

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Opening prayer: *Loving God, in our first reading today you castigate the people for worship that is shallow and insincere. Help us to worship you with sincerity of heart. May our prayers be backed up with good and loving deeds. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: If you had a million dollars to spend, how would you spend it?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, *Hosea* tells us that what God wants from his people is not sacrifices, but a genuine and faithful love. In the second reading, *Paul* tells us that Abraham's faith in God should serve as a model for our faith in Christ. In the Gospel, *Jesus* shocks religious leaders by eating and drinking with sinners and calling one of them to be an apostle.

If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

FIRST READING: Hosea 6:3-6

The prophet Hosea, often called the 'prophet of God's love', lived and wrote in a time of enormous turmoil in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Today's verses are a part of a larger section in which the prophet castigates Israel for her infidelity to her covenant with God and calls for a sincere repentance and return to the Lord. Because the Assyrian King was threatening to take over the Northern Kingdom, the people cry out to God for help. Then God speaks. He is obviously frustrated with his disloyal people. *"What can I do with you...? Your piety is like a morning cloud..."* Then God clearly states what he wants of his people: *"It is love that I desire, not sacrifice, knowledge and not holocausts."* God is not interested in empty rituals or sacrifices. What he wants is a heart totally dedicated to him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 50

This psalm echoes the theme of the first reading, which stresses the importance of love and praise over sacrifices.

SECOND READING: Romans 4:18-25

In this reading, Paul places before us Abraham as a wonderful example of faith. He prefigures Christian faith. Despite his (and Sarah's) old age, Abraham could still become a father, solely on the basis of God's promise. Because Abraham's faith did not waver, but found expression in gratitude to God, he was reckoned as just.

GOSPEL: Matthew 9:9-13

In *Living Word '05*, Fr. Duggan and Virginia Stillwell offer the following insightful commentary on today's gospel.

Today's Gospel captures as well as any section in Matthew the heart of Jesus' mission and ministry. It is well known that pious Jews felt revulsion toward fellow Jews who collaborated with the Romans in the collecting of taxes and who were themselves frequently little more than extortionists. Matthew the tax collector would have been an outcast among those with whom he lived, a figure of shame and reproach. Yet Jesus clearly saw more in him, and at what seems like their first encounter calls him to discipleship with the brief invitation, "Follow me." We miss in English the play on words in Greek, in which the name "Matthew" sounds quite similar to the word for "disciple." We are meant, in fact, to see in the story of Matthew's call an image of how all disciples of Jesus have been rescued from the alienation of sin and self-absorption.

What follows Matthew's positive response to Jesus' call ("He got up and followed him." [Matthew 9:9] is a Eucharistic scene: The Master sits at table for a fellowship meal, surrounded by tax collectors and sinners. It was this behavior as much as anything that Jesus preached, that earned for him the fierce anger of his opponents. In the culture of his time, Jesus' willingness to share a meal with unclean sinners would have been shocking and provocative. His defiant response to his critics, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." [Matthew 9:13] constituted a refutation of a "holiness code" that seemed to the Pharisees to have divine authority. Jesus counters that narrow view by quoting

from the prophet Hosea [today's first reading], reminding his opponents that God's priority is love and forgiveness, not mere ritual purity. Jesus reveals in this passage the compassionate face of God, a deity who prefers to reach out to sinners with healing mercy rather than with judgment and condemnation.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you and why?

? If so, how did you resolve the situation?

3. Jesus invites public and known sinners to dine with him. If Jesus did this in our day, would you be scandalized and outraged? After all, we live in a time when many Catholics want certain 'public

sinners' e.g. pro-choice politicians to be banned from receiving the eucharist.

2. Have you ever been torn between obedience to the law and what you considered "the loving thing to do"? If so, how did you resolve the situation?

3. Jesus invites public and known sinners to dine with him. If Jesus did this in our day, would you be scandalized and outraged? After all, we live in a time when many Catholics want certain 'public

4. Whom would you feel uncomfortable inviting to your table?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestion: Name an individual or group that you do not want to associate with. Begin a conversation with Jesus about these folks and see where it takes you.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for a more sincere commitment to the Lord. Pray for the conversion of hardened sinners. ©