

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

Welcome to the *Fifty Days of Easter* or the *Easter Season* in our Liturgical year. The Easter event is not just celebrated on one day, but throughout the Fifty Days of Easter. The focus is the new life, hope and community offered to all by Jesus' resurrection. These readings are intended to be instructive for the neophytes, baptized and received into our community at the Easter Vigil. The readings spell out the implications of the new life that they have embraced. The readings are also, of course, intended to be instructive for us, "old baptized". They call to keep alive the vision of new life in Christ and our call to make disciples of all the nations!

First Readings

This is the only season of the Liturgical year when the first readings are *not* from the Hebrew Scriptures or *Old Testament*. Rather, they are from the *Acts of the Apostles*. The first readings are a proclamation of the message brought to us by Jesus. They speak of community and the efforts of the early Christians to spread the Good News. We notice the transforming effect of the Holy Spirit on those first converts to Christianity.

Second Readings

The second reading during Year B is always taken from 1 John, an epistle written at the end of the first century to a Church undergoing a dramatic internal struggle

around questions of right faith, and right behavior. At issue was a proper understanding of the person of Jesus and his role in salvation, as well as a commitment to communal living according to the demands of Christian fellowship. The author insists that right faith recognizes Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, and that right behavior is reflected in mutual love among community members. When we are "begotten by God" we hold fast to this faith and "testify" to the truth by a life in which "we love the children of God."

The Easter Gospels

The gospels during the Easter Season in all three cycles are taken from John's gospel with one or two exceptions.

The Easter Gospels speak of resurrection and new life and how Jesus prepared his disciples for his physical departure from them.

The Easter season culminates with the *Feast of Pentecost*, which celebrates the imparting of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus.

Have a great Fifty Days and remember to often pray for Small Christian Communities meeting all over the world.

In the Risen Christ



Fr. Eamon Tobin

Editor's note: Father Eamon always chose to celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord at all the weekend Masses, therefore there isn't a commentary for the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

EASTER SUNDAY B

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 reading 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 to offer salvation not only 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 have 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. Peter 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 or
1 Corinthians 5:6-8**

The two alternative second readings declare that the Resurrection is the foundation of new life for those who believe. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul reminds his readers that through baptism, they had died and have been raised up, and that they should live accordingly. In his letter to the Corinthians, 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

Commenting on today's Gospel, Terence Keegan writes:

In the prologue of John's Gospel one reads, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). This image of darkness and light, as also the images death/life and falsehood/truth, recur throughout the Gospel and lie behind the story of today's reading. Mary Magdalene comes "while it is still dark" and mistakenly thinks that "the Lord has been taken from the

tomb" (20:2). Simon Peter saw the piece of cloth rolled up (20:7); hardly something that anyone stealing the body would have done, but apparently did not know what to make of this strange clue. The other disciple, when he entered, not only saw but also believed. This belief is the first instance of Resurrection faith in John's Gospel. In the language of the fourth Gospel, faith is the way in which an individual passes from darkness into light, from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Faith does not result from deduction but is a gift from God bestowed in virtue of the triumphant death/Resurrection of Jesus.

The author is careful to emphasize the extraordinary nature of this faith in the final verse of today's reading. Only when this gift is received, only when one has entered into the light, does the full meaning of the words of the Old Testament and the mysterious words and deeds of Jesus become clear. Only then does the significance of the rolled-up cloth become clear. Today's story is not about the disciples interpreting the empty tomb, but rather about the initial gift of faith by which one enters into the light, the truth and the life of Jesus' Resurrection.

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 the apostles were called to witness to Christ. So too are we. How can you be better in your witness to God's presence and redemption in your life?

3. The apostles were surely surprised by the events of Easter morning. Can you recall a time when God surprised you?

4. 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?

5. What is the challenge of Easter for you?

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, please help me to hear and respond and live the message you have given me this day.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: 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.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? 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 - DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY B

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 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: The readings during the Easter Season speak to us about the impact of the Resurrection on the lives of believers and unbelievers. In this week's readings, we hear how *new life in Christ* brings about unity and sharing (first reading), love of each other (second reading), and freedom from fear, guilt and disbelief (Gospel). The second Sunday of Easter is also *Divine Mercy Sunday* when we celebrate the wonderful mercy of God—popularized in recent times by St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who had apparitions of Jesus manifesting his mercy for humanity.

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 4:32-35

During the Easter season, the first reading is always from the *Acts of the Apostles*, sometimes called the *Gospel of the Holy Spirit* or the first *History of the Church*. The first readings from Acts during this season illuminate for us the mystery of the Church as it developed from its beginnings after Pentecost Sunday. On the second Sunday of Easter each year, the lectionary places before us one of three very similar summary statements of the life of the early Christian community. The statements are most likely an idealized portrayal of the first community of believers.

This week's reading speaks about the *unity* and *spirit of sharing* which characterized the

early believers: "*They were of one heart and mind... they shared all things in common.... and not one was needy amongst them.*"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This psalm expresses thanksgiving for deliverance. In this Sunday's liturgy, this thanksgiving is applied to Christ who was delivered from death.

SECOND READING: 1 John 5:1-6

The second readings during the B cycle are always taken from the *First Letter of John*, an epistle written towards the end of the first century to a church undergoing traumatic internal struggle around the questions of right faith and right behavior. At issue was a proper understanding of the person of Jesus

and his role in salvation, as well as a commitment to communal living according to the demands of Christian fellowship. The author insists that true faith recognizes Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and that right behavior is reflected in the mutual love among community members. When we are “begotten by God,” we hold fast to this faith and “testify” to the truth by a life in which “we love the children of God.”

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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

During the Easter season in all three cycles, the Gospel readings are from John, with a few exceptions. This week’s Gospel is a story of *mission, forgiveness, peace and faith*. It is also sometimes called “John’s Pentecost” because in it, Jesus imparts his Holy Spirit to those present. In the first scene, Jesus comes to a group of *fear-filled, guilt-ridden and depressed* disciples. He stands in their midst and offers them *four gifts: peace, joy, the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins*.

Because they have abandoned Jesus in his hour of need, the Apostles most likely feel a great need for “*shalom*,” i.e., God’s peace and reconciliation. The joy at seeing Jesus replaces the depression caused by his absence. The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the Apostles to go forth and preach

the Good News, casting aside all fear. The power to forgive sins enables them to impart to others the saving power of Jesus. In time, this text would be looked upon as the Church’s basis for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Sins would be “retained” or not forgiven if people were not truly sorry for them or were unwilling to embrace Jesus’ teachings.

By sharing with the disciples his wounds (“*He showed them his hands and side*”), Jesus is showing them that it is really he and not some ghost. He is also teaching them that there is no Easter glory without Good Friday pain. Jesus may be imparting to us that *community is built when the participants learn to share their wounds*.

In the second appearance, Thomas, who expressed disbelief in Jesus’ Resurrection, is present when Jesus tells him to place his hands in his wounds. He accepts Thomas where he is at and invites him to faith. Thomas makes a wonderful profession of faith in Jesus: “*My Lord and my God.*” Jesus says, “*Good, Thomas, you believe because you have seen. A time is coming when people will be called to believe without seeing.*” The “doubting Thomas” story is also important for all those in future generations who would struggle with faith questions. Thomas represents all those called to believe without seeing. Thomas would be their “patron saint.”

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 community of believers were of one heart and one mind.” What facilitates this oneness in families and parishes, and what hurts it?

3. Every saint and good and faithful Christians have been plagued with doubts about their Christian beliefs. Have you ever experienced doubt about your faith? If so, in what way and what helped you deal with your doubts?

4. Jesus brought shalom, peace and mercy to the disciples. How does your relationship with Jesus bring peace to your life?

5. In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples (his church) the power to forgive sins. Over the years has the sacrament of reconciliation played a role in your spiritual life? If so, how?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ 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 I ponder your forgiveness of the disciples who deserted you in your suffering, I think of the many times I too have deserted you in the many sufferings in our midst. Please forgive me as you forgive others as you forgive me and grant us your peace.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Be aware this week of what you can do to build community in your home, workplace, neighborhood, parish and place of recreation. If you live with other people, call a family meeting. Make a list of what works well in your family. Ask each member to name one way he/she can contribute to a greater family harmony.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for parishes and families who experience division. Pray for people who often are plagued with religious doubts.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

Prayer for God’s Mercy

Almighty Lord God,
Your glory cannot be approached,
Your compassion knows no bounds,
Your love for all mankind is beyond
human expression.

In your mercy look on us
and on all your people;
Do not leave us to our sins,
But deal with us according
to your goodness.

Guide us to the haven of your will,
And make us truly obedient
to your commandments,
so that we may not feel ashamed when
we come before your judgment seat.
For you, God, are good and ever-loving.

We glorify you, Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit,

Now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.
From *Treasury of Prayers* by Father Eamon Tobin

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER B

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: *Holy Spirit, we thank you for gathering us together to share your Word. Fill us with the same fervor that empowered Peter to proclaim Jesus and his message. Just as you opened the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, open our eyes to recognize your holy presence in our midst. 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: In the first reading, Peter shows great courage in confronting the leaders and people for their role in the death of Jesus. In the second reading, John says that authentic love is shown by obedience to the commandments. In the Gospel, Luke shows that while the risen Christ is different (he comes through locked doors), he is also like the Christ whom the Apostles knew prior to the Resurrection. He has physical wounds and he eats food. All three readings show that belief in the Resurrection should lead to a repentance of sin.

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 3:13-15, 17-19

The Acts of the Apostles contains five speeches by Peter. Today's verses—an excerpt from his second speech—follow the healing of a crippled man which gives Peter a unique opportunity to preach about Jesus.

Peter begins by placing blame on his hearers and their leaders for the death of Jesus whom the God of their ancestors has now raised from the dead. But then, Peter tells his audience that they have acted out of ignorance, implying that had they known better, they would have acted accordingly. Now, through the witness of the disciples, they do know better and ought to reform their lives through repentance of sin and to come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 4

This psalm of lament expresses confidence in God's favor in time of trial, the kind of confidence Jesus must have had when faced with his sufferings.

SECOND READING: 1 John 2:1-5

Ideally, as Christians, we should not sin but if we do, we should be comforted by the fact that we have an advocate in Jesus who died for our sins. John states emphatically that true knowledge of Christ will lead one to keep the commandments. In stating this, John is responding to a widely held belief that a superior type of knowledge is sufficient for salvation and that such knowledge excuses one from adherence to moral norms.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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 24:35-48

This Gospel follows on the heels of the famous Emmaus story during which the two disciples experience Jesus in the breaking of the bread. As the two disciples describe their fascinating encounter with Jesus, he suddenly reappears to them. But they are scared and have no idea who he is. They think he is a ghost. Jesus tries to bring them to faith by appealing to their “sense of touch”: “*Look at my hands and feet,*” and to their reason: “*Ghosts have no flesh.*” Jesus opens their minds to their own writings in the law, the prophets and psalms, and how all of these point to his coming. Then the disciples are commissioned to go forth and be his witnesses: “*Penance and remission of sins must be preached to all nations.*”

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. Sin and repentance, and mercy are mentioned in today’s readings. What helps you to keep a balance between all three -

awareness of our sinfulness our need to repent and the gift of God’s mercy? How are you challenged to do the same?

3. Even though the two disciples had just seen Jesus in the Emmaus event, they had no idea who he was when he appeared to them very shortly after that. What are we to make of that?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus offers the Apostles the gift of peace. How can you be an instrument of peace in your environment?

5. When are you most at peace? How can you bring peace to others?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/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, like the two disciples I am sometimes slow or fearful or unable to truly trust that it is you performing miracles in my life. Please help me to trust you completely.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Be alert to opportunities for sharing your faith with others.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for families who have children receiving First Communion during the Easter Season. Pray that this important event in the life of their child will move those who are lax about Church to return to the Eucharist on a regular basis.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

When Fearful

Lord, we ask you to deliver us from fear
of the unknown future:
from fear of failure; from fear of poverty;
from fear of bereavement;
from fear of loneliness;
from fear of sickness and pain;
from fear of age; and from fear of death.

Help us, Father, by your grace
to love you above all, and to fear nothing.

Fill our hearts with cheerful courage
and loving trust in you;
Through our Lord and Master,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER B

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: The Gospel presents Jesus as the model Shepherd in his spirit of dedication and willingness to surrender his life for his sheep. The letter of John speaks of the graced outcome of the Shepherd's death: our becoming children of God. This Jesus, moreover, is the only way to the Father, as Peter tells his listeners in Acts. In him alone is salvation, which is now extended to all humanity

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 4:8-12

Peter responds to the leaders who are disturbed by his healing of the crippled man at the gate of the Temple. He tells the leaders that the crippled man is healed through the power of the risen Christ working through him. Peter proclaims that all salvation comes through Jesus. The image of the rejected cornerstone is a popular proverb. Although it first appears in Psalm 118 in celebration of Israel's triumph in battle, early Christianity adopted it as a metaphor for the Crucifixion. Jesus, rejected by his own people, is revealed as the Savior of the world.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a thanksgiving psalm and, in the context of today's liturgy, it is a hymn of thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of salvation gained for us by Christ.

SECOND READING: 1 John 3:1-2

John conveys to his readers the awesome privilege of the children of God. In and through Baptism, we live in God's household. But one of the consequences of this reality is that the world which rejects Jesus will also reject us. John refers to what is called in theology the "already" and the "not yet." Through Baptism, we are "already" children of the light, but our

complete transformation in Christ has “not yet” been completed.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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 10:11-18

Jesus uses the popular and well-loved image of a *shepherd* to describe himself. The chapter follows the healing of the man born blind. Not only do the Pharisees treat the man shamefully, but they also reject Jesus’ claim that he is from God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, defends his authority and rejects that of the Pharisees. Like the *hired hand*, they have no true concern for their people.

There are two qualities that make Jesus a *good* Shepherd. First, he lays down his life for his sheep, and second, he and his sheep know one another. The former quality is the central point of this passage.

Jesus’ reference to other sheep and to one flock underscores *universality* and *unity*, which are to characterize this new community of believers. In Jesus’ day, the *other sheep* may have referred to the poor, the tax collectors and sinners generally ostracized by society. For the Early Church, the other sheep may have been the Gentiles and others who had yet to hear the Good News. For us, the other sheep might be

people of non-Christian religions and non-believers.

Jesus’ way of shepherding the flock is not one of domination, but one of care and concern. On the other hand, true sheep are the ones who hear the Shepherd’s voice. In a world of a million lies, we sheep find our anchor and truth in Christ and his 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. Who are some modern examples of “rejected cornerstones”—people whose cause or work is not accepted by the general masses? Have you had a personal experience of being rejected for what you believe or for a cause you feel strongly about?
3. How might the belief that you are an unconditionally loved child of God impact your prayer and the way you relate to Jesus and others?
4. Why is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd so popular with people? What other image of Jesus do you like?
5. What is the difference between a hireling and a good shepherd when it comes to caring for people? When might we act like a hireling, showing no real concern for those in need of good shepherd care?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ 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: Dear Jesus, there are so many who are rejected because they do not know their value as a child of God, help me to be your good shepherd to those you send.

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 look for ways that you are a hired hand and can transform to a good shepherd.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all who are or feel rejected, all who don't know their value and especially for all who treat others as less than.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

For Guidance

Lord, take me where you want me to go;
Let me meet who you want me to meet;
Tell me what you want me to say,
and keep me out of your way.

Father Mychal Judge

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER B

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: *Christ our Vine, we gather in your name so that we may grow in our understanding of and love for your Word, and bear fruit in your name. Prune and remove all sin doubt, and clutter from our lives. Help us, like St. Paul, to boldly proclaim our faith in you. 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 Easter message of new life in the risen Christ continues in today's Gospel of the Vine and the Branches. Apart from Jesus the Vine, there can be no Spirit-life for his disciples. The letter to John reminds us to recognize Jesus as God's Son and to keep his commandments. The Spirit at work in Acts moves the recently converted Paul to present his message in Jerusalem regardless of the personal danger involved. Thus, the vine and branches constitute a living reality within the human soul and within a growing Church.

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 9:26-31

This conversion story shows the marvelous transforming power of God's grace. It follows Paul's conversion story. Paul, the former *persecutor*, becomes a *proclaimer* and disciple of Jesus. When he returns to introduce himself to the Apostles, they are naturally fearful and suspicious of him. But Barnabas, Paul's "sponsor," encourages the Apostles to accept Paul. Then Paul immediately starts to preach about Jesus and his message. The Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) reject Paul and try to kill him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 22

These verses celebrate a sufferer's deliverance.

SECOND READING: 1John 3:18-24

Three theological themes are combined in a very significant way: *Christian love, confident belief* and *faithful obedience*. The first exhortation is to active love. It is not enough to proclaim love for God, but we must also love one another. And if in our efforts to love we fail and "our hearts condemn us," we ought not to worry because God's love and mercy "is greater than our hearts." In prayer, believers should go to God with utter confidence knowing that he will always bless us with what is best for us. Finally, the writer speaks about faithful obedience which involves two things: belief in the name of God's Son and love for one another.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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 15:1-8

Last week, Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. This week he refers to himself as the *Vine* which gives divine life to all who believe in him and live according to his Word. Non-fruit-bearing branches will be cut away. This could be a reference to the Jews who reject Jesus or to people who do accept him but do not follow his ways. But even fruit-bearing believers will be pruned or purified by Jesus so that they can bear even more fruit. This daily pruning often involves dealing positively with our daily crosses and losses.

In the ‘vine and branch’ imagery, Jesus explains the wonderful intimacy that exists between him and his followers and the responsibility that goes with it. Believers who nurture their relationship with Jesus by lives of faith and love will bear much fruit. But then follows a severe warning: those who neglect their relationship with Christ will be cut away and thrown out. It is similar to what happens in close personal relationships: unless they are nurtured, they die.

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. Who has been a Barnabas in your life—in other words, who has been your primary inspiration and supporter in your efforts to become more Christ-like?
3. What *pruning* have you experienced? Who or what has been removed from your life that ended up bringing you closer to Jesus?
4. The vine and branches speak about the union between Christ and us. What helps you to have a greater awareness of this bond?
5. What fruit have you borne in your life that could not have happened without the presence of Jesus?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/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, the deepest desire of my heart is to remain in you so you may act in me. Please help me to bear much fruit.

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 try hard to live with a more conscious sense of the "divine in dwelling."

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for Church and government leaders, especially in their decision-making.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

PRAYER FOR HEALING THE FAMILY TREE

[Many families are cursed with the sins, wounds of their ancestors e.g., alcoholism, suicide, various physical and mental diseases. Hence, our need to pray for the healing of our Family Tree. Many individuals have through prayer been able to break the curse and heal wounds inflicted on their family.]

Heavenly Father, I come before you as your child, in need of your help.

Many of my problems have been caused by my own failure, neglect and sinfulness, for which I humbly beg your forgiveness.

I also ask you to forgive the sins of my ancestors whose failures have left their effects on me in the form of unwanted tendencies, behavior patterns and defects in body, mind and spirit. Heal me, Lord, of all these disorders.

With your help I forgive all who have hurt me, especially living or dead members of my family tree, who have directly offended me or my loved ones in any way, or those whose sins have resulted in our present sufferings and disorders. In the name of your divine Son, Jesus, and in the power of his Holy Spirit, I ask you, Father, to deliver me and my entire family tree from the influence of the evil one.

Free all living and dead members of my family tree, including those in adoptive relationships, and those in extended family relationships, from every contaminating form of bondage.

By your loving concern for us, Heavenly Father, and by the shed blood of your precious son, Jesus, I beg you to extend your blessing to me and to all my living and deceased relatives.

Heal every negative effect transmitted through all past generations, and prevent such negative effects in future generations of my family tree.

I symbolically place the cross of Jesus over the head of each person in my family tree, and between each generation; I ask you to let the cleansing blood of Jesus purify the bloodlines in my family lineage. Set your protective angels to encamp around us, and permit Archangel Raphael, the patron of healing, to administer your divine healing power to all of us, even in areas of genetic disability.

Give special power to our family members' guardian angels to heal, protect, guide and encourage each of us in all our needs. Let your healing power be released at this very moment, and let it continue as long as your sovereignty permits.

In our Family Tree, Lord, replace all
bondage with a holy bonding in family love.

And let there be an ever-deeper bonding
with you, Lord, by the Holy Spirit,
to your son, Jesus.

Let the family of the Holy Trinity pervade
our family with its tender, warm,
loving presence, so that our family may
recognize and manifest that love in
all our relationships.

All of our unknown needs we include
with this petition that we pray in
Jesus' precious Name. Amen

Rev. John H. Hampsch, CMF

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER B

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, in today's first reading, you pour out your Spirit on the Gentiles and remind believers of the command to give and receive your love. Open our hearts as we gather in your name and pour out on us your Holy Spirit and fill us with your love. 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: All three readings today highlight God's *initiative* in the world. In the first reading, it is God who launches the Gentile mission in conferring the Spirit upon Cornelius' household. In the familiar Johannine refrain on the primacy of love, the second reading reminds us that it is God who first loves us, and the Gospel says the same in referring to our election as disciples. We do not have to search God out. He comes looking for us.

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 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

This reading is sometimes called the "Gentile Pentecost" because in it is described a powerful act of 'Spirit outpouring' on the Gentiles—previously thought to be excluded from God's plan. When Peter sees God at work in Cornelius, he becomes aware that "*in truth, God shows no partiality.*" If God has accepted the Gentiles into his household, so must the Christian Church. Also, Baptism is seen not so much as a cause of God's love but as a celebration of it.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 98

This psalm takes up the theme of God's universal love that emphatically declares:

"All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God."

SECOND READING: 1 John 4:7-10

This reading uses the word *love* nine times. When it comes to speaking about the central mystery of our faith, speaking about who God is, the most important thing we can say about God is that he *is love*.

Then John says an amazing thing: "*whoever loves is begotten of God and knows God.*" This means, among other things, that the person who lives a loving life knows God – even if he/she is a non-believer. Elsewhere, John says: "*where there is love, there is God*". The reverse side of the above truth is that *whoever does not love, does not know*

God. This refers to believers who do not live lives of love.

The last verse of the reading underlines another important truth, namely that God loved us way before we ever showed our love for God.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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 15: 9-17

The context for this beautiful teaching on love is the Last Supper. Like the second reading today, this reading uses the word love *nine* times.

Jesus makes an amazing statement which we might easily miss. *“I love you disciples with the same intensity of love as my Father loves me.”* Pondering these words could do wonders for us as we struggle to deepen our sense of God’s love for us. Then Jesus says: *Remain in my love.* Even though Jesus will be physically separated from his disciples by his death, they can still experience his love by *remaining in his love and by keeping his commandments.* Jesus summed up *all* the commandments in one word, namely, *love:* love of God, love of neighbor and love of self.

The *sacrificial* dimension of love is also stressed here. Laying down one’s life for another is the greatest form of love. This word of Jesus has to be very consoling for all those who day after day care for loved ones, for the sick and for those who live on the margins of society. Finally, the reading underlines God’s initiative when it comes to our relationship with him. God is always seeking a relationship with us when we show little or no interest in him.

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 Jesus’ time, the Gentiles were considered as “them” and the Jews as “us.” In our time, name some of the groups considered as “them.” If we really see the “them people” as part of God’s household, to what extent would we continue to view them as “them”?
3. *“As the Father loves me, so do I love you.”* How can these awesome words of Jesus transform our lives?
4. Do you tend to believe that you have to earn God’s love? If so, why? How hard is it for you to believe that God loves us just as we are with all our sins and failures?
5. What can help to deepen our sense of God’s unconditional love for us?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ 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: Dear Jesus, I know that I do not love myself or others as you love us, please help me to love like you so my joy may be complete.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Take action on the "us" and "them" issues. Pray for "them." Defend "them" when they are spoken about in an uncharitable way.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially that you might more fully embrace God's love for you that you might more fully love.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

PRAYER OF LOVE

I love you, O my God,
and my only desire is to love you
until the last breath of my life.
I love you, O my infinitely lovable God,
and I would rather die loving you,
than live without loving you.
I love you, Lord,
and the only grace I ask is
to love you eternally.
My God, if my tongue cannot
say in every moment that I love you,
I want my heart to repeat it to you
as often as I draw breath. Amen

St. John Vianney

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

Suggested Reading

On the topic of God's unconditional love for us, see my book *13 Powerful Ways to Pray*, page 15, *Developing a Positive Image of God and Self*.

ASCENSION OF THE LORD B

Celebrated at all weekend Masses rather than Seventh Sunday of Easter

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 Kings 2:4-15, the prophet Elijah told his disciple Elisha that he would receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit if he saw Elijah being taken up into heaven. It came to pass; Elisha witnessed the flaming chariot take up Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind. Thus Elisha received the spirit of Elijah and proceeded 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.

This reading shows us that the Ascension of Jesus 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 and creation of a liturgical celebration of the enthronement of God.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:17-23

This 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 he prays that believers may be enlightened on three things:

1) hope which is rooted in the possession of the Holy Spirit; 2) the inheritance of God's life ("glory") as definitely assured; and 3) the tremendous power of God's abiding presence 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

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: Mark 16:15-20

The disciples are given the necessary means of salvation: belief in Jesus and baptism into the Christian community. They are commissioned "to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world" so that all will have a chance to be saved. While many will hear the message, not all will open their hearts to it. Mark names signs that will accompany believers that they will be blessed with empowerment to continue the healing ministry of Jesus. Their *teaching ministry* will be accompanied by a *healing ministry*. The reference to 'picking up snakes and drinking deadly poison' is not to be taken literally. It is a Middle Eastern form of hyperbole, a way of saying that followers of Jesus will have his power to overcome all forms of evil. They will possess a power beyond their own to enable them to

cope with the hardships of life. For example, many people have been healed by the power of prayer; others have been delivered from the power of Satan; and still others have received the power of God to help them to stop drinking and be freed from the painful memories of a difficult childhood. If Ascension means being lifted up, then we need to believe in the healing power of God to lift us up when we are wounded and possessed by demons of one kind or another. Jesus' Ascension marks the end of his life on earth and the beginning of the mission of the Church, which all of us participate in by means of our Baptism.

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. 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?
4. Jesus' Ascension is a time of transition for the Apostles. Share a time of transition in your life that turned out to be a blessing.
5. Can you tell a story of when you have been lifted up or have lifted up another?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ 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, I haven't been as attentive as I should be to your commission to proclaim the gospel, please renew in me a new vigor, skill and desire to proclaim the Good News of you.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Pray for all graduates and people beginning a new chapter in their lives.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially for an openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

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.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

I HAVE A MISSION

God has created me
To do Him some definite service.
He has committed some work to me
Which He has not committed to another.

I HAVE A MISSION

I may never know it in this life
But I shall be told it in the next
I AM A LINK IN A CHAIN
A bond of connection between persons
He has not created me for naught
I shall do good - I shall do his work
I shall be an angel of peace
A preacher of truth in my own place
While not intending it
If I do but keep his commandments
THEREFORE I WILL TRUST HIM

Whatever I am,
I can never be thrown away.
If I am in sickness,
my sickness may serve Him.
In perplexity,
my perplexity may serve Him.
If I am in sorrow,
my sorrow may serve Him.
HE DOES NOTHING IN VAIN
He knows what he is about
He may take away my friends
He may throw me among strangers
He may make me feel desolate
Make my spirits sink
Hide my future from me—still
HE KNOWS WHAT HE IS ABOUT.

John Cardinal Newman

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

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 (see 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 recreated
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.

Opening Prayer (Pentecost Sunday)
Scripture Readings for the Nine Days

DAY 1

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 2

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

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

DAY 3

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

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

DAY 4

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 5

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 6

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 7

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

“Holy Spirit, teach me to pray.”

DAY 8

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 9

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.”

PENTECOST SUNDAY B

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 matter and not their *historical chronology*. In Jewish tradition, *Pentecost* is a harvest feast celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. It commemorates Israel's covenant with God, the birth of Israel. *Pentecost* (meaning fifty) takes place 50 days after Passover.

Luke has the Holy Spirit come 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 appeared to Moses in a burning bush and God spoke 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: Galatians 5:16-25

Paul contrasts life in the spirit to life in the flesh. Life in the flesh follows earthly passions. Paul names fifteen such passions. When living life in the Spirit, one bears good fruit. Paul lists nine virtues or fruits of the Spirit.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

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 come through locked doors shows that the “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. This gift 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 felt during Jesus’ absence.

Then Jesus imparts his Spirit: *“He breathed on them.”* This gesture is reminiscent of God breathing 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. He then 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 sin or who do not embrace 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. Who is the Holy Spirit to you? If you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, how did it begin and develop?
3. In the second reading for this Sunday, Paul names nine fruits of the Spirit, which fruit comes easy enough for you? Which fruit is a challenge for you?
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/ 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 have given me the Holy Spirit to aid me in doing your work. Please help me to bring your peace.

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 do not experience the Holy Spirit's *presence* and *activity* in your life, consider speaking with a priest or spiritual guide about this important matter.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? This week consider praying briefly over each

member of your group for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Gather around each person and lay hands on them. You can pray in silence or vocalize a prayer. Ask each person what gift or fruit (peace, joy, love, etc.) of the Holy Spirit they would like to receive or grow in.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit,
let your gracious love and presence descend upon us, so that no unchaste thought may corrupt the souls which you have ordained for your praise,
no unchaste actions defile the bodies which are temples of you.
Grant that, our hearts being filled with love of you,
we may be enabled to overcome the temptations of this present life,
and finally be made partakers of the glories of the world to come:
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

Meditation

The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden, for he is light.... Rays of light and knowledge stream before him as he approaches. The Spirit comes with a tenderness of a true friend and protector to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console. The Spirit comes to enlighten [our] mind...and through [us], the minds of others....

As light strikes the eyes of [one] who comes out of darkness into the sunshine and enables him to see clearly things he could not discern before, so light [of the Spirit] floods [our souls] and enables [us] to see clearly things...beyond the range of human vision, things hitherto undreamed of.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

(Quoted in *Essentials of the Faith*, p.79, Fr. Alfred McBride)