apostle bearable. His apostolic labors result in an increase of grace,

that is, more people are converted to faith and more bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. And all this, Paul says, is “to the glory of God.”

In the second paragraph, Paul reverts to the theme of his apostolic sufferings. They are taking a toll on his physical health, but Paul knows that his “inner nature” (the new Adam in him, the divine image) is being renewed in preparation for the final resurrection of the body. We do not yet, as the false apostles supposed, have resurrection life, but we have something that is starting in our inner nature—the renewal of the core of our ego that will eventually be clothed by the resurrection body.

It is this resurrection life that Paul is referring to when he contrasts the things seen and the things unseen, and says that the former are transient and the latter eternal. This must not be understood in a Platonic sense, as though there were two permanent orders of reality. The things that are eternal are partly future (the glorious resurrection life) and partly present (the inner transformation that is already taking place).

The third paragraph (beginning at [2 Cor 5:1](#)) is the beginning of a new section describing the resurrection hope. It is, however, logically connected with the preceding paragraph by the opening word, “For.” It is because we know that we have a resurrection body awaiting us, says Paul, that we do not lose heart amid our present sufferings.

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### **Gospel: Mark 3:20-35**

This reading is one of the well-known “sandwiches” that occur in Mark's Gospel, that is, passages in which one event is inserted into another ([Mark 5:21-43](#); [11:11-21](#); [14:53-72](#)). In this case the two events are the coming of Jesus' family to take him home, with the consequent pronouncement about who are the true family of Jesus, and the Beelzebul controversy with the scribes. The purpose of these sandwiches is twofold. First, on a more superficial level, the event inside the respective sandwich provides time for the other event to take place. Here Jesus' family have time, after setting forth from home, to reach him where he is. The second, more substantive purpose is to allow the one event to interpret the other. Both Jesus' family and his scribal opponents misunderstand him, and he reacts to their misunderstanding.

Let us take the Beelzebul controversy first. The structural pattern of this story is that of a chiasm (ab b'a):

- (a) The scribes charge Jesus with being possessed by the devil.
- (b) The scribes charge that he casts out demons by the prince of demons.
- (b') Jesus answers the second charge, the one in b, with the parabolic saying of a house divided against itself.
- (a') Jesus answers the first charge, the one in a): he is the stronger one who is binding the strong one (Beelzebul) so that he may later plunder his goods. This refers to Satan's overthrow when the kingdom of God finally comes.

Tacked on to the Beelzebul controversy is the very difficult saying about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, a saying that has played a somewhat macabre role in the history of Christian piety. People have had fantastic ideas that they have somehow inadvertently committed this unforgivable sin, and that in so doing they have condemned themselves unwittingly to everlasting damnation. Our text has nothing to do with such fantasies. Nor does it, as more recent exegetes have often contended, have the purely general meaning of calling evil good and good evil (“Evil, be thou my good”).

Rather, it has to do quite specifically with Jesus' exorcisms and his implicit christological claim. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to fail to see that Jesus' works are the acts of the eschatological power of God at work in his person. It is to deny the "theology of Jesus" (to use Schillebeeckx's term, meaning what Jesus believed God was doing in himself) or Jesus' implicit christological self-understanding.

Now we turn to the outside of the sandwich. In the RSV text as printed in the Lectionary for Mass (1970), we read that Jesus' "friends" came to seize him. The Greek is *hoi par'autou*, which literally means "those who were from him."

Since verses 31-35 are a continuation of this story, the phrase in question is elucidated by verse 32: "Your mother and your brethren"—hence the NRSV "family."

This is where the sandwich arrangement helps to interpret the ambiguity. There is a deliberate correspondence between the role of Jesus' family and that of the scribes. Both in various ways misunderstand Jesus and his mission. The one party thinks that he is mad, the other that he is in league with Beelzebul. This may shock those who take the birth stories in Matthew and Luke as literal facts. Such readers would object that Jesus' family, or at least his mother, already knew who he was from the start. But we must not harmonize Mark with Matthew and Luke in this way, but must take Mark's text as it stands. The point of the saying in verse 35, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother," is that Jesus' "eschatological family" replaces his earthly family.

To do the will of God means to respond to Jesus' eschatological message and to follow him. In this interpretation we follow the task force on [Mary in the New Testament](#) (see the report of that name, edited by Raymond E. Brown and others, p. 59). It is worth adding that in a footnote the task force observed: "However we cannot say that Mark means to exclude the family permanently from following Jesus. Presumably family members could become disciples of Jesus on the same basis as any one else."

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