

NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE B

Opening prayer: Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together to be fed with your Word. You gave us the Sabbath as a day of rest. Help us to know that we, your people, are holy. We are your earthen vessels containing the treasure of you, of your light. Help us to understand the meaning of keeping holy the Sabbath day. May your Word deepen in us today. We pray this in confidence and in love. Amen.

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading stresses the importance of Sabbath rest. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that Sabbath rest must not be an excuse for not reaching out to the person in need. In the second reading, Paul reflects on his own sufferings in the light of the cross.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The author stresses the importance of resting on the Sabbath. If God rested on the seventh day, so should we, his children. Sabbath rest is a time to recognize the One who ultimately gives us the harvest.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 81

This is a hymn sung by pilgrims especially at harvest time.

SECOND READING: 2Corinthians 4:6-11

In this powerful passage, Paul speaks of dying to self in order that the life of God may emerge more fully in our lives.

The human person is an *earthen vessel*-fragile and disposable-in and through whom God reveals himself and achieves his plan. In his sufferings, Paul carries around in him the sufferings of Christ, so that "the life of Christ may be manifested in his body."

GOSPEL: Mark 2:23-26

By the time of Jesus' arrival on earth, Sabbath rest has become very legalistic. The leaders are constantly finding new ways to charge the people for violating the Sabbath rest.

In the first story, corn-plucking by the Apostles is interpreted as harvesting, which is forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus defends his disciples by referring to an incident in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 21:2-7).

In the second story, Jesus heals on the Sabbath-also forbidden by law. Jesus states that the performance of an act of mercy takes precedence over legalistic requirements around the Sabbath. The spirit of the law takes precedence over the letter of the law.

In both stories, Jesus is saying that it is permissible, even required, to break the law about the Sabbath rest for a good reason.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. Do you think many Christians today have lost a sense of what it means to keep holy the Lord's Day?
3. How do Paul's reflections on suffering speak to you?

4. Do you tend to be a legalist when it comes to religious matters? Do you think that today we have lost a sense of respect for the law?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

What do today's readings call you to? Suggestion: Avoid all unnecessary work on Sundays.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION