

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel reading continues the account of Jesus at the synagogue in his hometown. After Jesus reads Isaiah's words about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus makes a surprising comment. The people are excited by his presence, but disturbed by his comments. They had heard that he was healing people and performing other works of mercy, so, they wanted him to heal their sick as well. After all, he is one of their own, a hometown boy. They knew Jesus as "the son of Joseph," one of their own townspeople. What they didn't understand is that Jesus, the Messiah, had come for everyone, even so-called outsiders who believe in him. Jesus tells the people that faith plays a primary part in his healings, not just familiarity. To reinforce this, he reminds them that their revered prophets, Elijah and Elisha, were not sent to do their works for the Israelites, but for foreign widows and lepers. This angered the townspeople.

## A Gospel Word for the Home

### Luke 4:21-30

Occasionally one comes across the idea that the family, while loved by God, can escape into God's loving presence by turning in on itself. The family can think of everyone outside the family as a kind of enemy or at least not important. Family first, they say. Charity begins at home. Take care of your own.

And while there is some value in this approach, if carried to extremes it violates one of the central truths of our Christian faith. God is the God of all and Jesus came to redeem all. Christians are always challenged by the inclusiveness of God's love. Not only families, but churches can set limits upon their interests and service to others. On a global scale, it is important to recognize that the Catholic Church reaches out to serve the needs of all. When a tragedy happens, help is offered to all.

Something similar should be a part of family life. Of course, we care for our own family but we also look for opportunities to serve the common good, to help people near and far when we can. The Church often described all humankind as "the family of God." We are *all* created and loved by God and that should make a difference in how we think, pray, and serve.

### Thought for the Week

Humans tend to think of others, especially those who are different from us, as unimportant, as not a part of our lives, or sometimes even as enemies. Religious, racial, ethnic, and social prejudice is all too common. In his remarks to the people of his hometown Jesus is presenting a different way of looking at the Messiah. He is a Messiah for all not only for the Chosen people. A critique of social narrowness is at the heart of today's Gospel reading. It is not hard to find examples of this attitude in our world today with all the conflict we see between groups. We can sense it at work, in some of the debate over immigration in this country, and in others. Mostly, we each need to look into our own hearts to learn how we view others, especially if they are not like us. Jesus came for all people. Our God does not see national boundaries nor does God have favorites. God's love is deep, inclusive, and universal, and we are invited to have a similar love.

## Parent Survival

“Protecting our own” can take a lot of energy. This is especially so when we are aware of all the meanings of “our own” that fills our lives. For instance, our own stances on the life of the Church, our own political position on any number of issues, even our preferences for certain athletic teams or social groups. If we live in a “we versus them” world, we can be exhausted as we constantly feel that we have to defend our own no matter how it affects others.

Being a person who is open and accepting is never easy. Oftentimes such openness may feel uncomfortable or indicate that we are not firm in our own beliefs. Years ago, a book and movie came out called *The Accidental Tourist*. It was about an American who traveled outside this country but always took his country with him. He only stayed in hotels that appeared to be American. He was weary of trying local foods. He wasn't hostile to anything foreign. He simply preferred American. Of course, he missed out on one of the great joys of travel which is learning new things and enjoying new experiences. The more accepting we can be of the “other,” whatever that might mean for us, the more peace we will experience within.

## Car or Meal Talk

Discuss how you can reach out to persons whom family members feel are really different from them. Take a reading on how positively or negatively your family members view outsiders.

## One-Line Prayer

God the Holy Spirit, expand our awareness of others and deepen our love for all you have created. Amen.