

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

June 2020

The following series is free, downloadable small-group materials based on each week's Mass readings and the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minutes format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.** (The booklet *A Facilitator's Guide*: is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see that this passage ties into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Second Reading and the Gospel Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear Scripture read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail**

Sincerely,

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THE HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY—June 7, 2020

Introduction: The Holy Trinity is an integral part of our faith, the understanding of which is often under emphasized. Holy Trinity Sunday was introduced into the church by Pope John XXII in the 1300's to honor the Trinity of Persons in God. Throughout the Scriptures we see various passages which bring out the reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, their unity, and the various roles they fulfill to accomplish their will.

Ephesians 4:4-6 is one such passage; "There is one body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, ... one God and Father of us all." As in this passage, an overriding characteristic of the Holy Trinity is their unity and oneness. The Holy Trinity is united in bringing about our salvation, as we see in Ephesians 1:1-14, and united in bringing about our unity and oneness. Interestingly, this unity and oneness of his Body is integral to advancing the Gospel. How scandalous it is for us who name the name of Christ, to live with, and in some cases foster ungodly divisions among ourselves. The following quote from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reveals the importance of this oneness to the spread of the Gospel. "Thus, the Church confesses, following the new Testament, 'one God and Father from whom all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit in whom all things are'. . . Hence the whole Christian life is a communion with each of the divine persons, without in any way separating them. Everyone who glorifies the Father does so through the Son in the Holy Spirit; everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and the Spirit moves him."

How can we honor the Holy Trinity? First and foremost is by cooperating with the Trinity in the work of salvation. If we have ever held back a part of ourselves from fully believing and surrendering to Christ and his gracious offer of salvation for us, if we have consented only with our head and not our heart and will, we can honor the Holy Trinity by a simple prayer of surrender and welcome.

Those of us who have already done so, can pause and reflect on our previous commitment, asking the Holy Trinity to reveal to us areas where we need to conform to the Father's will in different or deeper ways. Perhaps we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how we might be more actively involved in the Trinity's work of bringing the Good News of salvation to our world. In addition, we can pause to offer a special prayer of thanksgiving for the Holy Trinity's presence in our life, and tell the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit of our love for them.

"O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest. May I never abandon you there, but may I be there, whole and entire, completely vigilant in my faith, entirely adoring, and wholly given over to your creative action."¹

¹ Prayer of the Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

First Reading — Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9

1. Contrast this passage's description of God with Moses' description of the people of God.

Responsorial Reading — (Ps) Daniel 3:52-55

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

2. What cause and effect relationships do you see in this verse?

3. Which aspect of St. Paul's admonition stirred your heart?

Gospel Reading — John 3:16-18

4. How does this passage differentiate between God's part, and our part, in seeing this promise fulfilled.

5. What are some synonyms for "believe"?

6. How is believing in Jesus, different than believing about some other historical figure?

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THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY—June 14, 2020

Introduction: Parents lovingly putting another spoonful of baby food into the eager mouth of a growing infant is an expression both of love and provision. Yet early in their growth, toddlers endeavor to wrestle the spoon from their parents in an often-humorous expression of their independence. They subtly state, “I can do it myself!” as they smear more food around their head than they get in their mouth. This quest for independence is manifest early in our lives, however later it often gets in the way of our truly relying on Christ for our spiritual sustenance.

How we respond to Jesus as the Bread of Life often has to do with our willingness to depend solely on him for our nourishment. For most adults it is humbling to have to depend upon another for our sustenance. It is hard on our pride to be totally dependent. Yet the revealed truth is that our spiritual food and drink cannot be earned, or wrestled from the fist of God, we can only open our heart and freely receive it as it is freely given.

“A meal is a very intimate gift, and sadly, many of us have forgotten the deep meaning behind it ... when we receive food, we are given the wherewithal to live. The giver is, in fact, saying to us: ‘I want you to live.’ This intimate sign is deepened when we go to the trouble of preparing and cooking the food. When we sit down and share the meal, we are saying, ‘I want to draw life from the same source as you.’ Jesus goes further than we can go, he becomes the food and drink. He is saying to us: ‘Not only do I want you to live, but I want you to live through Me.’”¹

The Feast of Corpus Christi (The Most Holy and Blood of Christ Sunday) commemorates the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was first initiated by St. Juliana of Cornillon. St. Juliana received a vision in which she was told that this feast honoring the Body and Blood of Christ was missing in the liturgical calendar and should be added. She was much opposed by some from her own religious order and suffered at their treatment. However, she shared her vision with and received support from the future Pope Urban IV, who upon becoming Pope sanctioned this feast in 1264. Later Pope Clement V mandated that the feast should be observed throughout the Catholic world.

The Eucharist is, of course, central to our Catholic faith. It is the source from which we gain spiritual strength and vitality and the summit of saving faith as we remember and receive Jesus who suffered for us. This being so, you would think that we would not need to have a special feast day to celebrate Jesus’ Body and Blood, inasmuch as we should be celebrating it at each mass as we receive him. By the ready availability of this heavenly meal, like our daily nourishment, we sometimes take it for granted and treat it with a familiarity that breeds ingratitude. Consequently, this feast day functions much like Thanksgiving does for many Americans. It is a time to pause and reflect with gratitude in a special way and with a special feast, to recall that with which we have been especially blessed.

This is a Sunday in which we can pause and recognize our dependence, and receive him not only into our mouth but also into a grateful heart. This annual feast must remind us that as we receive Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Eucharist that he made the ultimate sacrifice for us, and it should elicit from us not only willing dependence on him but an invitation to Jesus to abide in us providing true life. Let us pray in the words of St. Thomas à Kempis, “Lord, all things in Heaven and earth are Yours. I desire to give myself to You as a free offering, and to be Yours for ever. O Lord, in simplicity of heart I offer myself to You this day, to be Your servant for ever: I do this as an act of homage to You, and as an act of perpetual praise.”²

¹ Ian Petit in *This Is My Body*.

² *The Imitation of Christ*, p. 199.

First Reading — Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16

1. How can we avoid missing the message behind the meal God provides for us?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 147:12-15, 19-20

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

2. What practical effects should the belief in “one Bread, one Body” have on us?

Gospel Reading — John 6:51-58

3. What was the root issue these disputing Jews had with Jesus’ message?

4. What does it mean to have Jesus abide in us?

5. What are the promises Jesus included in this teaching?

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THE TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 21, 2020

Introduction: “All through my childhood I used to hear old soldiers of the First World War speak of the endless horrors of a battle in which the whole genius of the strategist seemed to consist in filling the shell holes with living soldiers until the enemy had run out of ammunition. They told how, thanks to a wound or a period of leave, they would go back for a few days or weeks ‘to the rear,’ and how what they saw there - acts of cowardice, petty betrayals, a dubious sense of well-being - helped them to return, if not without fear, at any rate without regret, to the fire-scorched fraternity of the front line.” (*From Be Not Afraid*, by Pope John Paul II)

To be on the front line for Christ can also be a fearful experience, but fear need not be debilitating. “Fear not” and “Be not afraid” are recurring messages sent from heaven, so God must know how easy it is for us to look and to live on the dark side of life. Since we are social creatures, desiring friendly relationships and the support of others, we are greatly influenced by the acceptance or rejection of us of those around us. Holding strong beliefs which result in our embracing upright, moral behavior that the secular world often considers offensive, may sometimes also result in our being disliked by others, and can cause them to withhold their friendship and support. Sometimes they even oppose us, and this hostility can spark fear in our heart. But we should not give over control of our lives to others out of fear.

Being a follower of Jesus calls us to be counter-cultural. It requires us to live and communicate values that the world does not understand, nor appreciate, and which it sometimes resists with hostility. It is hard for us who love Jesus to accept the fact that many in the world reject Jesus, his values and his character. So sometimes we are surprised when we too are confronted with hostility because we follow Jesus and allow him to live in and through us. The days leading up to the crucifixion were threatening and fearful and the disciples experienced a similar fear of hostility. After the crucifixion the followers of Jesus were threatened, abused, and even killed. So it is not unusual if we experience similar opposition and fearful situations as followers of Christ.

But fear need not be debilitating for us. The disciples left the crucifixion in fear and hid themselves in a room making sure the door and windows were closed and locked. Forty days later we see these same disciples standing in the center of Jerusalem proclaiming that this Jesus who the people killed was both Lord and Christ. What transformed this fear into boldness?

The person who loves us, Jesus the Son of God, can give us the perspective we need to face and conquer fear, if we listen to him and stop listening to our fears. In love, and in anticipation of the trials we would face, we were given the Holy Spirit to indwell, or live within us. Because all power has been given to Jesus, he can provide the power to change us from fearfulness to boldness. He can help us overcome threatening situations because he has overcome the world. The following passage is very helpful: “. . . fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) This is just one of the many promises the Father has given us to dissipate our fear. It is a promise reiterated again and again by his heavenly messengers, by Jesus, and by his Holy Spirit. If we listen we will find that the front line of spiritual warfare need not be a fearsome place, but can be a wonderful “fire-scorched” community of brave followers of Jesus. Perhaps we should memorize one or more of these promises so that the Holy Spirit can bring it to the forefront of our mind and transform our fear to boldness.

First Reading — Jeremiah 20:10-13

1. What advice can be gleaned from this passage for responding to threatening situations?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35

Second Reading —Romans 5:12-15

2. What new insight do you find in this passage?

3. How would you state the results of Adam's decision, and of Jesus'?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 10:26-33

4. How does the fear of others' opinions, manipulate us?

5. What perspective does Jesus provide to overcome fear's control of us?

6. Describe God's opinion of you.

7. What does it mean to "acknowledge" Jesus before others?

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THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 28, 2020

Introduction: Paul's admonition in Galatians 6:10, makes a great introduction to the issue of hospitality; "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." How we treat others is a picture window into the condition of our own souls. Our gracious treatment of others, or lack thereof, reveals a great deal about how we feel about ourselves. It also reveals our perspective on others and whether we see them as Christ sees them, or whether we simply treat them as their behavior warrants. Most importantly it reveals our devotion to Christ and our willingness to let his desires and interests exceed our own self-interest.

Our hope is that the Father will not treat us as we deserve to be treated, but will respond to us in mercy (not giving us that which we deserve) and in grace (giving us that which we do not deserve) based on the fact that we know and love his Son, Jesus, the Christ. In the same manner, Jesus does not expect us to treat others as they deserve, but to treat them with mercy and grace even as we have been treated by him. Imagine how drastically different the world would be if mercy and grace prevailed in all our dealings with others. How quickly some behavior would disappear, and opportunities to express love, compassion, and service would be eagerly sought. Jesus' words, "for as much as you do it to one of these you do it to Me," would become the watch word for how we relate to others. This is especially true in respect to how we treat other Christians in whom Christ dwells, for in reality our treatment either honors or dishonors Christ who dwells in the other person.

Likewise, Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" should move us to treat all people with a similar attitude. For we do not know, and cannot know, if maybe the person we encounter has in fact been sent by God. One thing we do know if we are believers, is that we have been sent by God, and represent him to each person we encounter.

Though I don't know if it is true, I recently heard a story which effectively illustrates the need to treat strangers with love. Upon enthusiastically entering their church on a Sunday morning to hear a well-known visiting speaker, the worshippers were appalled to find a derelict lying close to the door in an apparent drunken stupor. Many as they passed by shied away looking in disgust and anger at his disheveled appearance. When the time came for the morning worship to start there was some confusion inasmuch as the visiting pastor had not arrived. After a few minutes of delay, the supposed derelict, in reality the visiting pastor, walked down the aisle and took the podium to speak on the love of Christ and to remind the worshippers that "as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these you have done it unto me.

"Without love, the outward work is of no value; but whatever is done out of love, be it ever so little, is wholly fruitful. For God regards the greatness of the love that prompts a man, rather than the greatness of his achievement. Whoever loves much, does much. Whoever does a thing well, does much. And he does well, who serves the community before his own interest." (Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*)

These days as one ages there is often a lot of talk about Social Security and planning for our futures. Was Jesus serious when he said, "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water ... he shall not lose his reward?" I think he was. We are storing up for our heavenly future by how we respond to others today.

First Reading — 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

1. What characteristics do you think are essential to be hospitable?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 89:2-3, 16-19

Second Reading — Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

2. How would you describe the “newness of life”?

3. What does the term “dead to sin” mean to you?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 10:37-42

4. Explain the attitude Jesus desires us to have toward:

Himself:

Our self:

Others:

5. What have you found helpful to move you from being self-serving to serving others?

6. During this year of the Eucharist, how do these readings help you carry Christ to others?

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