

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

May 30, 2010

Opening prayer: *God of all ages, you are loving, slow to anger, rich in kindness. We praise you for your goodness. You are the Creator and sustainer of our lives. You are our Savior. We honor you for your total gift of self. You are the Spirit of life, forgiveness, and peace. We delight in your tender love. One God in three persons, be near to us who are formed in your image. Dwell in us. We ask this gracious God, living and true, forever and ever. Amen.*

Sharing life: How have you experienced God this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The Feast of Pentecost completed the Lent-Easter season. We resume Ordinary Time the day after Pentecost, but each year, the *Sundays* in Ordinary time begin with two Solemnities, namely, the Most Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi. During the *Fifty Days of Easter*, we celebrated what God *did* for us through Jesus. This Sunday on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, we celebrate *who* God is for us. The first reading speaks of Lady Wisdom's role in creation. In the second reading, Paul reminds us how Christ's sacrifice made possible for us a personal relationship with God. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit helps the church to grasp the full meaning of Jesus' message, especially his message about his Father.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Proverbs 8:22-31

In this reading, we are introduced to a mysterious figure, Lady Wisdom. She has intrigued scholars since the dawn of creation. In the first verses of today's reading, Lady Wisdom tells us that she was God's first-born, existing long before anything else was brought forth. Then, in poetic detail, Lady Wisdom tells us how she was present with God as a kind of craftsman when the world was being created. The reading ends with an intriguing image of Lady Wisdom playing on the surface of the earth, taking delight in human beings. Lady Wisdom should not be seen as separate from God. Neither should she be seen as the feminine side of God. (Being pure spirit, God is neither male nor female.) In the Christian era, Wisdom was seen as the Word of God, which became flesh in Christ.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 8

This hymn of praise contrasts God's majesty with human lowliness, and marvels at God's treatment of humankind. The author especially marvels at God's concern for us inferior human creatures.

SECOND READING: Romans 5:1-5

The *saving work* of Jesus is a major theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. We are saved by grace. It is pure gift. We do not earn it. Rather, we open our

hearts to the gift and receive it. This "opening of our hearts" to Jesus is one way to describe what we call "*faith*." By opening our hearts to God in faith, we "gain access" to God who is our peace, hope and end. Because of our relationship with God, we can endure afflictions. Coping with afflictions leads to endurance and endurance leads to *tested virtue* and *hope*, which keeps us going in difficult times.

GOSPEL: John 16:12-15

Today's Gospel is an excerpt from Jesus' *Farewell Discourse* to his Apostles. They are downcast because of his departure. To console and help them, Jesus promises to send his Holy Spirit. One of the roles of the Spirit is to lead the disciples into "all truth." The Spirit will lead the Church to gradually understand the deep meaning and radical implications of the teachings of Jesus. Often the teachers of our Church will use this text when speaking about some of our teachings that are not *explicitly* mentioned in Scripture—beliefs about Mary, the papacy, and original sin. Through centuries of meditation on the Scriptures, Mother Church, led by the Spirit, observed the above teachings implied in the Scriptures. Another role of the Holy Spirit is to help the Church in every age to express, in fresh contemporary language, ancient truths.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you in the readings?
2. The first reading speaks about Lady Wisdom being playful, creative, and appreciative of beauty. To what extent are you like Lady Wisdom? Where do you see beauty in life?
3. What is one of your favorite images of God? Why?
4. To what extent is your spirituality Trinitarian? Do you pray to one person of the Blessed Trinity more than you pray to the others? Do you have a relationship with all three persons of the Trinity?
5. What questions would you like to ask God?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestions: When receiving Holy Communion or praying, try to image God as pouring his life and love into your being. Experiment with being playful in your relationship with the Lord.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray that our church family grows in her ability to image to the world the communal life of the Blessed Trinity. ©

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

June 6, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Loving and nourishing God, we gather together to contemplate the great gift of the Holy Eucharist. Open our eyes to the holy presence of Jesus in our midst and in our Eucharistic celebrations. Open our minds and hearts to the message you wish to convey to us in the scriptures we are about to share. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing of life: How was your week? Did you feel close or distant from God?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Three meals are recounted in today's readings. The first is probably a cultic sacrificial meal offered by Melchizedek, a priest and the king of Salem. The second reading is St. Paul's description of "what had been handed on to him from the Lord," namely, the words and actions of the Last Supper. The third is the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Today's solemnity gives us the opportunity to see the many facets of our weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Here we remember the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. We remember that Jesus Christ is present under the forms of bread and wine—real food and drink for our journey. And here we experience a multiplication of grace and mercy as we humbly offer ourselves to God. Let us pray this week for a greater appreciation and love for the Body and Blood of Christ.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Genesis 14:18-20

In this short reading, Melchizedek, King of Salem (early name for Jerusalem) comes to greet Abraham who is returning from a victorious battle. Melchizedek, who is also a priest, blesses Abraham with bread and wine. In early Christian tradition, the bread and wine are taken to prefigure the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Melchizedek, a man of unknown origins, is also seen to prefigure Christ. Just as the bread and wine celebrate Abraham's victory over his enemies and his reunion with his brother Lot, so does our Eucharistic sacrifice celebrate Jesus' victory over death, evil and sin, and enable us to remember our union with Jesus. In a response, Abraham gives Melchizedek a *tithe* of all he had. This is one of the first references to tithing in the Bible.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 110:1-4

This is a royal psalm extolling the Davidic kingship. It may have been addressed to a king on the day of his coronation by a court singer.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

This is the most ancient text we have on the origin of the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ. Since Paul was not present at the Last Supper, he is passing on what he

himself received. Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* it, *broke* it and gave it to his disciples. When he did this, Jesus identified himself with the bread and wine. "*This is my Bloody...my Blood...broken and poured out for you,*" i.e., Jesus' life was broken and poured out for the salvation of all people.

"*Do this in remembrance of me,*" do what I have done. In doing so, we are proclaiming and making present Jesus, our Redeemer. "*Do this...*" also calls us *to live* the meaning of the Eucharist. Like Jesus, we must be ready to lay down our lives for one another, thereby participating in the dying and rising of Christ.

GOSPEL: Luke 9:11-17

This is the only miracle story recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus is out in the desert with a large crowd of people teaching them about the reign of God and healing their sick. As evening draws near, the Twelve suggest that the people be dismissed so that they can go to the local villages for food and shelter. But Jesus challenges the Twelve to provide food. Then Jesus tells the Twelve to break the large crowds into small groups. Jesus *takes* the bread, *blesses* it, *breaks* it and *gives* it to his disciples to share. Jesus' action has clear Eucharistic overtones. At the Last Supper, he will also *take, bless, break* and *give* bread to the Twelve.

“All are satisfied” and there are 12 baskets left over. These simple words give us the meaning of this event, namely, that Jesus is the bread that satisfies our soul-hungers and he is the One who blesses us with abundance. The story also tells us that when we offer Jesus the little we have, he will bless and multiply it and use it to bless and nourish others.

“Give them something to eat yourselves” is a challenge to the Church to feed the physical and soul-hungers of people.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you in the readings?
2. Do you tend to limit your understanding of the Body of Christ to the bread you receive at Mass, or do you have a more expansive and global sense of the Body of Christ as including all the baptized?
3. The Vatican II document on the Sacred Liturgy states that at Mass, the aim to be considered above all else is the ‘full and conscious active participation of the people at Mass.’ To what extent is this true in your parish? Do you think that the people who sit near you are fully engaged in the mass? What helps and hinders you from being more fully engaged in the Mass?
4. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1397) states that participation in the Eucharist commits us to sharing our bread with the poor. Do you think that many Catholics make this connection? Do you?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Read an article that may help you to grow in your appreciation of the Eucharist. Be more conscious that in sharing your life with others, you are being Eucharist for them.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray that each of us may learn to connect the Eucharist more and more with our everyday lives. ©

For more on the Eucharist, see my Catechism articles on our webpage, www.ascensioncatholic.net. On the home page click on Catechism Topics. Scroll down to Lesson 14 on the Eucharist.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 13, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *God of mercy, your word to us today speaks of your mercy and compassion for the sinner. May we in turn be ready to share your mercy with all who have offended us. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, the prophet Nathan catches the conscience of Israel's King David by telling him the story of a rich man who takes a poor man's only lamb. In the Gospel, Jesus tries to catch the conscience of Simon the Pharisee by telling him a story. We don't know if Simon got it or not.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: 2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13

In this reading, the prophet Nathan confronts David with his sin of adultery and how he planned the murder of the woman's rightful husband. The reading begins with Nathan recounting God's blessings on David: God has chosen him and anointed him as king of his people. Nathan suggests that David's guilt is all the greater because he has been so blessed by God. David's sins of adultery and premeditated murder were tantamount to a rejection of God, and Nathan attests to this in verse nine: "*Why have you spurned the Lord?*"

Confronted with his terrible failures, David admits his wrongdoing: "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" Then Nathan assures David of God's forgiveness. "*The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin; you shall not die.*" In the context of today's Gospel, Nathan's proclamation of God's mercy is the main focus of this reading. God's willingness to forgive us is always greater than our ability to offend him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 32

This penitential psalm was prayed during public confession of sin. It celebrates God's willingness to forgive when we are willing to admit our sins. (See Psalm 51 for David's own act of contrition for his sins.)

SECOND READING: Galatians 2:16, 19-21

In this reading, Paul is developing the central thesis of his apostolic ministry, namely, that salvation

comes to us as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, and not as a result of our observance of the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. Only faith in the saving power of the risen Christ can bring us salvation. Our role in our salvation is humble acceptance of the gift offered by Christ.

GOSPEL: Luke 7:36-50

This Gospel is a powerful expression of the unconditional love that God has for the sinner. The scene includes an action and a parable with the latter explaining the former. Jesus shows that he forgives the woman's sins by accepting her act of hospitality, even before he pronounces the words of his forgiveness. And, as his parable explains, her love, in turn, is great because she has been forgiven much. Commenting on this Gospel, John Schmitz writes:

The Pharisee represents those community members who stingily dispense forgiveness and carefully select those worthy of it. Most likely they excluded their own kind from even needing forgiveness.

The penitent woman represents those community members who openly admit their need of God's forgiveness by their attitudes and actions. Such behavior Jesus encourages and praises.

The sandwiched parable of the generous money-lender suggests that God forgives all types of people—sinners great and small. Those sinners most receptive to God's love are abundantly blessed, while those perfect Pharisee-types receive little forgiveness because of their blindness.

The women named at the end of today's reading become very important. They represent those who had received the healing touch of Jesus. A true ministry of forgiveness and healing can take place only in a community where the members receive this healing themselves before they try to extend it to others. Luke seems to indicate that these women performed this ministry quite effectively.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. King David commits adultery, even though he had several wives, and covers up his grievous sin by planning for the murder of the woman's husband. Was God too soft on David? Should he not, at least, have demanded that David be fired or deposed? Would you?
3. How do you understand the connection between faith and good works? Do most Catholics act as if their salvation depended on their good works?
4. The unnamed woman in the Gospel is forgiven much because of her great love. "But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." How do these verses speak to you?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

How can you act on the message of today's readings?
Suggestion: Spend some time reflecting on the awesome nature of God's love. If you are harboring resentment towards others, pray for the grace to extend God's mercy to them.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for your own needs and the needs of others. ©

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 20, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Good and gentle God, thank you for bringing us together to share faith and fellowship. Your Word today draws us to contemplate your sufferings on behalf of humanity. May our sharing on the mystery of the cross comfort us as we experience suffering in our lives. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: In your opinion, what is the greatest form of suffering occurring in our world at this time?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The theme of suffering connects the first reading with the latter half of today's Gospel. In the second reading, Paul points out the radical equality we enjoy as baptized members of Christ.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Zechariah 12:10-11, 13:1

Today's first reading was evidently chosen to connect with the first prediction of Jesus' passion in today's Gospel. The background of the passage is uncertain.

The oracle contains elements of judgment and lamentation as well as hope and salvation. It seems the people of Judah have done a great wrong against some unidentified individual. They will look on him whom they have pierced and mourn as they would for a first-born son. The oracle ends with a note of hope. Those who are found guilty in the first part of the reading will be cleansed. Judgment will be turned into salvation.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 63

This beautiful psalm expresses the writer's longing for a close, intimate relationship with God.

SECOND READING: Galatians 3:26-29

For the next three Sundays, we will listen to three selections from Paul's Letter to the Galatians. In today's powerful reading, Paul proclaims the *radical equality* that exists among those baptized in Christ. No longer can Jews see themselves as superior to Gentiles, nor can men see themselves as superior to women. Even the baptized slave is his master's equal. While distinctions will continue, they will not benefit some to the disadvantage of others.

GOSPEL: Luke 9:18-24

The Gospel narrates Peter's confession of faith in Christ and Jesus' first prediction of his passion, death and Resurrection. It begins with Luke telling us that this story happens while Jesus is at prayer. Luke often speaks of Jesus at prayer before important events in his life. These verses are very important because they speak of Jesus' identity and portend that the Messiah would win salvation, not by political might, but by suffering—which would be incomprehensible to the disciples. Not only does Jesus tell his disciples that he will suffer, but that they too will experience the cross. The mystery of the cross is not only central to Jesus' vocation but to his disciples as well.

What does Peter mean when he says that Jesus is "The Christ of God"? The title does not mean what it means to us—that Jesus is a divine person. It does mean that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the new David who will defeat the Romans, their oppressors. Jesus tells those present not to tell anyone about his identity. He does not want them to be spreading false rumors as to who he is.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most? Why?
2. What was the greatest loss you ever experienced? What helped you to get through it?
3. Despite Paul's statement about the equality of all the baptized, we, 2,000 years later, still live in a world and even in a church where some people are

seen as more important than others. What are some examples of this and why does social inequality continue?

4. How would you answer Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am?" What is your favorite image of Jesus?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: If experiencing some loss, mourn it. Observe how you treat *all* people this week, irrespective of their background.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all grieving a loss. Pray for the perseverance of all advocates for equality among all people. Pray for all carrying a cross. ©

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 27, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Jesus, in today's Gospel you begin your journey to Jerusalem where death awaits you. Give us the courage to follow you and trust you in all things. May your Holy Spirit be with us as we share your Word. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The words “journey,” “commitment,” and “discipleship” sum up the message of today’s readings. In the first reading, Elijah says goodbye to family and former way of life to embark on a new journey of commitment and discipleship to God. In the Gospel, Jesus “resolutely” sets out on a journey to Jerusalem where he will pay the ultimate price for his fidelity to his Father. As he journeys, he tells prospective disciples “the cost” they will pay for following him. The second reading points to a journey from “living in the flesh” to “living in the spirit.”

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: 1 Kings 19:16, 19-21

This is a story of prophetic succession. It is done not only by *spoken word*, but also by *symbolic action*—the passing of a mantle. The passing of a mantle represents the handing down of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. Elisha is very willing to respond to his call, but first asks if he can bid farewell to his parents. Elijah’s harsh remark is no harsher than Jesus’ in today’s Gospel. The killing of the oxen is a symbolic action by which Elisha makes a total break with his former life as a farmer. Finally, before Elisha would become a full-fledged, independent prophet, he must first serve as Elijah’s attendant.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 16

The exclusive character of the prophet’s love for Yahweh fits well with today’s responsorial psalm.

SECOND READING: Galatians 5:1, 13-18

In these verses, Paul speaks about Christian freedom. Through baptism and the grace of Christ, Christians have been freed from the tyranny of the law and from enslavement to sin. But freedom is both a gift and a daily challenge. God graces us with true freedom to serve him in love, but if we do not cooperate with his grace, we will fall back again into the “yoke of slavery.”

Christian freedom is not a license to do what *we* want—especially not a license to follow every urging of the flesh. Rather, Christian freedom calls us to be free to serve others in love. For the Galatians to be “biting and devouring each other” is very contrary to what their baptism and Christian freedom call them to do.

Paul exhorts his readers to live by the spirit and not by the flesh. Paul’s intention here is not to set up a false opposition between our physical and spiritual selves. For Paul, “the flesh” is that part of us which has not yet surrendered to God, the part of us that is inclined towards selfish and sinful ways. The “spirit,” on the other hand, is that part of us that seeks to follow God’s promptings. If we submit to the Holy Spirit, he will help us to resist the inclinations of the flesh and embrace the ways of Jesus.

GOSPEL: Luke 9:51-62

Today’s Gospel begins Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem where he will face death. Luke uses the image of a journey as a metaphor for the Christian life. As Jesus travels, he instructs his followers on the *meaning* and *cost* of true discipleship. Prospective disciples must be willing to encounter rejection (“the Samaritans would not welcome him”), poverty (“nowhere to lay his head”), sacrifice of one’s previous priorities (“let the dead bury the dead and proclaim the Kingdom of God”). In other words, true discipleship calls for a total break with one’s entire past.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you in the readings?
2. In our first reading, we have the “passing of the mantle” of prophetic leadership from Elijah to Elisha. Can you name an experience from your family, work or church life when this happened to you? What was that experience like for you?
3. “Curbing the cravings of the flesh” can be a big challenge in a society that is so self-indulgent. Is there a craving of the flesh that is a big challenge for you? If so, what helps you to curb this craving?
4. Today, Luke begins what is often called his “journey narrative” (9:51–18:14). Jesus journeys to Jerusalem. Can you share an event or time when your life took a new direction, and the consequences of that choice or new direction?
5. In the Gospel, some “wannabe disciples” are making excuses as to why they want to delay a call to follow Jesus. What roadblocks do you run into when it comes to your giving Jesus a more committed ‘yes’?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestion: Take time to reflect on the journey of your life. Where is it going? Are you peaceful with its present direction? Would you like your life to go in a different direction? If so, name one thing you can do to move in the new direction.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for new disciples of Christ that they may have people to teach them by word and example.©

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 4, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Caring God, in our first reading today you are imaged as a caring mother comforting her children. As we gather today to share your Word, may we experience your motherly care for us. This we pray through Christ the Lord of the harvest. Amen.*

Sharing life: What do you love the most and least about America?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Our first reading celebrates Israel's return home from exile. In the second reading, Paul shares with us how he bears the marks of Christ on his body. In the Gospel, Jesus commissions the seventy-two disciples to go forth and share the Good News he came to bring. A spirit of joy pervades all three readings.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 66:10-14

This reading is a part of a larger poem which announces the return of the Israelites from exile. It proclaims the end of a time of suffering and the beginning of a new era of peace for Jerusalem and her inhabitants. "*Rejoice with Jerusalem...*" Isaiah uses the image of motherhood to characterize the relationship that will exist between Jerusalem and her people as well as the loving care that this relationship will provide. Like a nurturing mother, Jerusalem will give of herself, feeding her inhabitants from the fullness of her body. The very city for which they had previously mourned will now comfort her children.

Then the author uses the image of motherhood to speak about God's tender care for all who live in Jerusalem. Some of us today who are accustomed to only thinking of God in male images may find the motherly image of God surprising if not shocking.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 66

The strong joyous spirit of this psalm echoes the joy found in all three readings this Sunday.

SECOND READING: Galatians 6:14-18

This reading contains the closing verses of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Some of Paul's audience, the Judaizers (who try to impose Jewish customs on Gentile Christians) boast of circumcision as a sign of their favor with God. For Paul, circumcision means nothing. What matters is the cross of Christ and the new life it makes available to him. For Paul to boast

of the cross of Christ is amazing when we realize how crucifixion is regarded in his time. It is a degrading death reserved for slaves, violent criminals and political rebels. Who would want to boast of this kind of death? Paul also refers to how his commitment to Christ has led him to share in the sufferings of Christ. The "marks of Jesus" on his body is most likely a reference to the many beatings he received.

GOSPEL: Luke 10:1-2, 17-20

In today's Gospel, Jesus commissions seventy-two disciples in pairs to share the Good News to all ready to listen. (*Seventy-two* represented all the nations of the world; hence, their mission was to *all* people.) Before they depart, Jesus warns them that they will not be received warmly ("lambs among wolves"). He also tells them to travel lightly, trust in him. The urgency of the mission is underlined by the words: "Greet no one on the way." Jesus is telling them not to waste time with social niceties and not to waste time looking for suitable lodgings. Accept whatever is offered. If people open their hearts to you, accept their offer of hospitality. Cure the sick, cast out demons. If people close their hearts to you, do not waste time arguing with them. Move on to the next town. The Master is in charge.

The reading ends with the return of the seventy-two disciples and their stories of success. Jesus places their experiences in their true context. As impressive as the wondrous deeds they have witnessed, even more wondrous still is the fact that their names have been inscribed in the heavenly book (Exodus 32:32).

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you in the readings?
2. How does the image of God as a mother appeal to you? Do feminine images of God disturb or help your relationship with God?
3. In the second reading, Paul talks boastingly about the cross of Christ which gained him salvation. Can you name one time, past or present, when carrying a particular cross helped you to grow spiritually?
4. How easy is it for you to “travel light” in the journey of life?

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all missionaries at home and abroad. Pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Pray for America. ©

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 11, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Loving God, we gather once again to share life in the context of your holy Word. Today, you tell us that your Word is very near to us, in our mouths and in our hearts. Reveal to us the word you want us to hear this day. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, Moses reminds the Israelites that the law of God is “already in your mouths and in your hearts.” This truth is echoed by the lawyer in the Gospel who readily quotes the law. Jesus, echoing Moses, urges the lawyer to do what he already knows. The compassionate action of the Good Samaritan reveals to us the “image of the invisible God” which Paul speaks about in the second reading.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 30:10-14

This is an excerpt from Moses’ farewell speech to the Israelites in which he instructs them about the importance of the Law and its accessibility. He exhorts them to commit themselves to the Lord by observing his commandments. Previously, these commandments were considered as *external* to them; now they are presented as springing from within themselves. They are written in the people’s hearts and not far away from them. They can be understood by anyone who is open to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 69

Confidence in God in the midst of adversity is the key feature of this psalm of lament.

SECOND READING: Colossians 1:15-20

This is the first of four readings from Colossians that we will listen to in the coming Sundays. This reading is an excerpt from an early Christian hymn which focuses on the *divine nature* and prerogatives of the risen Christ, rather than on his humanity. These verses underscore the cosmic role, superiority and significance of Christ. *Christ is the icon or visible presence of God in our midst.* As the wisdom of God, present at the creation of the world, Christ is God’s “blueprint plan” as ordered. All things are made through him and for him. All things are designed to be in him. Christ is also Head of the Church. Despite the lofty images Paul uses to speak of Christ, he ends by grounding them in the historical reality of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, the redemptive event

that stands at the heart of his Lordship over all creation.

GOSPEL: Luke 10:25-37

In this well-known parable, a scholar of the law seeks to embarrass Jesus by challenging his knowledge of the law. Jesus turns the lawyer’s challenge back on him by asking him to answer his own question. Jesus poses the lawyer’s second question—“*Who is my neighbor?*”—to tell a parable and to affirm that one’s neighbor is *any* person in need, irrespective of class, race, color or creed.

We should note that the priest and Levite in the story are not the cold-hearted people that they are often made out to be. If they had touched what seemed like a dead corpse, they would have incurred ritual defilement and thus be unable to carry on their duties at the Temple. Then comes a Samaritan, a half-cast and despised by Jews. But this supposedly good-for-nothing fellow is moved by great compassion for the man who is almost dead. He treats him with great care and tenderness and pays for his care at the local inn. The lawyer who tried to trick Jesus is now forced to recognize that his enemy is the one who showed love for the person in need. Jesus ends by exhorting all to “go and do likewise.” Christianity is not a spectator’s sport. It is a call to compassionate action.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. In the first reading, we are told that the Word of God is not external to us; rather it is in our hearts. What is *your* experience? Do you generally tend to

think of God's Word as external to you or do you often experience it as present in your heart?

2. In the second reading, Paul tells us that Jesus is the Head of the Church. How does this belief make you feel?

3. As we look at the behavior of the Good Samaritan, what can we learn from him about how to respond to a person in need?

4. Name one good Samaritan you know. What makes the person a *good* Samaritan?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestion: Observe yourself this week and see to what extent you treat others with compassion. See if there are certain types of individuals or groups that you exclude from your circle of love.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for hospice workers and all who work with the needy, sick and homebound. ©

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 18, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together to share life in the context of listening to your Word. Help us to grow in the grace and ministry of hospitality. Help us to listen well to your Word and to always be ready to extend hospitality especially to the stranger and to the person in need.*

Sharing life: What gave you life and what drained life from you this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings are two beautiful stories about hospitality shown to divine persons. In the second reading, Paul speaks of his mission to the Gentiles and how his sufferings in some way supplement those of Christ.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: Genesis 18:1-10

In this classic-like story from the ancient Near East, heavenly beings come in disguise to a humble home, receiving hospitality from those living there, and reward the family with the announcement of the future birth of a child. The author(s) of Genesis made use of this form of storytelling to show how God intended to be faithful to his promise of a child to Abraham, whose name means “father of a multitude of nations.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 15

Those who live virtuously with others are the ones who are worthy to stand in the presence of God.

SECOND READING: Colossians 1:24-28

In this reading, Paul speaks about his sufferings and his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul’s reference to how his sufferings make up for “what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” has been the subject of much discussion. Obviously, Paul is *not* saying what he *seems* to be saying, namely, that there is something lacking in the saving acts of Christ, which are totally complete. Commenting on the statement of Paul, Patricia Sanchez writes: “*While the saving work of Jesus was complete, his campaign against sin is still being waged in and through the members of his Body, the Church.*” Paul is rejoicing for his share in this campaign. Paul’s sufferings on behalf of the Body of Christ help to extend the boundaries of the Church.

GOSPEL: Luke 10:38-42

Scholars like to point out the placement of this story in Luke’s Gospel. It comes immediately on the heels of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which highlights the “action-dimension” of the Christian life. This story is intended to balance that by highlighting the “contemplative dimension.” The story is *not* intended to be a put-down on Martha and her attention to the practical details of hospitality. Without the Marthas of this world, Jesus may not have gotten something to eat and the dirty dishes would have all piled up in the kitchen. Having said that, Martha needs to learn that even more important than the practical details of hospitality, is sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen to his words. The “better part” is to be devoted to Christ above all things and to be his faithful disciple, which in reality will involve both *listening* to Jesus and *acting* on his Word. In the Christian life, we are called to balance and integrate the *active* and *contemplative* dimensions of our spirituality. We go from prayer to action and from action to prayer, and hope that our action will also be a prayer. We need to keep in balance the Martha and Mary dimensions of our Christian life.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea, or image spoke to you most and why?
2. How would you rate your parish when it comes to hospitality? How are newcomers welcomed and helped to integrate into the parish? How could your parish be more hospitable? (Let your Pastor know.)

3. In the second reading, Paul states that his sufferings, joined to those of Christ, do help in some mysterious way to further his mission. Does this spiritual truth hold any practical value for you? If so, what?

4. Do you tend to be more like Martha or Mary? How can you keep a healthy balance between prayer and action?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Draw up a list of ways that the ministry of hospitality could be improved in your parish. Offer them to your pastor and hospitality ministry. This week, observe how well you keep a balance between prayer and action.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace to see God in the strangers you meet and to keep the balance between prayer and action. ©

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 25, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Father in heaven, Lord of the earth, we humbly place ourselves in your holy presence. In our readings today you teach us about prayer. Help us to be good students and especially help us to pray well. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What do you like most and least about this time of the year?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Our first reading is a concrete example of a person persevering in intercessory prayer, which Jesus speaks about in the Gospel. Both readings also speak about the justice and mercy of God. The second reading is a baptismal instruction in which Paul describes the effects of the Resurrection of Christ in the lives of believers.

If you have not read the commentary on the readings prior to the meeting, consider doing so after you read each reading. *Pause* briefly at the end of each reading.

FIRST READING: GENESIS 18:20-32

This week's first reading picks up where last week's reading left off. After the departure of the mysterious strangers from his tent, Abraham finds himself walking with the Lord, bargaining over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The reading is a wonderful example of how to be humble before God *and*, at the same time, assertive and courageous. Also notice how approachable God is in the story. Even though one could see from the reading a wonderful example of one person persevering in prayer (as Jesus exhorts us to do in the Gospel), the reading is more about the *nature of divine justice*. A central question in the conversation between God and Abraham is: *Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?* The answer is obvious. Of course, he should. In the reading, Abraham questions God six times about the parameters of divine justice, and six times God appears to adjust them. The sacred worth of the few is upheld. For the sake of a few innocent people, God is willing to spare the city. (If we read on further, we will find that the city is destroyed because no innocent people could be found.)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 138

This is a psalm of gratitude to God who has given hope to a people feeling lost and abandoned.

SECOND READING: Colossians 2:12-14

In these three verses, Paul shares with us the awesome effects of Baptism in the life of the believer. Prior to Baptism, the believer was spiritually dead

due to sin. In and through the cross, Jesus cancels our debt of sin. He wipes it out. In the waters of Baptism, believers share in this redeeming work of Christ. Jesus, as it were, takes us down into the tomb of death, washing us totally of sin, and raises us up to new life in him. We are literally on a spirit/soul level, a new creation. The debt owed to God is completely wiped out. In response, we would hopefully desire to struggle daily to remain clean, free, forgiven and faithful.

GOSPEL: Luke 11:1-13

In this Gospel passage, Jesus responds to his disciple's request for instructions on prayer: "*Lord teach us to pray.*" We can first note that Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's (the 'Protestant' version to which is added the words: "*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever*"). A brief comment on each part of the Lord's Prayer that books have been written on:

"*Our Father.*" The prayer is primarily intended to be a community prayer versus a private one. Notice Jesus says "*Our*" not "*My*." Because God is *Our* Father; all of us are not only his sons and daughters but also brothers and sisters.

"*Father.*" Scholars love to point out that the word Jesus used for "Father" is more accurately translated "dada" or "pop." This is very important because it tells us that Jesus wants us to share the same close intimacy with his Father that he shared. Ideally, we should approach God with the confidence of a child

or with the confidence of Abraham in the first reading.

“Hallowed be your Name.” In the Hebrew mind, a person’s name stood for his whole character and being. Thus when we say: “Hallowed be your name,” we are saying that “those who know the whole character and mind and heart of God will gladly put their trust in him” (William Barclay).

“Your Kingdom come.” May God’s kingdom of peace, love, justice and truth become a reality in our world and in the hearts of people.

As we grow in our awareness of the all-powerful and all-holy God, we also become aware of our neediness before God. We need what it takes to make it through each day (daily bread). We need mercy for our sins. And we need strength in times of trial. Note the prayer mentions the *“final test.”* This is a reference to the trials that will come at the end of the world. There is also recognition that as we experience God’s mercy, we will extend that same mercy to all who have hurt us.

Having taught his disciples to *whom* they should pray (God as Papa) and for *what* to pray (God’s Kingdom, bread, mercy and strength in adversity), Jesus then rounds out his lesson with advice on *how* to pray, namely, with persistence. As we read Jesus’ brief parable, we should avoid comparing God to the reluctant friend whom we need to hassle to get what we need. Rather, the point is: if a reluctant, imperfect friend is willing to answer our plea for help, how much more so will God seek to respond to our prayer. But we must *ask, speak* and *knock*.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. What can we learn from Abraham about how to relate to God?
3. What does it mean to you to be baptized in Christ?
4. Which piece of the Our Father do you love the most? Which part challenges you the most?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestion: Try to connect prayer with the issues of your life.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace of perseverance in prayer. ©