



Preaching on Faithful Citizenship

This guide offers reflections to aid in preaching Faithful Citizenship during 2026, Year A. Similar aids will be available for Years B and C, in 2027 and 2028. With the intention of supporting ongoing efforts for conscience formation, this guide identifies possible ways to connect the call to Faithful Citizenship with the lectionary readings during an eight-week period during September, October, and November.

These suggestions are available to assist preaching during this time period, while also recognizing that strategies must be adaptable to local contexts and realities. A brief handout is also included at the end of this document to illustrate a concise example approach for preaching Faithful Citizenship that can be used on any Sunday.

Copyright © 2026, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. All rights reserved. This text may be reproduced in whole or in part without alteration for nonprofit educational use, provided such reprints are not sold and include this notice. All quotes from Popes and Vatican sources, copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana (LEV), Vatican City. All rights reserved. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

These preaching aids were developed by the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, in consultation with members of the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations and are authorized for publication by Msgr. Michael J. Fuller, General Secretary, USCCB. Fr. Llane Briese, STD, contributed to these materials.



Overall Rationale of Preaching Faithful Citizenship

The Three Themes from the U.S. Catholic Bishops and Preaching Plan

- Responding to recent developments in U.S. culture, the U.S. Catholic bishops have discerned the following three themes for attention in preaching faithful citizenship:
 1. The Church's Role to Transform Society
 2. "Who Is My Neighbor?"
 3. Faith before Politics
- In 2013, Pope Francis asked homilists to go beyond the surface of the text:

"...Our own aim is not to understand every little detail of a text; our most important goal is to discover its principal message, the message which gives structure and unity to the text. If the preacher does not make this effort, his preaching will quite likely have neither unity nor order; what he has to say will be a mere accumulation of various disjointed ideas incapable of inspiring others. The central message is what the author primarily wanted to communicate; this calls for recognizing not only the author's ideas but the effect which he wanted to produce."¹
- Scripture in general and the Gospels in particular seek to produce several effects, building the Kingdom of God chief among them. This vision of the Kingdom contrasted with the world Jesus and his disciples experienced while living under the Roman Empire. It continues to contrast with the world throughout time and of course with our world today. Christianity was countercultural in its earliest decades and remains so today.
- In the first encyclical of his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV restated a series of foundations and principles that together compose Catholic Social Teaching.² These three foundations—the human person as image of the Triune God, equal dignity of all human beings, and the supreme value of human rights—and five principles—the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, and social justice—have developed since the late-19th century as the Church confronted various social and political changes.
- While this doctrinal development has occurred rather recently in Church history, the proclamation of the Gospel amid complex social and political realities is nothing new.

¹ Pope Francis, *[Evangelii Gaudium](#)* (2013), no. 147.

² See Pope Leo XIV, *[Magnifica Humanitas](#)* (2026), nos. 46–89.



- As is the case in each era, Christianity had a complex relationship in its earliest period with the Roman Empire. On the positive side, the Gospel was proclaimed in Greco-Roman cities by apostles who traveled using imperial infrastructure (Roman roads, sea routes, etc.) and communicated in a language and literary techniques largely borrowed from Hellenistic culture. At the same time, this same Empire conquered populations, imposed unjust taxation, reduced countless humans to slavery, and enforced self-serving laws through brutal repression.
- The sociopolitical backdrop of the biblical texts—especially the Gospels—provides a promising starting point for preaching on the U.S. bishops’ three themes. Although the readings change from week to week, sociopolitical challenges formed part of the milieu in which the biblical authors composed Sacred Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- The following summaries offer an initial rationale for how each Sunday’s readings relate to one of the three themes proposed by the U.S. bishops. Admittedly, not all Sundays equally lend themselves to preaching these three themes; even so, the following suggestions attempt to articulate fairly the strongest connections between the readings and the themes in a way to promote maximal flexibility for homilists and their congregations.



Appropriate Sundays for Preaching Faithful Citizenship in 2026

Pastoral Rationale

- The following suggestions focus on the Sundays that fall between mid-September and early November. This time frame affords homilists flexibility to focus on Faithful Citizenship while avoiding the summer vacation season as well as the privileged seasons of the liturgical year.
- This two-month period also focuses attention when questions about faithful citizenship are at their peak importance while avoiding identifying a specific Sunday with the topic.
- The following charts list the Sunday lectionary readings, suggest which of the three themes best fits each Sunday, and offer a brief summary for how one or more of the Sunday readings connect with the above-mentioned three Faithful Citizenship Themes (FCT), (1) The Church's Role to Transform Society, (2) "Who Is My Neighbor?", and (3) Faith before Politics. In the text that follows, FCT 1 indicates a possible connection with the first theme, FCT 2 with the second theme, and FCT 3, with the third theme.

Fall 2026 (Year A)

Sunday Date	Liturgical Day	1 st Reading	2 nd Reading	Gospel	FCT
September 13	24 th Ordinary	Sir 27:30–28:7	Rom 14:7–9	Mt 18:21–35	1
September 20	25 th Ordinary	Is 55:6–9	Phil 1:20c–24, 27a	Mt 20:1–16a	3
September 27	26 th Ordinary	Ez 18:25–28	Phil 2:1–11	Mt 21:28–32	2
October 4	27 th Ordinary	Is 5:1–7	Phil 4:6–9	Mt 21:33–43	1
October 11	28 th Ordinary	Is 25:6–10a	Phil 4:12–14, 19–20	Mt 22:1–14	2
October 18	29 th Ordinary	Is 45:1, 4–6	1 Thes 1:1–5b	Mt 22:15–21	3
October 25	30 th Ordinary	Ex 22:20–26	1 Thes 1:5c–10	Mt 22:34–40	3
November 1	All Saints	Rv 7:2–4, 9–14	1 Jn 3:1–3	Mt 5:1–12a	2

- **September 13 (FCT 1):** The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant and St. Paul's instructions to the Roman Church together teach two values that inform the Church's self-understanding—mercy and generosity—and which we are called to embody in encountering larger society.
- **September 20 (FCT 3):** The prophet Isaiah declares the Lord's message: "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Is 55:8). Similarly, the workers who worked a full day have thoughts that differ greatly from those of the landowner who pays them the usual daily wage and who paid the same wage to those who worked only one hour. At our worst, we err like these laborers, taking a fixed view of justice that overlooks that, in providing the usual daily wage even to those who worked only one hour, the landowner ensures that all workers get their daily bread. This theme can be extended to National Migration Week (September 21–27). The Church affirms both the right of states to regulate migration for the common good and the right of persons to migrate to find work if they cannot secure the means to support themselves and their families in their own country. We must also protect those who flee war or persecution. How can we overcome both internal misgivings and external political messaging that prevent us from helping those in need of safety and support?



- **September 27 (FCT 2):** Actions speak louder than words. Jesus' parable articulates this truism by contrasting two sons: one accedes to his father's call to labor in the vineyard but does not go, whereas the other son rebels against his father but then changes his mind. God rewards those who repent—change their minds and do his will—regardless of prior rebellion. Jesus' audience is shocked to hear that repentant tax collectors and prostitutes enjoy God's favor. This Gospel invites us to broaden our sense of neighbor to include all whom God wants to invite into his kingdom, a theme especially relevant on this World Day of Migrants and Refugees.
- **October is Respect Life Month, and today (October 4)** is Respect Life Sunday. Each year at this time, the bishops of the United States call us to pause and reflect more deeply on the sacred gift of human life and our role in welcoming, cherishing, and protecting the lives of our brothers and sisters. Like the owner who took such great care in the creation and cultivation of his vineyard, God loved each of us into existence and continues to care for us, inviting us ever deeper into his friendship. We draw closer to him when we follow his example and love one another as he loves us. We must persevere and work to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves or who feel as if their lives are not worth living. We are called to be set apart for the work of the Kingdom of God, proclaiming in word and deed the sanctity of every human life, from conception to natural death. How might we reflect on our role as workers in the vineyard who seek to protect the unborn, moms in need, and all who are vulnerable?
- **October 11 (FCT 2):** Today's readings focus attention to God's care for those on the margins. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a lavish banquet prepared by the Lord for all people in Jerusalem. In that same city, the Lord tells a parable of a wedding feast to which all are invited, even as they must dress in a wedding garment. St. Paul commends the Christians of Philippi for sharing in his distress as he suffers in prison; he expresses confidence in the Lord who strengthens him.
- **October 18 (FCT 3):** At first glance, Jesus tells the Pharisees to pay their taxes to Caesar. He makes a point about performing a civic duty while relativizing the value of the coin that bears the emperor's image in favor of the more serious duties that believers have toward God—duties that have both an internal and an external component. The Thessalonian Christians respond rapidly to St. Paul's preaching; scarcely three weeks of preaching leads them to an admirable "work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope," an example worthy of imitation. In what ways can our duty towards God inspire efforts for the common good that are first and foremost rooted in faith?
- **October 25 (FCT 3):** Asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, the Lord selects the famous *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:5 as the first and the injunction to love one's neighbor in Leviticus 19:18 as the second. In so doing, he does not diminish the rest of Israel's legal heritage but rather summarizes them under these two headings. This twofold moral duty toward God and neighbor sets the tone for faithful engagement in public life.
- **November 1 (FCT 2):** The Solemnity of All Saints displaces the ordinary Sunday celebration this year and reminds us that all of us are called to holiness by appropriating the values embedded in the Beatitudes, even as they contrasted with those of Jesus' time and culture and contrast with cultural norms today. The first reading from Revelation paints a rich portrait of the heavenly court: a countless multitude "from every nation, race, people, and tongue." As Catholics, we uphold human dignity across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, not out of any secular vision but instead because divine revelation demands nothing less.



Fall 2026 (Year A)

Preaching Aid for Sunday, September 13, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Sir 27:30–28:7	A call to forgive injustice
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 103	In praise of God’s mercy
Second Reading	Rom 14:7–9	“None of us lives for oneself”
Gospel	Mt 18:21–35	Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 1: The Church’s Role to Transform Society

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant and St. Paul’s instructions to the Roman Church together teach two values that inform the Church’s self-understanding—mercy and generosity—and which we are called to embody in encountering larger society.

Observations about the Readings

- This Gospel concludes the fourth of five major blocks in Matthew’s Gospel,³ the one in which the Lord establishes his Church (Mt 16:18) and forms his apostles for their unique role in it. The call to mercy functions as the Lord’s closing argument in this section before beginning the journey to Jerusalem that culminates in his Passion (Mt 19:1).
- The amounts of money given in the parable defy comprehension: the “huge amount” owed by the unmerciful servant is 10,000 talents and the “much smaller amount” of 100 denarii owed by the other servant. One denarius was the usual daily wage for a day laborer; while the conversion fluctuated over time, the talent was worth approximately 6,000 denarii. At \$15 an hour and an eight-hour workday, the unmerciful servant’s forgiven debt equates to \$7.2 billion, whereas the other servant owes \$12,000. How did the unmerciful servant find himself in so much debt? How wealthy was the king that he could forgive such a debt? And how could the unmerciful servant care about such a comparably small sum after the king forgave his much greater debt?
- The unmerciful servant’s peers report his actions to the king. Without this communal action, the outcome might have differed. The community in the parable thus demonstrates a concern for mercy that animates the Church’s activity today.
- The absurd financial figures point to a consoling message: God, like the king in the parable, forgives in a measure that we fail to comprehend. But such forgiveness imposes an obligation: to forgive as we have been forgiven with eternal consequences hanging in the balance. Our Lord addresses this parable in response to Peter’s question about how often he must forgive: rather than telling, Jesus shows, and he would continue showing as he approached his Passion. And his parable teaches the apostles how to fulfill their responsibility to bind and loose (Mt 18:18), which the Church continues to exercise today in the ministry of mercy.
- St. Paul addresses the text of today’s second reading to a Roman Church that is learning how to live the daily Christian moral life: “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself.” The Christian life thus inspires us to imitate Christ’s own self-offering: just as he lived and died out of

³ For further discussion of this five-block structure of Matthew’s Gospel, see the brief description in Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 23.



love for humanity, so our faith commits us to the common good and especially the poor and vulnerable, with whom the Lord especially identifies.

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- How do the members of my congregation respond to the call to forgiveness? Faced with the call to extend mercy, we face the same challenge that Peter encounters: to look for a limit to forgiveness—“as many as seven times”! How do we respond to our Lord’s confounding answer: “not seven times, but seventy-seven times”?
- How do we respond to the vast sums given in this parable? The \$12,000 owed by the other servant is hardly chump change—one can buy a decent used car for this sum—but it barely merits mention in comparison to the unmerciful servant’s \$7.2 billion. Even so, the \$12,000 can blind us to the reality of God’s mercy just as it blinded the unmerciful servant to the king’s pity. What is this \$12,000 in our own lives? When not distracted by comparatively petty personal issues, what (and who) comes into focus?
- St. Paul describes the Christian moral life with a general principle: “none of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself.” He thus takes a broad view of the common good, one that contrasts with the temptation to selfish myopia. What prevents our accepting St. Paul’s vision here?
- In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV surveys our war-torn world and comments, “We do not consider the present as a predetermined fate, but an opportunity for personal and collective conversion.”⁴ Both the Gospel parable and Pauline preaching call us to this kind of conversion, one marked by mercy and generosity. What does such a conversion look like in our local circumstances? What concrete evils can our congregation redress through the conversion demanded by this Sunday’s readings?

⁴ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 210.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, September 20, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Is 55:6–9	My ways are not your ways
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 145	God is close to all who call on him
Second Reading	Phil 1:20c–24, 27	“Life is Christ, and death is gain”
Gospel	Mt 20:1–16	Parable of the Good Employer

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 3: Faith before Politics

The prophet Isaiah declares the Lord’s message: “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Is 55:8). Similarly, the workers who worked a full day have thoughts that differ greatly from those of the landowner who pays them the usual daily wage, and who paid the same to those who worked only one hour. At our worst, we err like these laborers, taking a fixed view of justice that overlooks that, in providing the usual daily wage even to those who worked only one hour, the landowner ensures that all workers get their daily bread. This theme can be extended to National Migration Week (September 21-27). The Church affirms both the right of states to regulate migration for the common good and the right of persons to migrate to find work if they cannot secure the means to support themselves and their families in their own country. We must also protect those who flee war or persecution. How can we overcome both internal misgivings and external political messaging that prevent us from helping those in need of safety and support?

Observations about the Readings

- The Evangelists did not assign titles to the parables when they composed their Gospels. Instead, several parables have acquired titles over the course of history, with this parable often called “The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard” or something similar. Whatever their value, such titles can have the unintended side effect of placing certain characters in the foreground and others in the background. Fr. Daniel Harrington, SJ, proposes an alternative title: “The Parable of the Good Employer.”⁵ By accentuating the landowner, this new title draws attention to the Father’s generosity and providence.
- Every detail of this parable matters. The usual daily wage is the denarius, the amount of money a person needed to subsist. The landowner goes out for employees five times: at the start of the day, at midmorning, at noon, at midafternoon, and with only one hour left—he wants employees even if they only make themselves available for part of the day. Most importantly, he instructs his foreman to have those hired last receive their pay first: he wants those who worked all day to see how he paid all those hired later the same amount. Not only does the landowner seek to hire as many workers as he can, he also wants to teach them his sense of justice. The parable’s original Greek text makes the justice motif even clearer than does the translation: *dikaion* (“what is just”) in v. 4 connects elegantly with *ouk adikō* (“I am not cheating”) in v. 13. The employer delivers exactly what he promised: what is just.
- But why are the employer’s actions just? In paying all his workers a denarius, he ensures that they receive their daily bread.⁶ His actions cohere with providence of the Father, who answers the petition to “give us this day our daily bread” (see Mt 6:11).

⁵ Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville MN.: Liturgical, 1991), 282.

⁶ See Roland Meynet, *A New Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, trans. Patricia Kelly (Miami: Convivium, 2010), 294.



- The literary context contributes further meaning. Before delivering this parable, Jesus has begun his journey to Jerusalem (19:1), responded to the Pharisees' question about divorce (19:2–12), welcomed children (19:13–15), and encountered the rich young man (19:16–30). Immediately after addressing this parable to the Twelve, he predicts his Passion (20:17–19) and responds to the request of the mother of James and John (20:20–28). A common theme during this sequence is the inversion of norms in God's kingdom: "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (20:16; see also 19:30 and 20:26–28). In the parable, the most productive workers come last, while the latest hired receive their pay first; in the larger Gospel, those who respond last receive the Kingdom first.

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- With which characters in the parable do various members of my congregation identify? Some may relate to the hardworking workers who grumble at the landowner's actions. Others, especially those who face unemployment or underemployment, may relate to the workers hired later in the day and find in the landowner an ideal employer. This Gospel presents the opportunity for all readers to broaden their perspectives and develop a more profound solidarity with others in different life circumstances.
- This Gospel places economic realities in the foreground: all the workers wait to be hired, desperate to earn basic sustenance. God's sense of justice, exemplified by the landowner's actions, demands that all receive their daily bread. Few Gospel texts speak more clearly to the universal destination of goods—the natural right of humanity to provide for basic needs—even as humans also possess a right to private property.⁷ During National Migration Week—which occurs the following week, September 21–27—the Church recalls that this natural right is also applied to migrants, who flee their homeland in search of physical and economic security.⁸ The landowner in the parable chooses to allocate his property to provide for the needs of the various laborers, regardless of the number of hours worked. How willing are members of my congregation to make the same choice?
- Imprisoned for preaching the Gospel (Phil 1:7, 13, 17), St. Paul addresses the Christians of Philippi with holy indifference: "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain." By the time he penned these words, he had experienced gruesome persecution at the hands of the authorities. Yet he maintained optimism, rejoicing repeatedly (Phil 1:18, 4:4). To what extent is my congregation eager to adopt the Apostle's perspective and heed his instruction: "conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ"?
- The first reading offers God's words through the prophet Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." The landowner's thoughts and ways do not match those of his laborers left grumbling. Are members of my congregation willing to hear the prophet's words addressed to today's polarized media ecosystem and pursue Gospel values, unfiltered by partisan talking points?

⁷ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), nos. 7–11, repeated in subsequent magisterial documents such as Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), nos. 120–127, and Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), nos. 65–67. See also the summary in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2402–2407.

⁸ See Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), nos. 37–41 and 129–136.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, September 27, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Ez 18:25–28	Promise of mercy to the repentant
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 25	An appeal for divine compassion
Second Reading	Phil 2:1–11	Call to Imitate Christ's Humility
Gospel	Mt 21:28–32	Parable of Two Sons in the Vineyard

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 2: "Who Is My Neighbor?"

Actions speak louder than words. Jesus' parable articulates this truism by contrasting two sons: one accedes to his father's call to labor in the vineyard but does not go, whereas the other son rebels against his father but then changes his mind. God rewards those who repent—change their minds and do his will—regardless of prior rebellion. Jesus' audience is shocked to hear that repentant tax collectors and prostitutes enjoy God's favor. This Gospel invites us to broaden our sense of neighbor to include all whom God invites into his kingdom, a theme especially relevant on this World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

Special Note

The English and Spanish translations of this Sunday's Gospel differ in the order in which they report the two sons in the parable: the English describes first the son who refuses to work in the vineyard but then changes his mind, whereas the Spanish relates him second. The answer to the Lord's question thus differs in the two versions: the English has "the first," whereas the Spanish has "*el segundo*." This discrepancy results from complexities in the manuscript tradition; textual critics differ on which tradition is authentic.⁹ Homilists who preach in both languages will want to ensure that their preaching matches the version proclaimed.

Observations about the Readings

- The Evangelist sets this parable during the first Holy Week, mere days before his Passion. Jesus has entered Jerusalem (Mt 21:1–11), cleansed the temple (21:12–17), cursed the fig tree (21:18–22) and now faces a hostile audience of chief priests and elders who question his authority (21:23–27). This parable thus takes a polemical tone: the Lord faces accusations and, far from wilting under pressure, takes a strong stand: "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you." The Lord's words invite us to consider the circumstances when the Church should articulate a strong message amid hostile circumstances.
- Our Lord's positive mention of tax collectors and prostitutes demands attention, as the chief priests and elders would have taken offense.¹⁰ After all, these two groups were infamous public sinners, whereas the chief priests and elders saw themselves as the defenders of Israel's moral heritage. Yet what matters is not history but how the groups responded to St. John the Baptist: the tax collectors and prostitutes, like the repentant son, "changed their minds."
- Repentance as a change of mind also appears in the first and second readings. Amid the chaos of the Babylonian Exile, the prophet Ezekiel calls his hearers to "turn away" from wicked ways. Similarly, St. Paul appeals to the Philippian church to turn from "selfishness and vainglory" and toward the humility exemplified by Christ's death on the cross.

⁹ For more on this text-critical issue, see Donald Senior, *Matthew*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 237.

¹⁰ For further discussion, see Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 275–76.



- This change of mind affects whom we perceive as our neighbors. The chief priests and elders have a narrow definition of neighbor, one that excludes tax collectors, prostitutes, and other groups they consider sinful. The Lord invites them and us to a broader perspective: the Lord calls all to repentance. Our neighbors include all whom the Lord so calls.

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- The last century has seen an increased consensus on the existence of inalienable human rights, even as new threats to human dignity have emerged.¹¹ Following the long tradition of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that fundamental human dignity attaches to each human being “simply by virtue of existing, of having been willed, created, and loved by God.”¹² The Lord’s universal call to repentance—a “change of mind”—provides evidence of this divine love that undergirds human dignity. To what extent is my congregation willing to adopt God’s merciful perspective in broadening our sense of neighbor?
- The canticle that appears in today’s second reading famously articulates the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. The Church uses it also every year in the Lectionary of Palm Sunday and prays it at First Vespers of Sunday. But the canticle is no poetic digression; rather, it appears in St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians to persuade these first-century northeastern Greek Christians to take on “the same attitude” that led Christ to the cross. How willing is my congregation to heed this apostolic call to humility?
- All three readings are set amid troubled circumstances: Ezekiel lives in Babylonian exile, Paul languishes in prison, and Jesus faces hostile questioning from the Jerusalem authorities. Yet all three voices resound courageously, an inspiration to contemporary Christians who face new troubles. How does my congregation respond to adversity with such boldness?
- Who are today’s tax collectors and prostitutes? Many in Judea considered these groups treacherous: tax collectors extorted funds for the imperial occupiers, and prostitutes often consorted with Roman soldiers.¹³ Whom do members of my congregation perceive as treacherous today and thus exclude as neighbors? How does this parable challenge that tendency?
- The World Day of Migrants and Refugees is a Vatican sponsored celebration that occurs on the last Sunday of September. Given the distinctive way Scripture understands who our neighbor is, how do we use this understanding to inform our engagement with migrant communities who are coming to the United States, who attend our local parish, and who live in our communities?

¹¹ See Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), nos. 54–58.

¹² Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 52.

¹³ See Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 299.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, October 4, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Is 5:1–7	Israel, the Vineyard of the Lord
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 80	God, Shepherd of Israel
Second Reading	Phil 4:6–9	“Have no anxiety at all”
Gospel	Mt 21:33–43	Parable of the Vineyard’s Tenants

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 1: The Church’s Role to Transform Society

October is Respect Life Month, and today (October 4) is Respect Life Sunday. Each year at this time, the bishops of the United States call us to pause and reflect more deeply on the sacred gift of human life and our role in welcoming, cherishing, and protecting the lives of our brothers and sisters. Like the owner who took such great care in the creation and cultivation of his vineyard, God loved each of us into existence and continues to care for us, inviting us ever deeper into his friendship. We draw closer to him when we follow his example and love one another as he loves us. We must persevere and work to protect the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves, those who are vulnerable, or who even feel as if their lives are not worth living. How might we reflect on our role as workers in the vineyard who seek to protect the unborn, moms in need, and all who are vulnerable?

Observations about the Readings

- The vineyard is a setting with twofold significance. On a positive note, vineyards produced the fruit that was essential for food security in the ancient Near East. On the flip side, vineyards were also the site of backbreaking labor, which was often performed by tenant farmers such as those described in the Gospel parable. These workers were paid for their service on the land, but most of the profit belonged to the owner. The workers—perhaps feeling underpaid and weighed down by the grind of heavy labor—rebel with violence against the owner’s emissaries.¹⁴
- Not only is the tenant’s plan utterly wicked, it is also downright foolish: they suppose that killing the heir will allow them access to his inheritance.¹⁵ Do they not realize that the owner will punish them and direct the inheritance elsewhere? Their rebellion has no realistic prospect of either relieving them of their labor burden or garnering them a pay raise. The parable thus speaks to the futility of rebelling against God’s call.
- The opening line of the parable borrows language from the first reading, mentioning the hedge, wine press, and tower, all of which appear in Isaiah’s song of the vineyard. The prophetic poem is a rhetorical masterpiece: it begins like a love song that celebrates how God provided lavishly and then invites its original reader into the action: “Judge between me and my vineyard.” The song ends in tragedy, as the reader hears the devastating judgment that the vineyard is God’s people, who have failed to meet his expectations: “He looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed!”¹⁶ In the same way, our Lord invites his hostile listeners to judge for themselves, and they in turn condemn themselves: “He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who

¹⁴ For an ampler description of the economic circumstances surrounding vineyards in the ancient Near East, see Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 304.

¹⁵ See Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 304.

¹⁶ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, Anchor Yale Bible 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 206–208, and Leslie Hoppe, *Isaiah*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament 13 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 21–23.



will give him produce at the proper times.” The Evangelist reports that, although they understand the parable, the chief priests and Pharisees continue to look for a way to arrest Jesus (Mt 21:45–46).

- The vineyard motif also appears in the Responsorial Psalm, which comes from Psalm 80. This psalm likens God’s people to a vineyard, laments their sufferings, and begs the Lord to care for and restore what he had planted.

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- As the Psalmist reminds Israel of its need for salvation and repentance, we are reminded that we belong to God, and that mercy and healing is always possible. In our world today, we see countless examples of complete disregard for human life. From the child hidden in its mother’s womb, to the terminally ill patient nearing the end of life, every person is created in the image and likeness of God and deserves respect and protection. The Lord invites us to seek forgiveness whenever we turn from him, and to receive his tender mercy. He wants to give us *new life*, no matter how we have failed. No sin is beyond God’s mercy.
- As the Evangelist reported mere chapters before this parable, Christ announced that he would found the Church on the rock of St. Peter (Mt 16:18). The Church thus recognizes that it has a vocation to perfect holiness, even as its members often fall short of that divine mandate by falling into sin, with consequences that mar the Church’s landscape.¹⁷ Is my congregation eager to join with the psalmist in begging for God’s restoration of all that is broken and seeking reconciliation, both with God and with one another?
- Catholics have long analogized service in the Church to labor in a vineyard. On the central loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica upon his 2005 papal election, Pope Benedict XVI famously described himself as “a simple and humble laborer in the vineyard of the Lord.”¹⁸ To what extent does my congregation identify with the “other tenants” who do the vineyard owner’s bidding?
- The Greek word for “fruit” (*karpos*) occurs four times in this Gospel parable, variously translated as *fruit*, *produce*, and *vintage* depending on context. Including these four occurrences, the noun occurs nineteen times in Matthew’s Gospel, by far the most of any New Testament book. The Evangelist thus privileges the effects of conversion; the words of St. John the Baptist establish a theme for Matthew’s entire Gospel: “Produce good fruit as evidence of your conversion” (Mt 3:8). What good fruit has my congregation borne? How have we responded to the many blessings the Lord has planted in his vineyard?
- One great fruit produced by faithful Catholics in the U.S. over the past several decades is steadfast support for mothers facing a challenging pregnancy. *Walking with Moms in Need* is a nationwide, parish-based initiative to increase support for pregnant and parenting mothers in need. It works to ensure that any woman who finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, or parenting in difficult circumstances, can turn to her local Catholic Church and be connected with the resources she needs. How does my congregation support pregnant and parenting mothers and families?
- Unfortunately, the tragedy of abortion has touched many Catholics. Statistically, there are many women who have had abortions or families that have been affected by abortion in your congregation. They need to hear that forgiveness and healing are available through the sacrament of reconciliation and that our church supports them through Project Rachel Ministry. How can I share this message with all in my congregation with special care for those who may have been wounded by the tragedy of abortion?

¹⁷ *Order of Penance* (Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing, 2023), nos. 3 and 5.

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Urbi et Orbi Apostolic Blessing* (2005).



Preaching Aid for Sunday, October 11, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Is 25:6–10a	God prepares a feast for all people
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 23	The table spread in the sight of foes
Second Reading	Phil 4:12–14, 19–20	Paul’s trust in the Lord to provide
Gospel	Mt 22:1–14	Parable of the Wedding Feast

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 2: “Who Is My Neighbor?”

Today’s readings focus attention on God’s care for those on the margins. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a lavish banquet prepared by the Lord for all people in Jerusalem. In that same city, the Lord tells a parable of a wedding feast to which all are invited, even as they must dress in a wedding garment. St. Paul commends the Christians of Philippi for sharing in his distress as he suffers in prison; he expresses confidence in the Lord who strengthens him.

Observations about the Readings

- Both the first reading and the Gospel evoke an inclusiveness that some original hearers would have found offensive. The prophet Isaiah expressly indicates that God prepares the feast of “rich food and choice wines” for the enjoyment of “all peoples,” Israel’s enemies included. Notably, this feast occurs in Jerusalem on Temple Mount. Such an image coheres with the same prophet’s vision of Israel, Egypt, and Assyria (modern-day northern Iraq) living in peaceful harmony (Is 19:23–25), a reconciliation that seems a pipe dream today as much as it did in antiquity.¹⁹ Similarly, the Gospel parable includes the “bad and good alike.”
- All three banquets in today’s Liturgy of the Word—in Isaiah, the psalm, and in the Gospel parable—offer lavish food and drink with overflowing cups and cattle ready for slaughter. In an ancient Near East where food security was hardly assured, the presence of an abundance of food and wine evoked God’s powerful intervention.²⁰
- The context of these lavish feasts implies God’s power over hostile forces. Isaiah’s banquet marks the destruction of death itself. (This reading thus also appears in the Lectionary for Masses of the Dead.) The banquet in the psalm occurs in the presence of foes. The Gospel banquet occurs after the king has punished a rebellious city and also describes the expulsion of an inappropriately attired wedding guest. While left undefined by the text, the wedding garment likely symbolizes the evidence of repentance otherwise described as “fruit” in Matthew’s Gospel.²¹ These context clues suggest that God’s abundant blessing does not denigrate human responsibility: God invites all to his banquet and demands behavior consistent with the generosity shown by God in preparing it.
- The king enters the banquet hall to see the guests; more literally, he comes to see “the ones who are reclining.” The Greek word translated “guests” is a participle formed from the verb “recline” (*anakeimai*), the usual posture for one dining at a meal. Notably, this same word appears in Matthew’s Gospel to describe Jesus both when he is anointed before his Passion (26:7) and at the Last Supper (26:20). The king in the parable not only provides an abundance of food for the guests, but invites them to dine at his table, a posture that suggests intimate communion. One might read the

¹⁹ Hoppe (*Isaiah*, 57) observes that “the prophet is carried away by his own rhetoric and describes a vision that has never been realized.”

²⁰ Hoppe, *Isaiah*, 67–68.

²¹ For more on how clothing symbolizes conversion in the New Testament, see Senior, *Matthew*, 246. See also Gal 3:27.



expulsion scene as an appeal to Church members not to forfeit their communion with the Lord through behavior inconsistent with the holiness demanded by Baptism.²²

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- The banquets in today's readings indicate that God invites generously to his table, even as he upholds a demanding moral standard. What factions or other obstacles to unity hinder my congregation from allowing the Eucharist to serve as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet?²³
- St. Paul teaches that the Eucharistic banquet is a "participation" or "communion" (Greek *koinonia*) in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16–17). In doing so, he emphasizes that the whole Church—the ecclesial body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27)—is brought together by the sacramental body of Christ.²⁴ How well does my congregation's liturgical celebration of the Eucharist articulate the dynamism between the Lord's Real Presence in the Most Blessed Sacrament and his action in the sacred assembly brought together as a united community in the Lord?
- As we come to receive the Lord in Holy Communion, we cannot but acknowledge our destitution before the God we receive. We thus echo the centurion in praying, "Lord, I am not worthy that you may enter under my roof" (Mt 8:8). Our conscious unworthiness thus requires that we remember the destitute among us, as we cannot receive so lavish a gift without using the supernatural strength gained from it to relieve the burdens of those in need.²⁵ What role do those suffering all kinds of deprivation occupy in my congregation?
- The broad language of these readings—"all peoples," "every face," "bad and good alike"—draws attention to peripheries of every kind. Pope Francis taught that "the salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone."²⁶ What obstacles prevent my congregation from bringing the Gospel to various peripheries? How can we, like the servants in today's Gospel, convey the invitation to the Lord's banquet, even as we uphold the Gospel in its integrity and its demand that all who are clothed with Christ walk by the Holy Spirit (see Gal 3:27, 5:16–23)?

²² Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 215. Perhaps the Evangelist obliquely alludes to a situation of immoral behavior within the church such as that addressed by St. Paul in 1 Cor 5:1–13.

²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 1402](#).

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 1396](#).

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 1397](#).

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), no. 113.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, October 18, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Is 45:1, 4–6	God at work through King Cyrus
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 96	The Lord as king over all nations
Second Reading	1 Thes 1:1–5b	Faith, hope, and love in Thessalonica
Gospel	Mt 22:15–21	The question about the census tax

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 3: Faith before Politics

At first glance, Jesus tells the Pharisees to pay their taxes to Caesar. He makes a point about performing a civic duty while relativizing the value of the coin that bears the emperor's image in favor of the more serious duties that believers have toward God—duties that have both an internal and an external component. The Thessalonian Christians respond rapidly to St. Paul's preaching; scarcely three weeks of preaching leads them to an admirable “work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope,” an example worthy of imitation. In what ways can our duty towards God inspire efforts for the common good that are first and foremost rooted in faith?

Observations about the Readings

- In what is quite possibly the earliest extant Christian written testimony,²⁷ St. Paul praises his northern Greek converts in Thessalonica for their rapid progress in the faith. He notes that they have been “chosen” by God and are responding to this call with a “work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope,” the earliest juxtaposition of what later Christian theology would call the three theological virtues. Although these Thessalonian Christians live in a cosmopolitan port city with all the sociopolitical complexity that it entailed,²⁸ the Apostle praises their having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes 1:9).
- The triad of theological virtues merits a closer look: St. Paul does not limit himself to speaking of faith, hope, and love. He says more: a “work of faith” and a “labor of love,” making clear that faith has both an internal and external component. The Church's theological tradition explains that faith, as a theological virtue, is infused into the human soul by God so that human beings can participate in the divine life of the Most Blessed Trinity.²⁹ At the same time, the Apostle makes clear here and elsewhere (see especially Gal 5:6 and Rom 13:11–12) that faith demands external action: it cannot remain a private opinion. Indeed, the Thessalonian Christians have so excelled in externalizing their faith they have become “a model” for all the other Christians in Greece (1 Thes 1:7).
- The example of the recent Christian converts in Thessalonica provides a lens through which to read the imperial upheaval evident in the first reading and Gospel. King Cyrus of Persia becomes God's chosen instrument to liberate the exiles in Babylon; this transfer of imperial power would allow God's people to return to their homeland in Jerusalem. Nearly six centuries later, the descendants of these exiles would find themselves under Roman domination and faced with a choice of whether to pay the census tax to Caesar—thus lending legitimacy to his sovereignty over a land to which God held true title—or to rebel against it and face potentially lethal consequences.

²⁷ See the discussion regarding issues of chronology relevant to 1 Thessalonians in Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 432–33 and 456–58.

²⁸ Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina 11 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 2.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [nos. 1812–13](#).



- Seemingly entrapped by his accusers, Jesus finds an escape hatch. He tells them to give their Roman coins, valid for tax payment only because Caesar has so decided, to the one who issued them. But the Lord follows this instruction with something more demanding: “Repay ... to God what belongs to God” (Mt 22:21)—which encompasses all possessions and more importantly, as Jesus will teach later that same day, all one’s “heart,” “soul,” and “mind” (Mt 22:37). In so doing, the Lord subordinates Caesar to the Father without provoking a seditious tax revolt.³⁰

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- Catholic tradition upholds a general duty to obey legitimate political authority but notably cites this Gospel in defending a duty to refuse obedience to illegitimate exercises of legitimate authority.³¹ Indeed, the Church understands the duty to “repay to Caesar” at the service of the common good. In this polarized era, to what extent does the common good motivate the members of my congregation?
- The common good is a hallmark of the social teaching of the Church. Pope Leo XIV recently remarked, “It is the pursuit of the common good that gives life to a people, understood not as a mere collection of individuals, but as a living reality in which people learn to recognize that they themselves are interconnected and jointly responsible for the *res publica* [public reality].”³² Our Lord’s words in this Gospel summon all of his people to responsible participation in the shared life of the human community. What opportunities exist in our local and national community for deeper participation?
- This Gospel thus is not so much about taxes or fulfilling social obligations as a summons to selflessness: to return all that God has given us to him for his glory and for the good of others. How does my congregation understand the duty to “repay ... to God what belongs to God”?
- This call to selflessness situates us alongside the Thessalonian Christians: God calls us also to a “work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope.” Each of us faces a question as we consider faithful citizenship: what motivates my work—my faith or something else?

³⁰ See Senior, *Matthew*, 247–49. The late American Passionist priest-scholar rightly notes that this text ought not be cited as evidence for the separation of Church and state, as such a view undervalues the narrowness of our Lord’s rationale for allowing the payment of the census tax: the coin is issued by Caesar and bears his inscription. What belongs to God greatly exceeds what belongs to Caesar: the two domains are not equal, separate spheres.

³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 2242](#). See also Pope Paul VI, Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 74.

³² Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 62.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, October 25, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Ex 22:20–26	The law of care for the weak
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 18	The Lord as refuge and strength
Second Reading	1 Thes 1:5c–10	Imitation amid affliction
Gospel	Mt 22:34–40	The greatest commandment

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 3: Faith before Politics

Asked which commandment in the law is the greatest, the Lord selects the famous *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:5 as the first and the injunction to love one's neighbor in Leviticus 19:18 as the second. In so doing, he does not diminish the rest of Israel's legal heritage but rather summarizes them under these two headings. This twofold moral duty toward God and neighbor sets the tone for faithful engagement in public life.

Observations about the Readings

- The first reading comes from the first major body of legislation in the Torah (Pentateuch), usually called the Covenant Code, as it appears after the Lord's manifestation to Moses and the people on Mount Sinai (Ex 19) and before the ratification of the covenant by the people (Ex 24). The duties toward noncitizens, widows, and orphans demanded by this legislation also appear in the laws of other ancient Near Eastern cultures, as without legal protection these groups would lack any defense against abuses.³³
- The psalmist uses a medley of images to describe God: strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, and salvation. A tone of desperation permeates the psalm, as the psalmist expresses relief at deliverance from a lethal threat from God.
- The desperation motif continues in the second reading, as St. Paul notes that the Thessalonian Christians heard the Apostle's preaching amid "affliction." This Greek noun (*thlipsis*) appears often in the Pauline letters, most notably in Romans 5:3–4, where Paul boasts in his afflictions because they produce endurance, character, and hope.
- The Lord himself faces trouble, as the question about the greatest commandment comes as a test. Presumably, the questioner wants to trap Jesus into preferring one law over another, which would serve as the basis for discrediting him as he teaches publicly in the temple. As he did with the question about the census tax, the Lord evades the trap, citing two commandments and claiming that everything else "depends on" the love of God and neighbor.³⁴

Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- These readings invite us to reflect on our experience of trouble and desperation. Most of us can relate to that pressured feeling in the gut and elevated heart rate that accompany trouble. Where have we felt so vexed by difficult circumstances that we did not know what to do next? These readings speak to the reality of those troublesome experiences and invite us to recognize how God is a rock amid them and how we are called to alleviate the sufferings of others.

³³ See Mark S. Smith, *Exodus*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 89. For examples of a few roughly contemporaneous Near Eastern laws that protect these vulnerable groups, see The Laws of Hammurabi, §177, trans. Martha Roth, no. 2.131 in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2:347, and The Middle Assyrian Laws, Tablet A, §A28 and §A33, in the same collection, 2:356–57.

³⁴ See Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 289.



- The prominence of the Mosaic Law, both in the first reading and our Lord's two citations of it in the Gospel, invites us to consider the purpose of law. Here Scripture speaks of law as a positive force, one that directs human action toward communion with God and human flourishing. The Catholic tradition builds on this biblical understanding, recognizing that legislative authority has a duty to serve the common good.³⁵ To what extent does my congregation's perception of law cohere with this understanding?
- Reflecting on these experiences, we have an opportunity to recommit ourselves to solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, a key tenet of Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Leo XIV speaks of solidarity as a choice to see one another with eyes that assume responsibility for binding up their wounds. He elaborates, "Solidarity arises precisely when we decide not to remain indifferent to what happens to our neighbor but instead to transform unavoidable bonds—economic, cultural, and technological—into paths of sharing, cooperation, and mutual care, embracing the idea of 'thinking and acting in terms of community.'"³⁶ To what extent has my congregation incorporated solidarity into our church life?
- Faced with present-day experiences of desperation and sorrow, the political culture of the U.S. often responds with suspicion, scapegoating, and cynicism. Indeed, television ratings and social-media views increase when an audience feels strong emotion: fear of danger, anger at perceived injustice, or euphoria at defeating a perceived enemy. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis identified these tendencies and called the Church to a clear-eyed charity: "Love of neighbor is concrete and squanders none of the resources needed to bring about historical change that can benefit the poor and disadvantaged."³⁷ What informs how the members of my congregation think about public life, an authentic love of neighbor or a lesser motive? What value can the Church's social teaching bring to the secular conversation, given our insistence on God's love for all who are vulnerable—from the unborn, to the poor, immigrant, sick, or elderly?

³⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1902–1904.

³⁶ Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (2026), no. 74, quoting Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 116.

³⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 165.



Preaching Aid for Sunday, November 1, 2026

Readings

First Reading	Rv 7:2–4, 9–14	The vast heavenly vision
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 24	Longing to see God’s face
Second Reading	1 Jn 3:1–3	“We are God’s children now”
Gospel	Mt 5:1–12a	The Beatitudes

Faithful Citizenship Theme (FCT)

FCT 2: “Who Is My Neighbor?”

The Solemnity of All Saints displaces the ordinary Sunday celebration this year and reminds us that all of us are called to holiness by appropriating the values embedded in the Beatitudes, even as they contrasted with those of Jesus’ time and culture and contrast with cultural norms today. The first reading from Revelation paints a rich portrait of the heavenly court: a countless multitude “from every nation, race, people, and tongue.” As Catholics, we uphold human dignity across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, not out of any secular vision but instead because divine revelation demands nothing less.

Observations about the Readings

- The Book of Revelation depicts the victory of Jesus, the Lamb of God who had been slain (see Rv 5:6). Today’s first reading depicts a grand celebration in which a vast multitude “who have survived the time of great distress” cry out in praise. The inclusiveness of the multitude demands a broad understanding of neighbor, as membership in the heavenly city transcends national, linguistic, and other cultural boundaries.
- The posture of this multitude merits mention: they stand before the throne, a notable choice given that others prostrate themselves in the scene. In the New Testament, the standing posture connotes victory, resurrection, and steadfastness. St. Paul uses this posture with the same meaning when he relates the importance of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:1) and affirms the Corinthian Christians for their steadfastness in faith (2 Cor 1:24), among other texts.
- Moreover, the white robe and palm branches held by the multitude of victorious faithful imply significant meaning. The white robes evoke innocence (Rv 3:4) and baptism (Gal 3:27), which itself effaces divisions among the faithful. Palm branches symbolize victory over the forces causing the “great distress” of persecution.³⁸ Taken together, these two symbols point to two perennial realities of Christian life: opposition and victory. Just as Christ faced opposition on the way to his cross and empty tomb, so should his followers expect adversity as they follow the way of the Paschal Mystery.
- If the first reading and responsorial psalm invite us to long for the heavenly realm, the Beatitudes indicate how Jesus’ followers invite the value of the Kingdom of Heaven into the world. Jesus proclaims blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, peacemakers, and those persecuted for the sake of righteousness—all groups overlooked if not outright disdained in the Roman Empire. In his life and death, Jesus will show himself as the preeminent example of the Beatitudes.³⁹

³⁸ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 100.

³⁹ See Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 88.



Reflection Questions for the Homilist

- This feast day reminds us of the universal call to holiness, a key biblical theme brought to prominence at the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁰ As we consider the many saints of all different backgrounds who provide examples of holiness in the face of the challenges of their day, how does our story overlap with theirs? What attributes of saints inspire us today?
- The Catholic Church in the U.S. has a distinguished history of welcoming immigrants from many nations around the world. At the same time, suspicion of newcomers can sometimes mar this honorable tradition. How has our local community experienced the assembly in our midst of a multitude from “every nation, race, people, and tongue”? Has this experience prepared us for the heavenly recurrence of this multitude?
- The vision of the vast multitude in today’s first reading paints a portrait of the catholicity of the Church: all humanity is invited to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, and the Church’s mission encompasses all humanity in its divine mandate.⁴¹ In a U.S. culture that celebrates individual human rights and encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, a temptation can arise for Catholic communities to prioritize the desires of individuals at the expense of opening its doors to the masses. To what extent does this temptation affect my congregation, and how might we redouble our commitment to mission?
- As was the case in Roman Empire, the values of the Beatitudes contrast with many of those promoted in the U.S. today. After all, the scourge of internet pornography ensnares multitudes from being clean of heart. Less obviously, meekness tends not to enhance a college application or a job interview. To the peacemaker’s dismay, whole sectors of the economy boom when war strikes. How, therefore, should we as Catholic Christians live our call to holiness—to be in the world and not of it—amid these competing pressures?

⁴⁰ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), no. 39.

⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [no. 831](#).



Example Approach – Preaching Faithful Citizenship

Topics

Preaching should, over the course of the year, include all the topics of the Church's social doctrine:

- Human Life
- Promoting Peace
- Marriage and Family Life
- Religious Freedom
- Preferential Option for the Poor & Economic Justice
- Health Care
- Migration
- Catholic Education
- Promoting Justice and Countering Violence
- Combatting Unjust Discrimination
- Care for Our Common Home
- Communications, Media, & Culture
- Global Solidarity

Principles

- a) Resist ideology and partisanship by only using Scripture and Church Teaching as your sources. The focus is *faith before politics*.
- b) Start with the inherent and equal dignity of every person from conception to natural death.
- c) Recall that the role of politics and government is the promotion of the common good and the protection of the vulnerable. The key question to ask is *who is my neighbor?*
- d) The role of the Church is to *help transform society* by forming her members in an authentic understanding of justice, being a voice for the poor and marginalized, and working for the common good.
- e) How can building my homily on one or more of the **theological** and **cardinal virtues** help me stay true to the Gospel in preaching the Church's social doctrine?

Cardinal Virtues

Once drafted, ask yourself:

1. Is what I am saying promoting **justice**? Is it in right relationship to what the Church says? Does it promote right relationships, a just society?
2. Is what I am saying exhibiting **fortitude** and for the right reasons? Am I standing up for the truth of the Gospel?
3. Is what I am saying modeling **temperance**? That is, am I resisting the temptation to over emphasize one topic or point, making the message more political or partisan? Have I been preaching too much on one issue to the detriment of others?
4. Is what I am saying prudent? **Prudence** is authentic discernment and in this case, it means clearly evaluating what I am saying not by sound bites, headlines, or slogans, but in how the issue(s) actually impact human dignity.



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the hierarchy of bishops who jointly exercise pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
