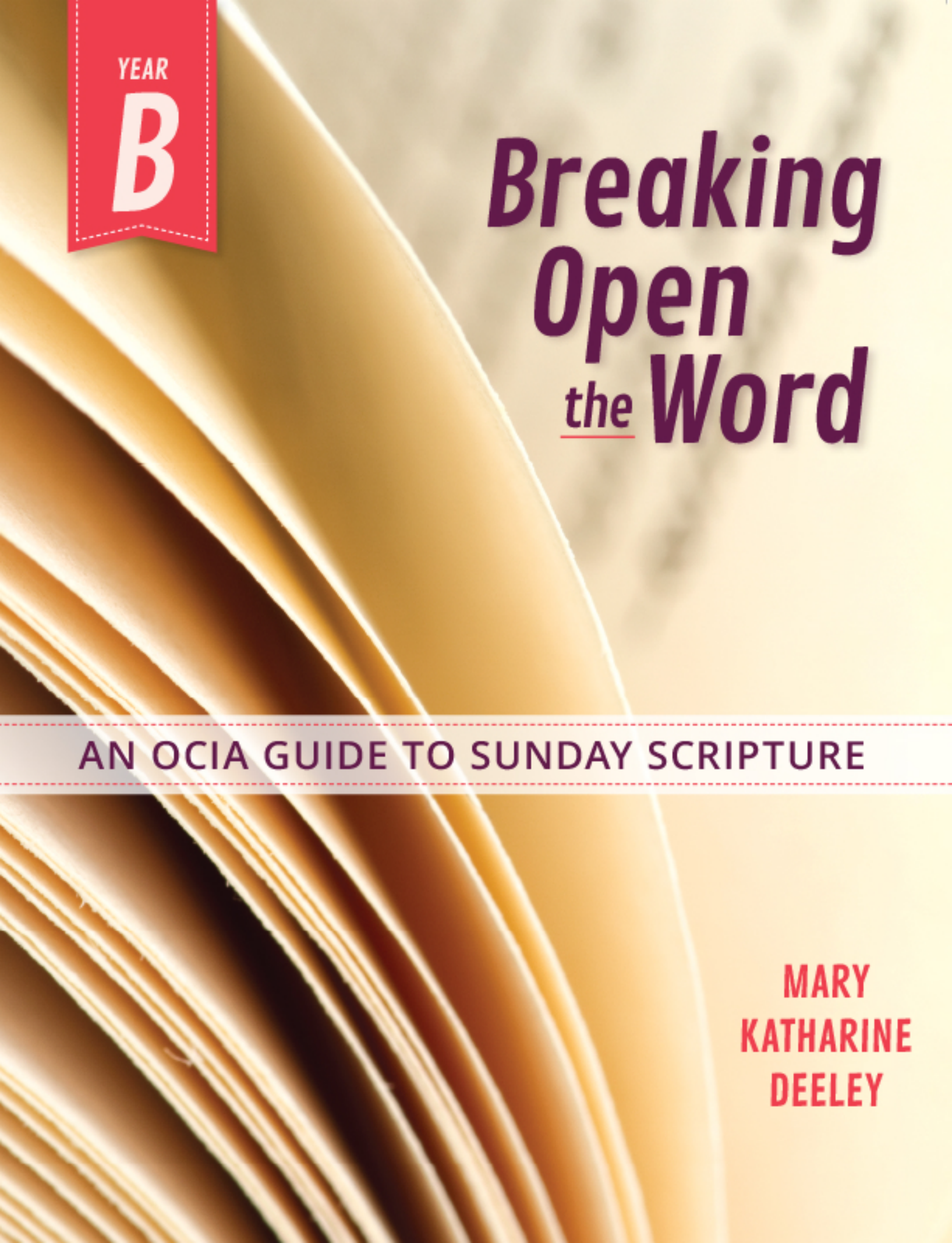




YEAR

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Breaking Open the Word

AN OCIA GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCRIPTURE

MARY
KATHARINE
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AN OCIA GUIDE TO SUNDAY SCRIPTURE

MARY KATHARINE DEELEY

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The process by which adults are initiated into the Catholic faith throughout the United States is now called the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. "Order" is a clearer translation of the Latin term for the process formerly known as the RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. People preparing for baptism and reception into the Church celebrate several rites as part of the order to which those rites belong—an order whose mission is to journey in the faith. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the name change in 2021, with American dioceses introducing the name thereafter. For more information, please contact your local diocese.

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Overview

What is Breaking Open the Word?

The *Lectionary for Sunday Mass* forms the basis for the OCIA process. This is appropriate because the Scriptures tell the story of the faith experienced by the people of God: the relationship between the Chosen People and Yahweh, and the relationship between the early Christian community and Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. As we reflect upon these faith stories, our own stories of how God has impacted our lives become more clearly perceived and articulated. The Scriptures convey the stories of a community. So it is fitting that the catechumens and candidates gather in community to break open God's word and apply it to their own lives in the here and now.

In their reflection and linking of the Scriptures to their own lives, the early Christians began to develop official summaries and teachings about the meaning of their communal religious experiences. Since these doctrines and dogmas were born of theological reflection grounded in Scripture, the Church now links these teachings to Scripture in the OCIA process. Therefore, the sessions begin with Scripture reflection and move toward an encounter with Catholic belief. Since it is primarily through the Sunday liturgy that the community hands on its traditions and beliefs, this is also the most opportune time for the catechumens and candidates to be formed by the community. Beginning with the period of the catechumenate, it is urged that they be dismissed from the liturgy following the Prayers of the Faithful to reflect together upon the word of God and the teachings of the Church.

Breaking Open the Word—available for each of the three liturgical years (A, B, and C)—contains all the readings for every Sunday of each year. The readings are arranged so there are twenty-eight weeks between the first Sunday of Advent and Pentecost and twenty-eight weeks between Trinity Sunday and Christ the King. Commentaries for each Sunday, written by Scripture scholar Mary Katharine Deeley, follow the readings and are introduced with titles.

How to use Breaking Open the Word

Breaking Open the Word is designed to be useful for all team leaders of Christian initiation groups—adults and adolescents—and it serves as an excellent resource for participants in adult initiation classes. Additionally, it holds value for individual use, separate from Christian initiation: Whether you are planning homilies, involved in small-group faith-sharing, or simply searching for further enrichment and knowledge through the Sunday readings.



Relevant *Journey of Faith* lessons are listed at the end of each reflection. These include lessons related to the theme, as

well as at least one lesson that ties most closely to the Scripture readings. Incorporating these lessons ensures that you cover all the lessons in *Journey of Faith* during the liturgical year. Sundays between the first Sunday of Advent and the eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time refer you to lessons from the *Journey of Faith* Catechumenate packet; Sundays between the first Sunday of Lent and Easter refer you to lessons from the Enlightenment packet; Sundays between the second Sunday of Easter and Pentecost refer you to lessons from the Mystagogy packet. Because the twenty-eight weeks between Trinity and Christ the King may be used either for continuing Mystagogy or for beginning a new group of inquirers (or both), all the Sundays between Trinity and Christ the King refer you to both the Mystagogy and the Inquiry packets.

The commentaries, themes, and prayers contained in this book are aids for preparing you to lead inquirers, catechumens, candidates, and neophytes. You are invited and encouraged to familiarize yourself with these resources to better anticipate and stimulate questions and discussions. Leading others to Christ is the most important work you will do in your life; your personal preparation for such significant and rewarding work can never be adequately emphasized. *Breaking Open the Word* is a valuable resource for this type of work.

Included in Breaking Open the Word

- Readings for all Sundays of liturgical years A, B, and C, Advent through Christ the King
- Readings for the Easter Triduum
- Year A readings for the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent
- Readings for those occasional Sundays that supersede Ordinary Time Sunday readings
- Scripture commentary for every set of readings
- Discussion and/or reflection questions for every set of readings
- Readings are cross-referenced to the catechetical lessons
- A brief collection of short gathering prayers and dismissal prayers for each phase of the initiation process
- A thematic index

All readings are taken directly from the Lectionary for Mass for use in the dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC.

Suggested Agenda for a Sunday Session

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 30 minutes | Liturgy—all gather in church. Dismissal after the Prayer of the Faithful. |
| 10 minutes | Refreshments and settling in. |
| 15 minutes | Prayer and reflection—Where are we at this moment? |
| 45 minutes | Reread, reflect upon, and share the readings of the day—either all or one chosen for this session. Spouses and sponsors can join this session after Mass. |
| 10 minutes | Evaluation and prayer—How are we going to live the Scriptures this week? |

Note: During Precatechumenate (Inquiry) or Mystagogy, this format may be adapted for either a Sunday morning after Mass or for a weekday evening session.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:3, 4, 5, 9, 11

First Sunday of Advent, Year B

READING 1, ISAIAH 63:16B–17, 19B; 64:2–7

You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.

PSALM 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

READING 2, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3–9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

GOSPEL, MARK 13:33–37

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Remembering God

When he gave his first interview to the press as the 266th pontiff, Pope Francis was asked, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” His notable first response was: “I am a sinner.” He said it with a candor and humility that awed the world. How many of us are so willing to admit our faults? Even more to the point, how many of us truly kneel before God in prayer and confess that we are sinners? We might wonder what God’s reaction would be and whether such an admission could truly set us free.

At the beginning of the Advent season as we prepare for Christmas and the coming of Jesus Christ, Isaiah the prophet describes the terrible situation in which the Israelites found themselves. They were in exile, their temple destroyed. They felt abandoned by God. Perhaps they were even angry with God because of what had happened. If we were to read all of Isaiah we would learn that many of the Israelites had failed to follow God’s law. Now in a foreign country, the people realized that without the familiar prayers, ritual, and community to guide and support them, they were falling further away from God. Isaiah acknowledges that God was justified in his anger, but he doesn’t turn his back. Instead, Isaiah calls out to God in an act of absolute trust. Isaiah helps us remember that God is our Father who works awesome feats for his people. When we remember God, even in the midst of sorrow and hurt, we open ourselves to him. But it’s important to note that Isaiah is a model servant of humility before the Lord. God is the potter, we are the clay, and allowing God to work on us throughout this season prepares us for his coming.

Spiritual Strength

Throughout Scripture, we see that God continually reached out to his people even when they failed to be steadfast in their faith and were lured away by temptations of the world or their own desires. This