

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

January 17, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *We are back to ordinary time, O Lord. No fasting or feasting, just common, plain time; days drifting into nights and then dawning new days again. Ordinary time is your time to do extraordinary things, like changing water into wine, into ice and snow; tears into laughter, into hugs and kisses. Let us notice your ways of keeping ordinary time. Help us keep time with you. Amen.*

Sharing life: Do you have a particular hope or dream for this New Year?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings use marital images to describe God's relationship with his people. The second reading speaks about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 62:1-5

These verses from the third section of Isaiah 56-66 were written during the turbulent years after Israel's return from exile in Babylon. The prophet seeks to reassure the people that God has not forgotten them even though they are very disloyal to him. The reading opens with God's refusal to be silent in the face of Israel's misfortune: "*For Zion's sake, I will not be silent.*" During her exile, Israel feels "*forsaken*" and "*desolate.*" Nations that hold Israel in contempt will witness the restoration of her status. Yahweh, Israel's husband, is coming to reclaim his disloyal bride. There will be a new beginning, a new marriage symbolized by a new name, "*My Delight.*" A second sign of the new beginning is the promise of reconstruction of the land which will now be called "*Espoused.*" Forgiven and rehabilitated, Israel will be restored to its status as the "*espoused and beloved*" of God. The God who called us into being offers us a new beginning whenever we call upon him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 96

This psalm calls for praise and thanks on the lips of those who have experienced firsthand the saving deeds of Israel.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

For the next six Sundays, the second reading will be from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. For the next three Sundays, Paul will speak about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In these verses, Paul is addressing difficulties that have arisen in the community over the exercise of the charismatic gifts. Arrogance and competition over the gifts are threatening to divide the community. Paul reminds his readers of two important facts concerning these wonderful gifts of the Spirit. First, all these gifts are *graces* from God. They have done nothing to earn or deserve them. Second, the gifts are not given so that individuals may think that they are superior to others. Rather, they are given so that the community will be blessed.

GOSPEL: John 2:1-11

In John's gospel, miracles are *signs* intended to *manifest* the *glory* of God through Jesus and to lead people to *faith*. Towards the end of today's gospel, we read these words, "thus did he reveal his *glory*, and his disciples *believed* in him." Jesus uses a simple wedding occasion to reveal himself as the bridegroom Israel has waited for, for hundreds of years. He is sent by God to woo and wed a new bride, a new Israel, joining Jews and Gentiles into one body.

A central theme in John's gospel is what scholars call *replacement* theology. John presents Jesus as the one who *replaces* Jewish customs, rituals and feasts with himself. Previously used as a means to holiness, these customs and rituals are now *replaced* by Jesus himself whose teaching, death and resurrection save us and offer us new life.

"*My hour has not yet come*" is a reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. The "*abundance of wine*" is a reference to the abundance of new life which Jesus brings, and the wine of the Eucharist which symbolizes the new covenant.

Also in his gospel, John shows Mary as *involved* at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and again at the *end* of it when she is present at the foot of the cross. Notice how Mary does not draw attention to herself. Rather, she tells the waiters to "*do whatever Jesus tells you to do.*" The essence of faithful discipleship is doing whatever Jesus tells us to do. When it comes to faithful discipleship, Mary is our model. In calling Mary "woman," Jesus is not showing his mother disrespect. The title "woman" is akin to our word "madam" or "ma'am."

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all whose "wine has run out." Pray for the grace to recognize your gifts and use them to benefit the community. Pray for newlyweds and those in struggling marriages. ©

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. The first reading states that the "Lord delights in Israel, his spouse." Do you ever have a sense that the Lord delights in you? Explain.
3. It is probably safe to say that most Catholics are unaware of how the Holy Spirit has gifted them for ministry, both inside and outside their parish. Can you imagine what our parishes would be like if all the members were *aware* of their gifts, *developed* their gifts, and *generously shared* them to bless their community? What gift(s) has the Holy Spirit given to you to bless our parish or wider community? Do you feel you are using your gifts? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Our first and third readings use marital images to speak of our relationship with God. Most of us may *not* often think of ourselves as married to God. If we did, how might that impact our relationship with him?
5. The gospel is a powerful example of Mary's intercessory role before the throne of God. How real is this Marian role in your spirituality?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Spend time meditating on the belief that "God is my spouse and I am his beloved." Share the good wine of your companionship with someone who is lonely. Often ask God to bless and make fruitful the gifts he has given you.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 24, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Gracious Lord, you reveal yourself to us through your Word. During our time together, open our minds and hearts as we share your Word. May we allow your Word to both comfort and challenge us. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, the people listen intently as Ezra proclaims the law of God. In the gospel, the people listen as Jesus proclaims himself to be the fulfillment of God's law or Word. Paul calls for unity in a community blessed with many diverse gifts.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

When the Israelites return from exile, not only have the cities to be rebuilt and the land restored, but the people have to be rededicated to God and his Word. Ezra, the priest/scribe, is entrusted with the spiritual renewal and rededication of his people. In today's reading, Ezra is leading the people in a "covenant renewal" ceremony, at the center of which is a long proclamation of God's Word (from sunrise to mid-day). The people are very moved as they listen to God's Word. Everyone is weeping. They realize how they have been unfaithful to God and how much they have missed hearing his Word. The rededication ceremony is concluded with a feast.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 19

The psalm celebrates the goodness and beauty of God's law, which to the Israelites was the same as God's Word.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

The Corinthian community was plagued by factions of varying kinds. In today's reading, Paul is preaching unity without diminishing the value of diversity. Just as each of our physical body parts must work together to ensure the proper functioning of the whole body, so must all the members of the Church, the Body of Christ, work together. Mutual respect, cooperation and support should characterize the interaction among the members of the community. *Each gift is valuable and should be used to build up the community.*

GOSPEL: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Today's gospel begins with the opening verses from Luke. Imitating the Greek writers of his time, Luke begins by addressing his message to a particular person. Theophilus ("friend of God") may have been a friend of Luke and a wealthy patron. Luke tells us that in his gospel, he is going to share with us events from the ministry of Jesus as handed on to him by eyewitnesses. Luke's hope and desire is that his message will lead others to accept Jesus and surrender their lives to him.

Then we move to what is often called Jesus' "Inaugural Address" or "Mission Statement." He uses verses from Isaiah to announce his Mission Statement. As the people listen, they should clearly realize that he is not going to be a political or military Messiah. Rather, he is going to be a servant who will proclaim by word and deed, God's love and concern for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the spiritually and physically handicapped. Jesus concludes by saying that he is the fulfillment of Israel's Messianic expectations.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you? Why?
2. The scene described in the first reading is very emotional. All the people are weeping as they listen to the Word of God being proclaimed. When did the scriptures start to become alive for you?
3. In the second reading, Paul is addressing divisive issues in the Corinthian community. What, if anything, causes dissension in your local parish?

Or what causes dissension in the larger Church that we belong to?

4. In the gospel, Jesus says that he has come to “bring glad tidings to the poor.” How does your parish seek to continue that mission of Jesus today? How can you participate in this central part of Jesus’ mission?

5. Jesus came to bring liberty to the oppressed. Who are the oppressed in your local county today? What are some ways that we can allow ourselves to experience oppression?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestions: Choose a phrase or verse from Jesus’ Inaugural Address and keep it in your heart all week. Be more aware of how the Spirit expects you to bless those around you and your parish with the gift(s) he has given you.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Include in your prayers, persecuted Christians, prisoners, especially the innocent, those oppressed by poverty, war and the powers of darkness. Pray for unity in our Church. ©

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 31, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Loving God, thank you for gathering us together. You formed each of us in our mother's womb and appointed us to be your ambassador in our families and communities. May your Holy Spirit breathe upon us so that we will understand and act on the Word you speak to us during our time together. Amen.*

Sharing life: What is the gift of love that you most cherish (other than your spouse, if married)?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Both Jeremiah and Jesus are sent by God to be God's spokesmen to the nations. Both experience strong resistance from the people. The second reading is Paul's famous hymn on the nature of love.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

This reading is about the call of Jeremiah to be God's prophet or mouthpiece. To Jeremiah, God makes three assertions: "*I formed you*"—a reference to how God is our potter and we his clay; "*I knew you*"—a reference to the intimate relationship between God and Jeremiah; and "*I dedicated you*"—a reference to how God has consecrated Jeremiah to do God's work.

Then God prepares Jeremiah for the resistance he will receive from the people. "*Kings and priests will oppose you, but they will not prevail*" for God will strengthen Jeremiah to withstand all rejection. During his lifetime, Jeremiah, like Jesus, is a total failure, but in time he is recognized as one of Israel's greatest prophets. Jeremiah is a wonderful example of "the triumph of failure."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 71

This psalm expresses the feelings of one who encounters opposition but trusts deeply in God's protection. We can envision both Jeremiah and Jesus praying this psalm.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13

In his commentary on *First Corinthians*, Richard Hays states that the purpose of 1 Cor. 13 is to portray love as the *sine qua non* ("without which there is nothing") of the Christian life, and to insist that love must:

- Govern the exercise of all the gifts of the Spirit (12:4-11, 27-31).

- Inform and inspire the mutual respect and relatedness of all members of the community (12:12-26).
- Be the motivation that draws the praying community together for the liturgy of the Lord's Supper (11:17-33).
- Guide both the weak and the strong members of the community in making decisions that may offend the consciences of others, e.g., idol meat (8:1-13).
- Prompt the caring correction of brothers or sisters who have sinned (5:1-13).
- Assist in overcoming whatever divisions threaten the unity of the Church (1:10-17).
- Inspire generosity in the hearts of those from whom Paul requests a collection for the poor (16:1-4).

Perhaps Paul's intent is best summed up in his own words: "Your every act should be done with love" (16:14).

Having established love as an ethical principle and a way of life, without which the manifestation of spiritual gifts has no meaning or value (1-3), Paul then proceeds to describe what love (now personified) does and does not do. After stating that love is patient and kind, Paul then lists eight things that love *is not*, namely, jealous, pompous, rude, etc.

Paul's reference to his childhood may be a subtle challenge to readers to "grow up," to look at love and learn from love, and thereby grow to maturity in Christ who is the love of God incarnate. In the concluding verses, Paul speaks about the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. These will remain, insists Paul. However, when believers pass

through death to eternal life, *faith* will yield to seeing God “face to face,” *hope* will be fulfilled, and *love* will endure forever.

GOSPEL: Luke 4:21-30

The gospel is a continuation of last Sunday’s gospel. It is the people’s reaction to Jesus’ “Inaugural Address.” Initially, they are very enthusiastic; they are “*amazed at his gracious words.*” But then things suddenly go sour. The people question Jesus and his identity: “*Isn’t this the son of Joseph?*” Jesus responds: “*No prophet is accepted in his native place.*” Then Jesus makes reference to the Gentiles (people like the widow of Zarephath and Namaam) who are more open to the prophets than the Jewish people. This reference to the Gentiles (the arch enemies of the Jews) and Jesus’ desire to include the Gentiles in his plan of salvation infuriates the people. They try to kill Jesus but he escapes for his “*hour has not yet come.*” This event foreshadows the opposition and rejection that Jesus will experience in future years.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you most? Why?
2. God truly wants to use each one of us to be his representative in our families, places of work and recreation. What can block and help us from living this vocation?
3. Gandhi, a Hindu, reached out to Muslims. Yitzak Rabin, a Jew, reached out to the Palestinians. Archbishop Romero of El Salvador reached out to the poor. All were killed. Why do we kill our prophets? Why are prophets hard to take?
4. See para. 3 of the second reading which says: “love is patient...is not rude, etc.” Which of the eight negatives (jealousy, conceit, etc.) do you find most challenging to keep out of your life?
5. In the gospel, a mob mentality takes over. Do you ever have to deal with a mob mentality as you seek to practice your faith? Can you name examples of mob mentalities prevalent in our society today?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday’s readings. Suggestions: Forgive someone who has

rejected you. Meditate on the second reading and substitute your name for the word “Love,” e.g., “Joe is patient...Joe is kind”...and see how you do.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for modern prophets who fight for the unborn, justice for the disenfranchised, for workers, the poor, global warming, etc. Pray to grow in the virtue of love. ©

What is love? Children know.

Children, ages 4 to 8, were asked, “What does love mean?” Here are some of their answers:

1. “When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That’s love.” (Rebecca, age 8)
2. “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.” (Billy, age 4)
3. “Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.” (Karl, age 5)
4. “Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.” (Danny, age 7)
5. “Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.” (Bobby, age 7)
6. “If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate.” (Nikka, age 6)
7. “Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.” (Noelle, age 7)
8. “I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones.” (Lauren, age 4)
9. “Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your french fries without making them give you any of theirs.” (Chrissy, age 6)
10. “Love is what makes you smile when you’re tired.” (Terri, age 4)

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 7, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together to share our lives and your holy Word. Anoint us with your Holy Spirit so that each of us may hear the word you want us to hear. Unworthy though we are, may we, like Isaiah, Paul and Peter, say “Yes” to your call and never be afraid to launch out into the deep. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: There is a clear theme of vocation in all three readings. Notice how Isaiah, Paul and Peter all feel unworthy to be chosen by God to be his agents in the world. Also in the second reading, Paul witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

In this reading, Isaiah shares with us how God calls him to the ministry of prophet during a liturgical celebration in the Temple. We notice three movements: the *theophany* (God’s appearance to Isaiah), the *purification* of the prophet, and *Isaiah’s “Yes”* to God’s call. In the theophany, God discloses himself as Most Holy (holy, holy, holy). Isaiah catches a glimpse of the awesome majesty and mystery of God. The experience of God’s holiness immediately makes Isaiah aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness before God. Isaiah considers himself as a “man of unclean lips, living among an unclean people.” Then God uses one of his angels to cleanse Isaiah. Purified of sin, Isaiah is now very ready to go and be God’s spokesman. During his ministry, he will frequently speak of God’s holiness and Israel’s sinfulness.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 138

This psalm is a very appropriate response for Isaiah and us after we have experienced the awesome presence of God.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

For the next three Sundays, in the second reading, Paul reassures his readers that the Good News he shares with them is not his own creation. Rather, it is the message received from Christ himself who died and has risen. His resurrection was testified by many. Then Paul, like Isaiah in the first reading and Peter in the gospel, testifies to his own unworthiness to preach the gospel. Yet, unworthy though he is, God calls him. In this reading, Paul especially challenges the Corinthians to accept the resurrec-

tion, not as someone’s nice idea, but as a real historical fact.

GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11

Isaiah experiences God in the temple; Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus; and Peter encounters him at his place of work. Jesus’ presence in the boat symbolizes his presence in and with the Church. Peter’s lack of success at catching fish symbolizes the “futility” of pastoral ministry without the presence and power of God. Discouragement is part and parcel of life, but we must not let it get us down. We must keep throwing out the net. In this gospel, Jesus is calling to himself disciples who will in turn “catch” others for Christ by the “bait” of God’s Word.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you most? Why?
2. Isaiah, Paul and Peter felt unworthy to do God’s work. Have you ever felt like that before God? What helps you to deal with any sense of unworthiness that you may feel?
3. It has been said (and our first reading seems to bear this out) that “the closer we get to God, the more we will be aware of our sinfulness.” Comment.
4. Most Catholics have a deep resistance to “catching others” for Christ. How can we help each other to overcome this resistance? If you have a story to tell in this area, share it.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Think of one person you may be able to invite back to church or to get closer to Christ. Begin to pray for this person. When the time seems right, invite the person to church or to join your small group.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Include missionaries at home and abroad. Pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life and to lay ministry. ©

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
February 14, 2010 C

Opening prayer: *Lord, in your Word today, you say to us, “Blessed are those who meditate upon your Word and place their trust in you.” Bless us now, Lord, as we gather together to meditate upon your law and help us to always place our trust in you and not in the things of this world. Amen.*

Sharing life: What does Valentine’s Day mean to you?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading *contrasts* the wicked who place their trust in people, with the righteous who place their trust in God. The gospel is Luke’s Sermon on the Plain which also speaks about trust in God. The second reading emphasizes the centrality of the resurrection in the Christian life.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading, if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Jeremiah conducts his ministry during a time when Israel’s leaders shift their trust in God and place it in the leaders of pagan nations. Today’s verses from Jeremiah are directed toward Israel’s leaders and all who place their trust not in God but in people. Those who place their whole trust in people are compared to a “barren bush in the desert.” The wise or righteous who place their trust in God are compared to a tree planted by the waterside. Such people are secure and productive because they are rooted in God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 1

This psalm is a clear echo of the first reading. There is a contrast between the good and wicked, between human and divine counsel. What matters, most of all, is a God-centered life which ultimately will not disappoint.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

It seems that some of the Christians in Corinth raise some questions about the resurrection. In response, Paul reasserts the central importance of the resurrection to the Christian life. Without it, all else crumbles. If there is no resurrection, there is no victory over sin and death, and our faith is in vain.

GOSPEL: Luke 6:17, 20-26

This weekend and next weekend, we will listen to excerpts from what may be the most challenging verses in Luke’s gospel, his “Sermon on the Plain.”

Jesus takes the accepted beliefs of his day and stands them on their heads. He names four groups of people who would have been regarded as very

blest, and states that they are anything but blest. And he takes four groups who would have been regarded as cursed and pronounced them blest. Jesus is speaking to a situation in which the economically poor are reduced to begging—they are marginalized. The rich and better-off members of the community fail in their covenant with God by not coming to the rescue of the poor. When this happens, God sides with the poor and speaks on their behalf. Let’s now look briefly at each of the four sets of blessings and woes.

Blessed are the poor... and woe to the rich.

The poor are not blest because they are materially destitute; rather, they are blest because they are able to place their trust in God in the midst of poverty. They are blest because God is on their side. The rich are not cursed simply because they are materially well off, but because of their failure to come to the rescue of the poor by generously sharing their blessings with them. They are having their reward *now* but they will lose out big time in the reign of God.

Blessed are the hungry... woe to the full.

Jesus is not saying it’s a blessing to be starving and a curse to have a good meal. He is saying we are blessed if we can keep trusting in God in empty/hungry times. It is also a blessing if we are hungry for God. It is a curse if our “plenty” times lead us to ignore God. It is a curse to be spiritually self-satisfied.

Blessed are you if weeping...woe if laughing.

It is a blessing if we mourn for our sins and for the injustices in our world and for the losses we expe-

rience in life. It is not a curse to be happy, but it is a curse if our laughter is a cover-up for our sadness or if it is at the expense of others. Some become rich at the expense of others.

Blessed are you if people hate you... woe if people speak well of you.

We are blessed if people reject us because of our love for Jesus. On the other hand, it is a curse to be spoken well of in a world that rejects Jesus.

Poverty, hunger, tears and rejection are *not* to be sought after. But if they come to us as a result of our following Jesus, then they are blessings. God can turn poverty, hunger, tears and rejection into blessings. We see this when people in bad times turn to God and convert to his ways. On the other hand, a good financial portfolio could lead to our spiritual demise. In Jesus' sermon on the plain, he is saying that a key part of living in his kingdom invokes standing with the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the persecuted and the marginalized. Finally, the beatitudes only make sense to one who has fully embraced the ways of Jesus. To the rest, they are nonsense.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, image or idea spoke to you most? Why?
2. What verse in today's readings makes you feel most uncomfortable? What verse challenges you the most?
3. What would you name as blessings and curses in your life?
4. What are the things you hunger for the most? What is the deepest desire of your heart?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestions: Spend some time meditating on where you tend to place your security. While we would all like to say, "My trust is in God alone," how true is that in your life?

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Ask God to give you a heart that places its trust in the Lord and is willing to take action to show solidarity with the poor, the homeless, the oppressed, the grieving. ©