

NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Opening prayer: *Loving God, we gather in your name to listen to your word. We thank you for the grace that draws us to do this sacred task. May our lives be always informed and formed by your word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading and gospel reminds us of the respective consequences that will come to those who choose to follow or not follow God's word and will. For the next fifteen weeks, our second reading will be from Paul's letter to the Romans (with the exception of June 29th, Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul). In today's reading, Paul tells us that justification or salvation is a gift from God made possible through Christ's death and resurrection and received through faith and *not* through observance of the law. The theme of internal conversion ties all three readings together.

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

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32

The long years of wandering in the desert are over. The Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land where they will encounter neighbors who believe in other gods. In these verses, Moses exhorts the Israelites to make sure that they remain faithful to their covenant with God by following his word. They must take the commandments into their hearts and souls. As an external expression of their interior conversion the Israelites are 'to wear the law on their wrists and let them be a pendant [something suspended] on their foreheads'. True holiness demands internal conversion. Then Moses sets before the people a "blessing and a curse". Following God's word will bring blessings. Disobeying God's word and following other gods will bring divine retribution.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 31

This psalm gives voice to the prayer of one undergoing trial and distress. Today's verses express the psalmist's unshakable faith in God as his 'rock of safety'.

SECOND READING: Romans 3:21-25, 28

In these verses, Paul stresses that salvation is not gained through good deeds but by placing our trust in God who saved us in and through Jesus' death and resurrection. In stating this, Paul is *not* saying that 'good works' are unimportant. It is just that we do not save ourselves. We do good works in *response* to God's goodness to us. True interior conversion expresses itself in good works.

GOSPEL: Matthew 7:21-27

This reading is the concluding verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (chs 5, 6, and 7). The reading begins with a judgment scene. God the Father is the judge and Jesus is an advocate. Those being judged will turn to Jesus to plead their case: "Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name?" Jesus' response emphasizes the importance of internal conversion. He says that it is not enough to keep company with Jesus and perform charismatic acts in his name. They must *act* with love and justice. Baptism and membership in a church will not be enough to save us. One must be making a sincere effort to follow God's will in all things. Jesus concludes his long Sermon on the Mount by using a theme common in wisdom literature: he offers the disciple two ways, the way of the wise (building one's life on God's word) and the way of the foolish (ignoring God's word).

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most?

2. In the first reading, Moses is giving advice to his spiritual children as they are about to leave the spiritual safety of the desert and enter a world with lots of temptations. What advice have you or would you offer children or young adults in general as they leave the spiritual safety net of their home?

3. On the one hand scripture and our church says that we cannot be saved by good works. On the other hand the scripture and the church states that faith without good works is dead (James 3:17). Does the faith and good works issue confuse you? Do you think that most Catholics tend to think that we are saved through our good deeds more than our faith in Christ?

4. What are some examples of how you or others can build their lives on sand?

5. What does the phrase 'internal conversion' mean to you?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one or more ways that you can act or respond to today's readings. Suggestions: Spend some time this week reflecting on what your life is built on.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for the grace of internal conversion