

2016 LECTOR RETREAT – ONLINE VERSION:

Welcome to the online version of the 2016 Lector Retreat. We have wanted to share this retreat with you for some time. In fact, it has been on our staff to-do list for several years, but like many items on our list, it kept getting pushed aside for more urgent matters. So as we share digitally, please know that we have dreamed of this moment and wanted to share it with you for quite some time. As your pastoral staff, it is our job to equip you for ministry, to enable you to live as the Church in the world. Each of you reading this has received a calling from God, a calling to proclaim the Word of God to our community. We hope to provide you with a time to reflect on this call and to come to a greater appreciation of our holy scriptures. Grab a partner (if you have one available) and quiet yourself before you begin.

Opening Prayer: *

Lord, open my lips; my mouth will proclaim your praise.

I will bless the Lord at all times; praise shall always be in my mouth.

My soul will glory in the Lord that the poor may hear and be glad.

Magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.

How I love your teaching, Lord! I study it all day long.

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.

Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

Your word, Lord stands forever; through all generations your truth endures.

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.

The statutes of the Lord are true, all of them just.

More desirable than gold, sweeter also than honey or drippings from the honeycomb.

By them your servant is instructed; obeying them brings much reward.

Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor.

Keep the thoughts of my heart before you, Lord my rock and my redeemer.

Amen.

*Prayer is taken from Psalms 19, 34, 51, and 119

Partner Share: These questions were originally intended to be shared one-on-one with a partner. If you can, grab someone to go through this retreat with you. Consider calling a friend who is a Lector and going through the retreat while on the phone. Of course, the alternative is to reflect on these questions alone, either silently or by journaling. Do what is best for you at the current time.

Partner Share: Turn to person next to you. Take turns answering this question: **Why did you become a Lector?**

Our Story Told in Ancient Words

Keep your answer to that Icebreaker question in your mind. We will come back to it later. For now, however, you are going to listen to a song. The words are printed below but are also on the video. After listening to the song, observe some silent time so you can reflect on the words in your own heart. The song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vmTkXNpwzs>

“Ancient Words” by Michael W. Smith.

Holy words long preserved
For our walk in this world
They resound with God's own heart
Oh, let the ancient words impart

Words of Life, words of Hope
Give us strength, help us cope
In this world, where e'er we roam
Ancient words will guide us home

Ancient words ever true
Changing me and changing you
We have come with open hearts
Oh, let the ancient words impart

Holy words of our Faith
Handed down to this age
Came to us through sacrifice
Oh heed the faithful words of Christ

Holy words long preserved
For our walk in this world
They resound with God's own heart
Oh let the ancient words impart

Ancient words ever true
Changing me and changing you
We have come with open hearts
Oh, let the ancient words impart

We have come with open hearts
Oh, let the ancient words impart

Partner share: *After a time of silent reflection, turn to your Sharing Partner and discuss the question:
How is your story told with ancient words?*

Ezra

The Bible is first the record of God's self-revelation to a chosen people, the nation of Israel, and then God's self-revelation to the entire world. But the Bible is more than a record of great deeds and earth-shattering events. The Bible is our story told in ancient words. God has chosen to not only reveal God's self through the great and mighty events of history like the Exodus from Egypt but also through small whispers to individuals who were just like you and me. The Book of Ecclesiastes says that there is nothing new under the sun so it is not surprising that as we read the stories that were written as long as 5,000 years ago that we find our own stories. We find a connection to our ancestors in the faith. As we read how God redeemed the people living in a small Mediterranean region thousands of years ago, we don't find strangers from an alien culture, rather we find people with our own personalities, character traits, hopes and dreams, and as we study people whose stories are not much different than our own, we learn our own salvation history, our own stories of healing and growing closer to God.

When we proclaim the Word of God, we not only experience this connection with the Word ourselves, but we are charged with helping others find their connection as well. As lectors, we both receive the Word and give it to others. That's why preparation for our ministry is so important. It's not just about pronouncing Qoheleth and Mephibosheth correctly. We prepare because it is impossible to give what we have not received. As lectors, we need to allow the Word of God to fill us up so that the extra can spill over and become what we give to others.

You are about to focus on a scripture passage through a process called lectio divina. You may already be familiar with this practice, and there are several variations on lectio divina, but I'm going to ask you to do it as follows. Read the passage through. Then pause, and I want you to call out a word or short phrase that jumped out at you from the reading. Don't analyze why it struck you. Just repeat the word or phrase and focus on it for a few moments. After a minute or two, read the passage again, and again, I want you to call out a word or phrase that struck you. Maybe it will be the same word or phrase as the first time, and maybe it will be something different. Then read the passage a third time. After this last reading, I want you to be silent for a few minutes and reflect in your own heart on what God is saying to you through this passage.

Before you begin, I want to give you a little background on this passage. The people of Judah had been through a lot. Seventy years before, their nation had been taken into exile after being conquered by Babylon. Most of the people were deported, stripped naked and chained together, and led into exile. Communities had been broken apart and small family groups had been resettled throughout the Babylonian empire among people who didn't speak their language and didn't share their culture. They were strangers in strange lands who clung to their faith as best they remembered it, but the scriptures had been left behind in the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem. Eventually, Babylon was conquered by Persia, and it was the Persian emperor's policy to let captured peoples return to their native lands if they so desired. The Jewish people were offered the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, but they had been in captivity for three generations. The people led away by the Babylonians were long dead. Some of their descendants decided to leave the only homes they had ever known and go to their ancestral homeland. Others decided to stay where they had grown up in other areas around the Mediterranean.

This caused tension between those who returned and those who stayed. Again communities were torn apart. Those who returned did not find an empty land. They came into conflict with the people who had settled in Jerusalem and put down roots for seventy years. They also found the Temple destroyed. As a building project commenced to restore the Temple, the center of their faith life, a scroll was found. It was examined by the priests and found to be the book of the Law of Moses. The people who gathered to hear Ezra proclaim the Word had never heard their sacred scriptures read before. Put yourself in their shoes as this passage is proclaimed. So now, close your eyes, relax, and still your mind and heart in preparation.

Read Ezra Reads the Law (Nehemiah 8:1-12).

Now when the seventh month came, the whole people gathered as one in the square in front of the Water Gate, and they called upon Ezra the scribe to bring forth the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had commanded for Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, therefore, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. In the square in front of the Water Gate, Ezra read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. Ezra opened the scroll so that all the people might see it, for he was standing higher than any of the people. When he opened it, all the people stood. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, "Amen, amen!" Then they knelt down and bowed before the LORD, their faces to the ground. Ezra read clearly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read. Then Ezra said to all the people: "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not lament, do not weep!"—for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He continued: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who have nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD is your strength!" Then all the people began to eat and drink, to distribute portions, and to celebrate with great joy, for they understood the words that had been explained to them.

Partner share: *After a time of silent reflection, turn to your Sharing Partner and discuss what each of you felt God was trying to say to you through this passage. How are you like Ezra? Have you ever wept upon hearing the scriptures proclaimed or upon reading them yourself? If so, tell about that experience.*

The Word

We now have a reading from the Gospel of John.

Read John 1:1-5, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Gospel of John doesn't have a nativity story because the writer had a profound understanding that the Son of God was present long before he became incarnate in this world. He was from the beginning and part of the creative act that brought this world into being. And the term the writer uses for the Son of God is in Greek "logos." Translated into English, it's "Word." The Son is the Word of God. And it is this Word which became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

When we are at mass, Jesus is present with us in:

1. The Consecrated Bread and Wine – which we receive during communion
2. The presider – who acts in the person of Christ during the mass
3. The assembly – the Body of Christ
4. The Word – the Word that became flesh is in the Word that we read

It is important to recognize all the ways Jesus is present with us during the mass, but as lectors, we should be particularly aware of how Jesus is present with us in the Word. By understanding Jesus as the Word, we are able to understand the significance of proclaiming the scriptures at mass.

Partner share: *Turn to your partner and reflect on the following question: **How does the awareness of Jesus' presence in the Word affect your attitude towards proclaiming the Word of God?***

When we gather together for mass, we feast first at the table of the Word before we feast on the Eucharist. Then in the Eucharistic prayer, we give thanks for what God has done for humankind as revealed in the Scriptures. This thanksgiving always culminates in giving thanks for the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. Part of the Eucharistic prayer reads: "Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption,..." We're not just giving thanks for what God did in ancient times. This is also our story. We are part of the story of salvation. Our own stories are written in ancient words.

Replay of "Ancient Words" & Focus on Calling

You are going to listen to the song we heard at the beginning of the retreat once more. I invite you to follow along with the words, close your eyes and meditate, or sing along if you wish.

Play "Ancient Words" by Michael W. Smith: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vmTkXNpwzs>

Calling:

Often we downplay our roles in ministry, but have you ever considered your service as a Lector as a calling from God? Close your eyes. Get comfortable. Picture Jesus standing in front of you. He has something he wants to say to you. Something that was written in the Gospel of John a long time ago. Open your eyes to read the following passage.

Read John 15:16a: *"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain."* Pause and repeat verse. *How does it make you feel that Jesus chose you for this role?* Pause. *Listen to him speak one more time.* Repeat verse.

Partner Share: - *Think back on your answer to the first question you discussed with your partner: Why did you become a Lector? Do you recognize being a Lector as a calling from God? As a gift to share?*

Closing Prayer:¹

We thank you and bless you, Lord our God. In times past you spoke in many varied ways through the prophets, but in this, the final age, you have spoken through your Son to reveal to all nations the riches of your grace. May we who have met to ponder the Scriptures be filled with the knowledge of your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and pleasing you as we should in all things, may we bear fruit in every good work. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

¹ From Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition, USCCB, 2007.