



Homily Connections for Housing from the Catholic Housing Initiative

Now Available at Your Request

Now, if you wish to have some assistance in connecting the readings for a particular Sunday with your efforts to implement the housing initiative in your parish, you can contact the Catholic Housing Initiative office, and we will produce a Homily Connection for whichever Sunday your parish team has chosen. As you choose your weekend, please first consider the readings, of course, and which readings particularly speak to you of housing, homelessness, discipleship, and the spiritual gifts we need to address our struggles for holiness and justice. There is much cause for discouragement and despair in our world, but we still have the stories of our faith – with all their power – to remind us that this is also a world of promise and hope.

The sample homily connections below show specifically how to connect the readings for particular Sundays with efforts to increase parishioners' awareness of the housing crisis, and invite them to participate in being part of the solution.

January 19, 2003

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

John 1:35-42 Discipleship: Come and You Will See

John calls Jesus “The Lamb of God” – the Passover Lamb whose blood saved the lives of the Hebrew children in Egypt, the Passover Lamb who saved God’s people from slavery. Like the disciples, we too are looking for a savior to free us from fear, oppression, and injustice in our time and place. Like the disciples, we look to Jesus and we hear him ask us a question: What are you looking for? What are the questions to which you do not have answers? What injustice overwhelms your thoughts? Like the disciples, when we ask how we are to follow Jesus today, Jesus invites us to “Come and see” - to spend some time reflecting on the great issues of our day in the light of our faith so that we may be empowered to act as Jesus would.

Today we are issuing an invitation for you to come and see. Last June, our bishop, John Cummins, issued a call asking each parish and each person to do one thing to address the housing crisis in the Bay Area. Over 100 people from 54 parishes have now been trained in the causes and solutions to the crisis, and many of those have held meetings, sponsored events, or joined with other community organizations to initiate and support efforts to address the housing crisis in their area.

In our parish, we have set up a series of meetings to help us learn about the crisis, and the unique role that we as a people of faith can play in addressing it. There are a variety of ways that we as individuals and a parish can respond: some might involve supporting various agencies and programs, or just learning what is going on in each of our cities and supporting these efforts. Whoever attends these meetings will be able to participate in our parish decision, and learn what each of us can do. More information is available (as you leave, in the bulletin, etc.)

And so, as followers of Jesus, let us take the time to reflect on one of the great issues of our day, and try to imagine how Jesus would want us to respond. For we know that Jesus is with us still – inviting us to come and see, and giving us the grace we need to overcome the challenges that we face.



January 26, 2003

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Mark 1:14-20 Signs of the Kingdom

As Mark tells us in his gospel, after Jesus is baptized, he goes to the desert and lives among the wild beasts. He is tempted, then ministered to by angels, and comes out preaching good news: “The kingdom of God is at hand! It’s time to change your lives!” In the months and years following this announcement, Jesus and his followers will proceed to show us what God’s presence, God’s reign in our midst will mean. Those who have been paralyzed will begin to move . . . those who have been silent will begin to speak out . . . those who have been blind will see at last.

So, how are we called to change our lives? How can we as followers of Jesus be signs of God’s kingdom, signs of God’s presence in our world today?

For Jesus, it seems, just one touch and the blind would see, the paralyzed would move, the silent would speak. Not so easy for us. So many important issues that concern us today seem so complex. There are so many ways to respond that WE are paralyzed, unsure exactly what Jesus would have us do. One of these issues is the severe lack of affordable housing in the Bay Area. According to the latest figures, only 12% of households in Contra Costa County, and 17% in Alameda County can afford to buy a new home. Now more than half (51%) of households in the Bay Area are renters. Many people pay so much for housing that other areas of their lives suffer, or they must live in unsafe, overcrowded conditions, or they have to commute long distances even for low wage jobs. Our bishop, John Cummins, became aware of this issue, and has taken the initiative to get us aware of and involved in possible solutions.

A process has been designed so that each parish can take some time to study this issue and choose a way to respond in the light of our faith. There are solutions, but they involve making new choices, changing our thinking. Being a part of the solution means bringing our faith to this issue. Being a part of the solution means being a sign of God’s presence, God’s reign – right here in our own community.

On (date) you are invited to come and discover how God may be calling us to learn what we can do about the housing crisis. Today Jesus preaches good news: the reign of God is happening in the midst of all that is wrong with the world.

May the efforts of the our parish as we participate in this housing initiative allow us to be signs of God’s reign, God’s hope and healing to those struggling with the effects of this crisis. And may we be signs of God’s healing presence with all we meet this week.

February 23, 2003
2 Corinthians 1:18-22

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B
Mark 2:1-12

Healing and Forgiveness

“For all that has been, THANKS!” “For all that is to come, AMEN!” That’s the prayer of Dag Hammarskjold, the first Secretary General of the United Nations. A prayer that reminds us of how God has blessed us in the past, and our confidence that God will continue to bless us in the future.

In today’s second reading, St. Paul also reminds us we need to say Amen – Yes - to God in our prayers and in our lives. Of course, it’s easy to say “Amen” when things are



going well. But, in troubled times, it's often healing that we need before we can say "Amen" to God again. And before we can be healed, we need to be forgiven

That's what we see happening in today's gospel. Jesus comes to Capernaum to preach good news, but what the people want is healing. Turns out, yes, they need to be healed before they can receive the good news that Jesus brings – and so do we.

In the gospel, when Jesus brings good news, he tells us three things: "This is the time of fulfillment!" (Yes, easy to say Amen to that!) The reign of God is here! (Yes, Amen again!) Repent and believe! (Wait a minute - I like my life, I don't want to change – or maybe I just don't think I can . . .)

The news that Jesus brings us is, "Yes, you can." When we are paralyzed – unable or unwilling to address the great issues of our lives and our world, we need to be healed. Whether we are paralyzed because of fear, confusion, or contentment, we need to be healed. And like the paralytic, we must be forgiven first

What does it take to receive forgiveness? Awareness of our sinfulness/limitations. What does it take for us to become aware of our sinfulness? Something must happen that makes us look at our lives and our world in a different way. In the gospel, there is a miraculous event, and all around know that things will be different now that Jesus is here. Today, the events that make us start moving are miraculous as well, but not always welcome

Perhaps we become aware of a need and we think: somebody should do something about this. Perhaps we or someone we love is suffering the consequences of decisions we have made – and we say: "I never want to do that again." Perhaps someone we respect has the courage to tell us: "You're going down the wrong path – you need to change your life." Challenging moments, but possible moments of grace – opportunities for God to step in.

This is the opportunity that the Catholic Housing Initiative of the East Bay is providing – Bishop Cummins has written us a letter asking us to "not stand idly by" as the housing crisis worsens. Today, in the bulletin, are some questions for your consideration, and some statistics that paint a picture of the effects of the crisis. (add your own personal or parish examples here) But the bottom line is we have not built enough housing in the Bay Area to house our workforce, our disabled, our seniors. And it is public policy choices we have made that are keeping so many households from safe, decent, affordable housing.

Our housing committee is developing possible actions that we as a parish and individuals might take to address the crisis – Today, they are asking you to take home a copy of the bulletin, read the insert, and pray – what would Jesus do? Perhaps he would heal us, so our eyes and hearts would be opened and we would change our lives and our world.

March 9, 2003
Genesis 9:8-15

First Sunday of Lent
Mark 1:12-15

Mark Repentance and Renewal

In the first reading, we are given the beautiful image of the rainbow as a sign of God's covenant, a sign of God's promise to always care for the earth and all its



inhabitants. It is a sign of our responsibility as well to be good stewards of the earth: to care for creation, to use what we have been given to renew the earth as God would wish us to.

Today, the First Sunday of Lent, we are particularly called to stop and reflect on the ways we are using the resources of our earth well, and the ways we are not. We heard today the beginning of Mark's gospel, (1:14) where he presents the three key elements of the Good News of Jesus : First, This is the time of fulfillment! Second, The reign of God is at hand! Third, Repent and believe.

This Lent, and every Lent, we are called to repent, to renew our faith and change our lives. This Lent, this Sunday, I invite you to reflect on how we might better use the gifts of creation - the resources of our earth - to assist those who are poor and in need of housing

(Mention a personal experience of the housing crisis or particular statistic)

Now, we are here preaching Good News today, so we need to also consider the kind of things that we can do to make a difference in this crisis. But we are also preaching repentance today. So I ask you to open your minds and your hearts to the possibilities for conversion, change of heart on an issue that is increasingly important to all of us,

Our bishop has asked us to look around us and consider how could we, as individuals and as communities, could change the way we are doing things so that we might better address the housing crisis in our midst. Bishop Cummins has asked us to consider how could we make better use of the resources that we have been given - resources of land, money and political influence - to address the needs and rights of those in need of housing. We each have a role to play in helping our neighbors understand this great need, and support positive solutions as they arise. In the weeks to come, we will be letting you know of a variety of ways that we as a parish and we as individuals can make a difference for good in the lives of many people.

Once, long ago, after a great flood, God promised to care for the earth and all who dwell on it . . . may we use this Lent as a time to reflect on how we can be better stewards of this earth as well, and better use its resources for all.

June 1, 2003
Acts 1:1-11

The Ascension of the Lord
Mark 16:15-20

Witness to the Presence of Jesus in our Midst

“Why are you standing there, looking up at the sky?” This is the question that the men in white garments ask the followers of Jesus in today’s first reading. The disciples had just heard Jesus proclaim, “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . Samaria . . . to the ends of the earth.” Now, Jesus is gone, and the messengers ask, “Why are you still standing there?”

Well, they didn’t stand around for very long. As we heard in the gospel, they “went forth and preached everywhere.” As we have been hearing from the Acts of the Apostles all during the Easter season, this small band of witnesses went go out and changed the world.. They preached repentance and conversion, worked many wonders, built up the church. “There was not a needy person among them”, we heard. “To each



goods were distributed to according to need.” The presence of the risen Lord in their midst enabled these early Christians to respond to the needs of their day, and to create new structures to respond to those needs.

This Feast of the Ascension is a good time to consider what we have to learn from these early followers of Jesus. Because, like them, we too have been sent.

A year ago, Bishop Cummins asked us to go out and change OUR world - to “not stand idly by”, as the housing crisis worsens. As a result of this call, hundreds of people in parishes have been trained, plans have been made, actions taken. There has even been a backlash to our efforts in some cases from those who want things to stay the same. So, why are we standing here, remembering Jesus, when there is so much work to be done?

Because perhaps standing here, sitting here, kneeling here remembering Jesus is a necessary first step to changing the world. Like those early Christians, we gather together, break bread and distribute it, tell the stories of our faith, and then are sent forth. Sent forth, not just to become aware of the needs out there, but to organize ourselves to respond.

(If you can wish, you can mention what is going on in your parish, in your area, for Affordable Housing Week 2003, or just refer folks to the notices that will be in your bulletins – check out www.oakdiocese.org/housing/housing/htm.)

For we know, of course, that this call to be witnesses to the presence of Jesus in our world was not just given to the original followers of Jesus, but to each of us in each age – to go out and proclaim what we know to be true, to respond to needs we discover, to bear witness as people of faith concerned about what is happening in our world.

For more information, see: [A Once and Coming Spirit at Pentecost: Essays on the Liturgical Readings Between Easter and Pentecost: Taken from the Acts of the Apostles, and The Gospel According to John](#), Raymond A. Brown, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.