

EASTER SUNDAY

A, B, C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *O Light of Lights, Risen Jesus, enter our hearts with your Good News. Enlighten our minds to understand that you have overcome death by your own dying and rising. Melt our frozen hearts with this Easter fire, that in our hearts of flesh we might come to believe that you forgive even our sins. Help us to see your presence everywhere as the first light of dawn beams upon our clouded vision. O Radiant Light, be in our midst as we gather to more clearly hear your Word of Life. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: All three readings focus on Jesus' Resurrection from the dead and its meaning for our lives. In the first reading from Acts, Peter states that all who come to believe in the Risen Christ will have their sins forgiven. In both of the alternative second readings, Paul stresses the moral dimension of the Resurrection. In the Gospel, Peter and John go on an 'Easter jog' to the tomb. Even though Peter gets there first, John is the first to believe that Christ is risen.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 10:34, 37-43

This is an excerpt from the last of several sermons of Peter found in Acts. What makes this sermon unique is that it comes right after the vision Peter has during which God reveals that Jesus has come not only to offer salvation to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles – to all people.

In this sermon, we hear about the scope and spread of the Gospel. The story of Jesus' baptism, his public ministry, death and Resurrection has been reported all over the land. The power of Jesus' ministry flows from him being anointed by God with the

Holy Spirit. Peter lists himself as a witness to all these wondrous events. He concludes by stating that *all*—through faith and repentance—now have access to the salvation that Jesus has come to bring.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This thanksgiving psalm is applied to all the great things God has done in Christ, especially raising him from the dead. *"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad."*

**SECOND READING: Colossians 3:1-4;
1Corinthians 5:6-8**

The two alternative second readings declare that the Resurrection is the foundation of new life for those who believe. In the Colossians reading, Paul reminds his readers that through baptism, they have died and have been raised up, and that they should live accordingly. In the Corinthians reading, Paul, using the imagery of yeast, states that because of our new life in Christ, we can make no accommodation to sin.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 20:1-9**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 20:1-9

Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb while it is still dark (in John's Gospel, a symbol of unbelief). When she finds the tomb empty, she assumes the body has been stolen and runs to tell Peter and the 'other disciple' (whom scholars believe is John). They both race to the tomb. John wins the race and waits at the tomb for Peter to arrive. Peter goes into the tomb, but apparently does not know what to make of the strange sight of burial cloths lying by the tomb.

Then the other disciple enters the tomb and believes that Jesus has been risen from the dead. In John's Gospel, this is the first sign of resurrection faith. One may ask, how come Peter who sees the same evidence as John (an empty tomb, cloths lying on the ground) did not believe. Some scholars say it was the love in the Beloved's heart that helped him to *see* with faith eyes.

Commenting on the Gospel and the love in John's heart, Fr. Denis McBride, CSSR, writes: "*When Jesus stands unrecognized on the shore of Lake Tiberias, it is the beloved disciple who inform Peter: 'It is the Lord.'*" His is a love that got him there first."

(Used with permission granted by Denis McBride CSSR, *Seasons of the Word*)

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Jesus' Resurrection is the gift of new life for all who open their hearts to him. What can keep us or others from opening our hearts fully to Jesus?
3. Easter is the victory of life over death, of light over darkness, of goodness over evil. Can you recall a Good Friday event in your life from which good and blessing came?
4. What are signs in our world and in my life that Jesus has triumphed over death?
5. Do you agree that "love in the heart can get us there first" – get us to see what we may miss without such love?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Risen Christ, fill my heart with your new life and alert me to ways I can share it with others.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Seek to be more aware that God's plan is to always draw goodness out of the painful experiences of life. Seek to be an Easter presence for someone going through a Good Friday experience.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Pray for those going through a Good Friday experience. Pray that you can be a sign of hope for people dealing with pain. Pray that our Risen Lord may touch the hearts of Catholics who only go to church at Easter, that they may be drawn back to the Lord's Table.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Blessed are you, Father,
for raising your beloved Son Jesus
from the dead and bringing us to faith
in his saving death and Resurrection.
Give us a taste of the joy
that filled the hearts of the first disciples,
and help us to trust in the life
that is promised through faith in him.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.
Amen.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER A DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Risen Christ, we gather in your name to celebrate your victory over sin, evil and death. As you breathed your Spirit on those gathered in the Upper Room, breathe your Spirit on us so that we may recognize your presence in our midst and come to know you in the breaking open of your Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: During the Easter season, the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles authored by Luke. Acts, among other things, illuminates for us the mystery of the Church as it developed from its beginnings at Pentecost. This week's readings identify several characteristics of the communal life of the first Christians. During Cycle A of the Easter season, the second reading is from the First Letter of Peter. The letter is addressed to Christians who were suffering harassment and persecution from their non-Christian neighbors. The author of the letter encourages his readers to persevere in faith so that their detractors would marvel at the good things God had done for them, be motivated to turn from their sinful ways and live lives of goodness. During the Easter season, the Gospel is nearly always from John. Two experiences of the Risen Christ are included in this week's reading. The second Sunday of Easter is also *Divine Mercy Sunday*, which celebrates the wonderful mercy of God – popularized in recent times by St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who had apparitions of Jesus in which he makes known his mercy for humanity. Our parish motto is "*Our Mission is Mercy and Love.*"

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:42-47

These verses are the first of three summary statements on the community life of the early Christians. *Four characteristics* are identified: instruction/teaching, table-fellowship, prayer, and sharing all things in common. These verses are an idealized version of how a community filled with the Spirit *should* live.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for deliverance.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 1:3-9

This letter is addressed to several Gentile Christian communities living in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), recently converted to Christianity. The communities are suffering

harassment and ostracization for being followers of Christ. They are made to feel like marginal people, ‘aliens’ in the society in which they live. A very existential question for them would have been: How can a person continue to be faithful to Christ in such a hostile environment? This pastoral letter seeks to give encouragement to Christians living in such hostile environment. The letter also contains a list of exhortations on things like household duties, husband/wife relations, and concern for the public face of the church living in a pagan society.

The God of Jesus Christ is praised for giving us, through Jesus, a new birth, a new hope, and an imperishable inheritance (Heaven). The gift offered to us is very precious and worth suffering for. The ‘inheritance’ of the believer is God himself. This is cause for rejoicing even in the midst of trials.

God’s presence does not mean that we will not suffer, but it does mean that we will have the strength to endure it. The power of the Resurrection at work in us gives us the ability to endure whatever comes our way. ‘Faith’ is described in terms of a love and a trust without sight (v.8). Joy in the midst of trial springs from the realization that the road to salvation has been secured.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws

us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

John shares with us two Resurrection appearances of Jesus. The first appearance is sometimes called John’s Pentecost because during it, Jesus imparts his Spirit. Prior to Jesus’ coming, the disciples were filled with *fear* (of the authorities, hence the locked doors), *guilt* (for abandoning Jesus) and *depression* (because of Jesus’ death). With Jesus’ entry into their lives, the fear, guilt and depression are replaced with joy and peace. Then Jesus commissions his disciples to continue his work, but not before he gives them his Spirit. He also gives them the power to forgive sins, something the Catholic Church acts on in and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sins would only be ‘retained’ if one were not truly sorry for his/her sins or were unwilling to embrace the teachings of Jesus.

Some scholars see Jesus’ appearance to Thomas as representing the second generation of Christians—those called to believe on the testimony of *others*. Even though Thomas refuses to believe the testimony of others, those following him will be called to come to faith on the testimony of others.

Though we may judge Thomas harshly, Jesus takes him where he is at. From Thomas, we learn how to be honest with our doubts. If Thomas needs to touch the wounds of Christ, Jesus will oblige him. The Gospel does not say that Thomas actually touches the wounds—only that he cries out in faith: “*My Lord and my God.*” It is a story for all of us who may sometimes experience doubt

concerning matters of faith. Jesus, too, will be patient with us and will help us overcome our doubts if we cooperate with his grace-filled touch upon our lives. To *believe* in Jesus' Resurrection implies an intellectual assent. If also means that we too are *sent* to share the Good News with others.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.

2. The first reading describes the communal life of the early Christians. What motivated you to join a Small Christian Community? How is your participation a blessing in your life?

3. In the Gospel, Jesus brings the gift of 'Peace' to the fear-filled disciples. How would you describe the gift of peace that Jesus gives us, gives you?

4. If you sometimes experience doubt in your faith life, what helps you to deal with it?

5. On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we rejoice in God's mercy and love for us. What helps you live a life of mercy and love towards others?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as*

he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, in today's Gospel you bring peace, joy and mercy to disciples who are fearful and depressed. Fill me with these Easter gifts of peace, joy and mercy.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Practice mercy. Pray for all experiencing doubt in their faith life. Pray for all received into Full Communion at the Easter Vigil, that they will have staying power (in Christ) to remain committed to their new Church family.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us pray for all who were received into our Church at the Easter Vigil. Pray for persecuted Christians.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus,
breathe on us your Holy Spirit
so that we can live our lives more
like you and be filled with your
peace, joy and mercy.
Amen.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord Jesus, in today's Gospel you appear to two disciples who have begun to lose hope and open their eyes to what the Scriptures foretold: that you must die first and then rise and ascend into your Father's glorious presence. May you breathe on our minds and open our eyes that we may recognize your presence in our breaking open your Word and follow you in your risen life. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading is the first of six major homilies which Peter gives in the *Acts of the Apostles*. In the second reading, Peter exhorts his readers to “conduct themselves with reverence” and to refrain from “futile conduct.” In the Gospel, Jesus opens the eyes of two disciples to his presence in the Eucharist as they travel with him to the village of Emmaus.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:14, 22-23

Luke builds a bridge between Jesus and the Church. In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus breathes on the Apostles, infusing them with the Holy Spirit and empowering them to preach the Good news.

In this reading, we witness Peter and the other Apostles doing just that: preaching the Good News about Jesus, the One sent by God to bring salvation to all the people. Even though Jesus is able to work signs and wonders, he is rejected by his own people (but raised up by God).

Jesus's death is not a random act but a part of the mystery of God's plan that also includes his Resurrection and his exaltation in the

glory of heaven. Peter is not accusing his fellow Jews but pointing out God's plan of salvation.

In the middle of the reading, we have a quotation from Psalm 16:8-11. The New Testament writers often quoted the Old Testament to show their readers that Jesus' coming and death were foretold in their own Hebrew scriptures.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 16

This psalm expresses confidence and trust in God.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 1:17-21

Although the earliest believers in Jesus do find themselves ‘at home’ in their newly discovered way of living, they also realize that because of their faith in Jesus, they are no longer ‘at home’ in the world. They feel like ‘sojourners in a strange land.’ In today’s reading, Peter urges these sojourners to “conduct themselves with reverence.” They must remember that they were delivered from a “futile way of life”—not by silver and gold but by the *Precious Blood of Jesus*.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 24:13-35

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Luke 24:13-35

This is Luke’s well-known and loved Emmaus journey story. In it we notice a movement from the darkness of unbelief to the light of faith, a movement from despair to hope. It is also a beautiful instruction on the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The first part of the story is like our *Liturgy of the Word*. Jesus proclaims a word to the two despairing disciples and opens their eyes to the *meaning* of the Scriptures.

Then we have a *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. Just as he did at the Last Supper, Jesus *takes*

bread, *blesses* it, *breaks* it and *gives* it to the disciples. In the *breaking of the bread*, the eyes of the disciples are opened and they come to believe in Jesus’ presence. Some commentators note that Luke uses this story to communicate to those who are missing the *physical* presence of Christ, that their celebration of the Eucharist is the new way that Jesus is going to be with them. Just as he fed them prior to the Resurrection with his teaching, now he will continue to feed and nourish them in and through the proclamation of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. When they (and we) gather together to listen to his Word and break bread, Jesus is truly in our midst.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The Christians in today’s second reading felt like ‘aliens’ in their world. In what ways might Christians feel like aliens in today’s world? What are concrete examples of ‘futile conduct’ mentioned by Peter?
3. Coming to believe that a dead person had come back to life must have been a huge challenge for early believers. Knowing your level of faith and maybe your tendency to be skeptical of outrageous stories, how do you think you may have reacted when the news came your way that Jesus had risen from the dead?
4. Like the two disciples in today’s Gospel, we too are on a spiritual journey. What do we

have in common with the two disciples?
What can we learn from their experience?

5. Have you ever felt as if your heart was “burning within you” because of some touch or experience of God?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, as you joined the two disciples on their journey, so do you always accompany me in my walk with you. Open my eyes to see your presence and hear your word to me. Amen.*

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: The next time you attend Mass, try to be more attentive to the awesome event that you are privileged to participate in. Also, examine whether you are presently engaged in any “futile conduct,” and if so, turn away from it. Is there a fire burning in your heart: words of forgiveness not spoken, a lie not confessed, or encouragement not offered? Find a way to express it this week.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Especially pray for persecuted Christians, and for a new awakening to Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus,
walk with us in the journey of life.
Make our hearts burn with a
sense of your presence.
Help us to be zealous messengers
of your love and mercy.
Amen.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, though your people walk in the valley of darkness, no evil should they fear, for they follow in faith the call of the Shepherd whom you have sent for their hope and strength. Attune our minds to the sound of his voice and lead our steps in the path he has shown, that we may know the strength of his outstretched arm and enjoy the light of your presence forever. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: Traditionally, the fourth Sunday of Easter is called “*Good Shepherd Sunday*” because the Gospel readings in all three cycles are taken from the tenth chapter of John, in which Jesus uses the image of a shepherd to describe his relationship to us. In the first reading, Peter stresses the importance of repentance and baptism for those who want to participate in the salvation won for us by Jesus. In the second reading, Peter seeks to give meaning to the sufferings of Christians. In the Gospel, Jesus uses images of the Good Shepherd and Sheepgate to describe his ministry.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:14, 36-41

This reading is the conclusion of Peter's sermon to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The first paragraph summarizes the whole sermon. Jesus' death reveals humankind's complicity with evil and God's immeasurable love for humankind. Convinced of their own sin and of God's love for them, Peter's audience is “deeply shaken” and asks, “What must we do?” Peter tells them that they must “*repent, be baptized, and receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, who is given for you and for all who are far off.*”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 23

In this well-loved psalm, the psalmist expresses a tremendous trust in God, our Good Shepherd.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 2:20-25

Peter is addressing slaves who have become Christians. He does not condemn the evil institution of slavery; he simply takes it for granted as Christians did for several hundred years after the coming of Jesus. Accepting that slavery is going to be around for a long time and that some slaves will become Christians and continue to suffer, Peter seeks to help them find some *meaning* in their

suffering. He sets before them the example of Jesus who also suffered unjustly. Jesus' attitude toward suffering is: if done for the right reason or motive, it can drastically change lives. A suffering servant can effect changes in the lives of those inflicting hardship and pain.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 10:1-10**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 10:1-10

This Gospel follows Chapter 9 of John in which the Pharisees are depicted as blind leaders and bad shepherds. They fail to recognize Jesus as the "Light of the World." They excommunicate from the synagogue the blind man who does recognize and accept Jesus.

Jesus replaces these blind guides and assumes leadership of his flock. He is the Good Shepherd who does not abuse his flock by tossing them out; rather, he lays down his very life for them. His willingness to put his life at risk for his followers makes Jesus a much more qualified leader than the Pharisees who are "thieves and robbers" who do not really care for the sheep.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows his flock by name. They recognize his voice and follow him as he leads them to good pastures. There is a close personal relationship between Jesus and his flock.

Jesus also describes himself as "the Gate for his sheep." He is the way to the Father and to eternal life.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. In the first reading, Peter's congregation is "cut to the heart" as they hear him preach. Has this kind of conviction or spiritual awakening ever happened to you as a result of a homily or as a result of some other event in your life?
3. Which stanza of Psalm 23 speaks to your heart most and why?
4. What are forms of slavery (second reading) in our world today? What if anything, can we do to oppose slavery?
5. What are traits of a good shepherd? How can you be a good shepherd to others?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as*

he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Thank you, Jesus, for being our Good Shepherd. Help me to hear your voice. Help me to make good use of the pastures you give me. Amen.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Be a good shepherd for someone going through a tough time. If someone is or has been a good shepherd to you, consider letting him/her know.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Pray for all who are suffering and for their caregivers.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayers for Priests and for Vocations

*Jesus, good and gentle Shepherd,
I thank you for the men
who have heard and responded
to your call to priesthood.
Place in their hearts a deep desire
to love and serve you and the people
you have placed in their care.
May their word to us be your Word.
And may we hear and act on your Word.
Protect and guard your priests
from false and sinful ways.
Keep them in your truth.
Help them to grow in holiness.
Help us, your people, to love and
support your priests by word and deed.
Lord of the harvest, may all those whom
you are calling to the priesthood and
religious life hear and answer your call.
Show us, as a parish, ways to foster vocations.
Jesus, bless all Vocations Directors;
help them to discover effective ways
to call men and women
to the priesthood and religious life.
Amen.*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Risen Christ, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. You lead us to the Father. Today, as we gather in your name, nurture us with your Word. May your Spirit breathe on us as we break open your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading tells us how the Diaconate ministry came to be. The second reading offers words of encouragement to a persecuted Christian community. In the Gospel, Jesus offers some words of comfort to his Apostles who are sad because he speaks about leaving them.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 6:1-7

As the Christian community grows in numbers, there is conflict around the care for poor widows. It seems that Greek-speaking Jewish widows do not receive the same care as widows living in Jerusalem. This has also caused a problem for the Apostles. In caring for the widows, time set aside for the preaching of the word has been curtailed.

The Apostles resolve both problems by having Greek-speaking Jews select seven men to take over the ministry of caring for the widows. The Apostles lay hands on the chosen seven and pray over them. And thus begins a new ordained ministry in the church—the diaconate. It has been well said that “necessity is the mother of invention.”

The reading also underlines how the first leaders of the church come to realize that true Gospel living involves caring for the poor.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 33

This psalm applauds God's fidelity.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 2:4-9

The author tells his readers that their high standing in God's eyes more than compensates for their low standing in the eyes of society. These ‘resident aliens’ may be *rejected* by the world but they are *precious* in God's eyes. These ‘nobodies’ are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people God claims as his own.” The author is saying to a people who may be feeling that they do not belong, that they very much belong to God. The

reading reminds those who are homeless that they have a home in God.

A ‘stumbling block’ (Isaiah 8:4) seeks to convey notions of strength and challenge in adversity. The reference to “the *rejected stone* becoming the *corner stone*” (Ps 118:2) explains how Israel was considered insignificant by the empires over the centuries. The Christians in hostile Asia-Minor will be a ‘stumbling block’ and a ‘rejected stone’ in their environment. Recall that Peter is writing to a community living in an unbelieving and often hostile environment.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 14:1-12**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 14:1-12

The setting for this Gospel is Jesus’s last meal with his disciples during which he speaks about going away to his Father. Jesus assures his disciples that he will not abandon them. Though he will be physically absent from them, he will remain with them in a new way.

At this time, neither Thomas nor Phillip understands the new way that Jesus is talking

about. In response to Thomas, Jesus says he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Jesus is the *Way* by which we travel to the fullness of God. United to Jesus, we enter into the life of God. Jesus—as the *Way*—includes the Way of the Cross.

Jesus is the *Truth*. He not only speaks the truth, but the fullness of truth resides in him alone. The Truth which Jesus offers is not ‘catechism truth’ or some system of thought. Rather, it is a person. Jesus reveals to us the true nature of God and the truth about humanity.

Jesus is the *Life*. Our life is totally wrapped up with Jesus through Baptism and the Eucharist. “*In him, we live, move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28).

Philip’s question gives Jesus the opportunity to speak about the closeness and intimacy that exist between him and the Father. The intimacy is so close that to see Jesus is to see the Father, and to ‘know’ Jesus is to experience the Father.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The first reading is about the creation of the diaconate. What is your experience of this ordained ministry in your parish? If you have no deacons, do you wish you had?
3. The diaconate was a new ministry created to meet a special need. Do you see the need for a new ministry in your parish to meet a need that is not presently being met? If so,

what is the needed ministry and how can you help?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus urges his disciples to not let their hearts be troubled. What kinds of things can cause your hearts to be troubled? What helps you to calm a troubled heart?

5. In what way is Jesus your Way, your Truth and your Life?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you are my Way, my Truth and my Life. Help me to live accordingly and not allow other things and persons to take priority over me.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Be aware of the things that worry and upset you. Try to do a better job of dealing with worry.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? What or for whom do we need to pray for?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Jesus,
You are the Way, the Truth and the Life.
Help us daily to be a little more aware
of this great belief.
Thank you preparing a permanent place
for us in Heaven.
Amen.*

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving God, thank you for sending us the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us, comfort us and convict us of sin. Help us to be more aware of and responsive to your Spirit's presence and activity in our lives and in the world. May the Holy Spirit be with us now as we gather together to break open your holy Word. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: Filled with the Spirit (promised in the Gospel), Philip brings the Good News to Samaria (first reading). The second reading is an exhortation to be faithful despite suffering.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

The death of Stephen unleashes a persecution of the early church in Jerusalem that sends some of its members scurrying for safety in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). God uses this terrible event to bring the Good News to the people of Samaria, a people despised by Jews. These verses focus on the evangelization ministry of Philip, one of the first deacons. Philip's preaching is accompanied and confirmed by signs and wonders, which is the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy: "*You shall do greater works than I.*" A second important thing to note in this reading is how these 'diaspora' (dispersed) communities stay connected to the Mother Church in Jerusalem. Finally, it seems that the laying on of hands for the coming of the Spirit is something reserved for the Apostles.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 66

A theme of universalism—God's care for *all* people—is dominant in this psalm.

SECOND READING: 1Peter 3:15-18

These verses from 1Peter exhort the Christians to continue to remain faithful to Jesus even in the face of hostility. If questioned by authorities about their faith, they should be able to explain the hope that is in them, doing so with respect and reverence and not with antagonism. They are encouraged to be faithful Christians so that their witness will be effective. It is not necessarily God's will that we should suffer, but it is God's will that we do good, that we do what is right and just, and if we experience suffering because of that, then we are called to suffer patiently, knowing that suffering is the cost of discipleship, and it is God's will

that we join in his sufferings. Jesus suffered for the unrighteous to bring them to God. In a similar way, followers of Christ are called to suffer at the hands of the unrighteous and trust that God will use such suffering to bring the unrighteous to God.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 14:15-21**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

Jesus promises the ‘*Paraclete*’ to his disciples, (‘*Paraclete*’ literally means ‘*alongside of*’). Its secondary meaning has to do with speaking, exhorting, begging, consoling, encouraging, instructing. In John, the *Paraclete witnesses* (15:6), *teaches* (14:26), *encourages* (16:6) *guides* (16:13) and *proves wrong* (16:8-11).

Notice Jesus says, “I will give you *another Paraclete*.” Jesus is the first one. The *Paraclete* is the “Spirit of Truth” who will remind the Apostles what Jesus taught, and help them to *understand* what he taught. In various situations, the Spirit will help Jesus’ disciples in different ways, e.g., if a disciple is in court, the Spirit will act as his inner defense attorney. In dealing with the world, the Spirit will act as his prosecutor.

The Spirit is the very presence of Jesus within us. Jesus has not orphaned us; rather, he is within us in a new way. The Spirit is a new presence of Jesus. The Spirit is our companion playing different roles at different times. For example, when we are sad, he is our *comfort*; when we are confused, he will guide us. This Spirit cannot be recognized without eyes of faith or without a heart of love. If we lack these qualities, the presence of the Holy Spirit will remain concealed from us. True knowledge of Jesus is always linked to loving Jesus.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The first reading speaks of ‘unclean spirits.’ Name some unclean spirits operating in our world today. What unclean spirits might we have to deal with?
3. In the second reading, Peter says, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” If asked what gives you hope, how would you answer the question? How easy or hard is it for you to talk to others about our Catholic beliefs and practices?
4. When did you become aware of the Holy Spirit within you? How did your life change?
5. How do you experience the *Paraclete* or the Holy Spirit?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Holy Spirit, help me to be more aware and responsive to your promptings in my daily life.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Try to be more aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within you. In preparation for the Feast of Pentecost, consider making a *Novena to the Holy Spirit* beginning this Friday. A suggested novena is offered at the end of this week's commentary.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? What or for whom do we need to pray for?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.*

*Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.*

*Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.*

*Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.*

*Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.*

Amen.

- St. Augustine

**NOVENA TO THE HOLY SPIRIT
IN PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST**

Before Jesus ascends into Heaven, he tells his disciples to return to Jerusalem and to wait in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). For the next nine days, the disciples, along with Mary and some other women, “devoted themselves to constant prayer” (Acts 1:14). This time of prayer is often called the first *Novena* (meaning nine). A *Novena* is a nine-day period of prayer for a particular intention.

Beginning next Friday, you are invited to pray the following Novena to the Holy Spirit for whatever intention you may have. You are encouraged to also pray for our Church family, that we will have a greater sense of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is God’s greatest gift to us. For the next nine days, make a particular effort to be attentive to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in your daily life and to respond to his promptings.

NOVENA OUTLINE

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit,
Fill the hearts of your faithful
And enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
And we shall be created
And you shall renew the face
of the earth.

Meditate on Scripture assigned for each day.

Pray one decade of the Rosary asking Mary to help you to become more attentive and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father of Light,
from whom every good gift comes,
send your Spirit into our lives.
With the power of a mighty wind
and by the flame of your wisdom,
open the horizons of our minds.
Loosen our tongues to sing your praise
in words beyond the power of speech,
for without your Spirit
we could never raise our voices
in words of peace
or announce the truth
that Jesus is Lord! Amen.

Scripture Readings for the Nine Days

DAY ONE

Luke 1:35: Mary conceives Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:21-22: Jesus is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

“Jesus, baptize me anew with your Holy Spirit.”

DAY TWO

John 7:37-39: Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, possess my whole being.”

DAY THREE

Acts 2:1-12: The promised Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples.

“Holy Spirit, awaken in me the fire of your love.”

DAY FOUR

Acts 2:42-47: Led by the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Christ join together in a small Christian community to share life and God’s deeds in their midst.

“Holy Spirit, may our Small Christian Community grow in love for you.”

DAY FIVE

Acts 10:44-48: The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles.

“Holy Spirit, help me to be open to your workings in the most surprising places and ways.”

DAY SIX

Acts 13:1-12: Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas are discerned to go on their first missionary journey.

“Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice when you call out to me.”

DAY SEVEN

Rom 8:26-27: The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer.

“Holy Spirit, teach me to pray.”

DAY EIGHT

1Cor 3:10-16: The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the deep things of God.

“Holy Spirit, show me God’s path for my life.”

DAY NINE

Gal 5:16-26: Paul names some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We are holy and Spirit-filled to the extent that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are operative in our lives.

“Holy Spirit, help me to grow in love, peace, joy.”

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God our Father, make us joyful in the Ascension of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we follow him into the new creation, for his Ascension is our glory and our hope. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading describes the Ascension of Jesus and his promise of the Holy Spirit. In the second reading, Paul describes the meaning of the Ascension, how God raised Jesus above all earthly powers and made him Head of the Church and Lord of creation. The Gospel is the Great Commission: Jesus sending his Apostles to preach the Good News to the whole world.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 1:1-11

In 2 Kings 2:4-15, the prophet Elijah tells his disciple Elisha that he will receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit if he sees Elijah being taken up into heaven. It comes to pass. Elisha witnesses the flaming chariot take up Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind. Thus Elisha receives the spirit of Elijah and proceeds on to Jericho to continue his mission.

In Acts 1:9, the disciples see Jesus being taken up into the clouds, only to return to them in the Spirit in Chapter 2. They are to carry on the mission of Jesus just as Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah.

Jesus' Ascension marks the end of his journey on earth and signals the beginning of

a new era. The mission of the Church begins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 47

This is a prayer of praise for creation and a liturgical celebration of the enthronement of God.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:17-23

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul provides a theological interpretation of the Ascension. Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, far above every principality, power, virtue, domination, and every name. Christ's Ascension is the completion of his exaltation. God has placed all things under Christ's feet and exalted him as Head of the Church.

More specifically, the reading is an excerpt from a prayer of thanksgiving. Paul begins by praying that all believers in Jesus will be blessed by wisdom and revelation of his ways. Then Paul prays that believers may be enlightened on three things: 1) hope which is rooted in the possession of the Holy Spirit; 2) inheritance of God's life ("glory") as definitely assured; and 3) tremendous power of God's abiding in believers. Just as God marvelously raised Jesus from death to life in the Resurrection, so too will Christians experience radical change in their own lives. What happened to Jesus will happen to those who believe in him.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
Matthew 28:16-20**

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 28:16-20

In contrast to Luke and Acts, Matthew has the Ascension happening on a mountain in Galilee. There he challenges the disciples to take his message to the *whole* world. "Make disciples of all nations. They are to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus's last words to his disciples is that he will be 'with them always until the end of the ages.' So

Jesus is not abandoning them. Rather, he affirms his intimacy with them.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.

2. After the Ascension, the disciples return to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. What new or fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit do you desire at this time for your parish and for yourself?

3. In the second reading, Paul prays that "the Father give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of Jesus." Discuss how this is reflected in your life.

4. Jesus' last message to his disciples is a commission to evangelize every creature. To what extent is your parish faithful to this Great Commission? How faithful are you? How can both you and your parish carry out more faithfully this commission of Jesus?

5. The Ascension is a time of transition for the Apostles. What has been one of the biggest transitions you have had to go through? What helped you to negotiate the transition?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on*

Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus just at you commissioned your disciples to share your message with others, you have commissioned me. Help me to be ready and willing to act on your word. Amen.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: This week, be on the lookout for opportunities to share your faith with others.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Pray for all who are graduating from school at this time. Pray for all who are in transition.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Jesus,

*Thank you for your promise
to be with us at all time until
the end of the world.*

*May your presence help us in our
baptismal call
to make disciples of all nations.
Amen.*

PENTECOST SUNDAY A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of god and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful gathered in your name. Enkindle in us the fire of your divine love. Allow your dormant gifts within us to manifest themselves in our lives so that all will know your presence and activity in our lives. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings speak of the Holy Spirit's coming. The second reading tells us that the Holy Spirit grants the Church a diversity of gifts.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:1-11

Luke situates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit comes on Easter Sunday evening. In Scripture, it is the *theological* meaning of events that matters and not their *historical chronology*.

In Jewish tradition, *Pentecost* is a harvest feast celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Pentecost commemorates Israel's covenant with God, the birth of Israel. *Pentecost* (meaning fifty) takes place 50 days after Passover.

Luke has the Holy Spirit coming on Pentecost to announce the beginning of a new Israel. The Church will be *universal* in scope. People of *every* nation will be invited to join this new People of God.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit is described in both visual and auditory terms, reminiscent

of the Old Testament theophanies, i.e., appearances of God. God appears to Moses in a burning bush and God speaks to Job from a whirlwind (Job 38:1). The first gift the Spirit imparts is the gift of *tongues*. Perhaps the most miraculous thing about this whole event is the *inner change* it works in the disciples. A group of fear-filled disciples now become bold proclaimers of the Gospel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 104

This is a hymn of praise to the Creator God—the One who gives us new life in the Spirit.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Paul makes two important points in these verses. First, all the gifts come from the *same* Spirit. This *One* Spirit is the *unifying* factor in a community in which the *many* gifts are threatening to create chaos. Second, the gifts

are given for the *common good* and not for one's self-aggrandizement.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

“On the evening of that first day of the week...Jesus came.” This appearance happens on Easter Sunday evening, the evening of the Resurrection. Jesus comes to a group of frightened disciples (*“the doors were locked for fear of the Jews”*). The fact that Jesus can enter through locked doors shows that *“resurrected life”* is totally different, not confined by physical obstacles. Yet, by showing them *“his hands and his side,”* Jesus is saying that there is a *connection* and *continuity* between the crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ. Also, by showing them his pierced hands and side, Jesus is communicating the *cost* of glory.

Jesus imparts three gifts: *peace*, *joy* and the *spirit*. The *“peace”* or *shalom* which Jesus brings replaces the feelings of guilt the disciples must have had for abandoning Jesus in his hour of greatest need. The gift of *peace* or *shalom* restores harmony to a broken or

wounded relationship. *Joy* is what the disciples experience when they see Jesus. This joy at the presence of Jesus replaces the feelings of depression the disciples must have suffered during Jesus' absence. Then Jesus imparts his spirit: *“He breathed on them.”* This gesture is seen as reminiscent of God breathing the breath of life into Adam (Gen 2:7). Pentecost is the beginning of a new creation. By his gesture of breathing, Jesus brings to birth his Church. Then Jesus commissions those gathered to go forth and forgive sins. *“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained.”* Originally, these words were probably seen as the Church's prerogative to confer or withhold Baptism from those seeking entry into the Church. People who were judged as not truly repentant of their sins or not embracing the message of Jesus were refused Baptism which, among other things, cleansed the recipient of sin. Later, our Church saw in these words of Jesus, the foundation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Name signs of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in our world, our Church, your parish and your own life and the life of your family.
3. Who is the Holy Spirit to you? If you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, how did it begin and develop?

4. What gift of the Holy Spirit do you most desire or need at this time in your life?

5. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's *presence* and *activity* in your life?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *"Thank you Holy Spirit for your heavenly presence in my soul. Help me to be more attentive and responsive to your presence."*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: This week, spend some time reflecting on how God has empowered you to do some work in our Church or world. If you don't experience the Holy Spirit's *presence* and *activity* in your life, consider speaking with a priest or spiritual guide about this important matter.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Breathe On Me, O God

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with the life anew,
That I may love the things you love,
And do what you would do.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with you I have one will,
To live and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
My soul with grace refine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with your fire divine.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God,
So I shall never die,
But live with you the perfect life
In your eternity.*

-Liturgy of the Hours