

EASTER SUNDAY

Cycle 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 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 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, and he believes that *all* people—through faith and repentance—now have access to the salvation that Jesus has come to bring.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This thanksgiving psalm points 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; 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 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

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions:

"Dear Jesus, again this Easter you give me another opportunity to cast off all that is of darkness and live more freely in the light of your life and love. Please grant me the grace to resolve to do so and more fully live so."

RESPONDING TO THE 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: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish 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 and draw them 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. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
Divine Mercy Sunday
Cycle 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: *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, relates for us the development of the early church. This week's reading tells how the working of signs and wonders led to great numbers joining the Church. During the C cycle of the Easter season, our *second reading* is from the Book of Revelation. Our *Gospel* this week recounts two post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples.

As you will see in your Missalette, the *Second Sunday of Easter* is also called **Divine Mercy Sunday**, a reference to the *Divine Mercy devotion* made popular by St. Faustina Kowalska, which celebrates the wonderful mercy of God for 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 5:12-16

The Apostles are preaching the message of Christ in a hostile environment. Note the observation: "*No one dared to join them.*" But soon people are attracted by the power of the Apostles' ability to heal the sick and cast out demons as a powerful sign that God's Spirit is acting in and through them.

One of the "proofs" of the Resurrection is the *transformation of fearful disciples into*

bold proclaimers of Jesus and his message. This is one way Luke shows that Jesus is alive in his followers. Also, we note that just as Jesus worked many signs and wonders, his followers, filled with the Spirit of Jesus, are also working many signs and wonders, another "proof" of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead and of his presence in his new Church, the Body of Christ.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for his goodness which endures forever. Especially during this Easter Season, the Church gives thanks to God for the salvation earned by Jesus.

SECOND READING:

Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19

John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, is writing from the island of Patmos where he is in exile, having been banished for his belief in Jesus. He is writing to fellow Christians who are also suffering for their faith. His correspondence seeks to give comfort to his audience.

Sustained by a firm faith in God's power to save, and strengthened by the conviction that God will not abandon his followers to the forces of evil, John entrusts his present fears and future hopes to God and invites his readers to do likewise. The basic message of his book is: *Evil will not triumph over goodness, neither will the evil of Rome nor the evil of death caused by persecution.*

The "seven lampstands" is a reference not just to seven churches, but also to all Christian churches, seven being the number that symbolizes perfection or totality. Jesus, the "Son of Man," is in their midst. Because of his presence, there is "nothing to fear." Because of his Resurrection, Jesus "holds the keys over death." By standing with Jesus, Christians are assured of victory over all adversaries—even death.

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

This Gospel, especially the first part of it, is often 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 abandoned Jesus in his hour of need, the Apostles must likely have felt 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, these words will be looked upon as the Church's basis for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Sins will be "retained" or not forgiven if people are not

truly sorry for them or are unwilling to embrace Jesus' teachings.

By sharing his wounds with the disciples (*"He showed them his hands and side."*), Jesus is assuring them that it is really him and not some ghost. He is also teaching them that there is no Easter glory without Good Friday pain. Thirdly, Jesus may be saying to us: 'Community is built when participants learn to share their wounds.'

Some scholars see Jesus' appearance to Thomas as representing the second generation of Christians, those called to believe in 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 needed to touch the wounds of Christ, Jesus would 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 will be patient with us, too, and will help us overcome our doubts if we cooperate with his grace-filled touch upon our lives. To *believe* in Jesus' Resurrection means more an intellectual assent. It also signifies 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. In the first reading, faith is expressed in bringing the sick and disturbed to be healed by the Apostles. What deepens your faith when physical healing doesn't occur?

3. In the second reading, we hear the following words: *"Do not be afraid...I hold the keys of death."* How do these words of Jesus comfort you?

4. Some scholars note that Thomas missed out initially because he had withdrawn from the community. Do Christians today miss out when they are not part of a Christian community? If so, how?

5. Have you ever experienced doubt or have had a faith crisis in your Christian journey? If so, what was that like for you? What helped you to get through that difficult time?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions:

Jesus, thank you for your mercy. Help me to share your mercy with others.

Jesus, thank you for the gift of peace. Help me to be a peacemaker.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: If you know someone having a faith struggle, reach out to him/her. Pray for those suffering religious persecution.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray for all who came into the church in our parish and throughout the world at last week's Easter Vigil. Pray for their faith that it may deepen and that they frequently proclaim the Good News with others.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*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.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cycle 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: *Risen Christ, we rejoice in your presence and in your offer of new life. May we never be afraid to speak in your name and may we willingly share in our Church's mission to feed all those who are hungry for your Word. Open our hearts to the message of the readings we are about to share. 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, who is reinstated as leader of the Church (in the Gospel), is fearless in his witness to Christ. In the second reading, we are taken to a heavenly realm where the Risen Lamb, carrying the marks of his passion, is praised by heavenly and earthly voices.

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 briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 5:27-32, 40-41

There is a rising tension between the Jewish authorities and the disciples of Jesus. It is a struggle between *light* and *darkness* as in Jesus' time. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles will not be silenced. Peter, the former coward and "denier," now becomes a courageous proclaimer. The Apostles are full of joy that they are found worthy of ill treatment for the sake of Jesus. Jesus' Resurrection is always central to their witness. We may not be dragged before a court of law to defend our commitment to Jesus, but each of us stands daily before the court of public opinion to give an account of our faith life.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 30

This prayer of deliverance from earthly tribulation echoes the sentiments of the persecuted Apostles in the first reading.

SECOND READING: Revelations 5:11-14

A victory celebration is taking place in the heavenly realm for Jesus, the victorious Lamb who has returned home to heaven and to God, having conquered sin and death. *Seven* great possessions of the victorious Lamb are mentioned: *power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing.*

In the Eucharistic celebration, we sing of the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*” Our earthly liturgies seek to pattern themselves after the heavenly liturgy described here. Both seek to give fitting honor and praise to the Lamb of God.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 21:1-19

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 21:1-19

Today’s Gospel is another resurrection story. Two scenes are interwoven: the miraculous catch of fish which ends with Jesus feeding the disciples, and the questioning of Peter which ends with his being commissioned to feed God’s flock.

In the first story, Jesus appears to seven of his Apostles. The incident is built around Peter. A constant feature of the resurrection stories is the transformed Jesus whom even the disciples do not immediately recognize. It takes some word or familiar gesture for him to be known. This is how the evangelists let us know that the Risen Christ has taken on a new form.

He is the same Jesus, yet transformed. He is not *as he was*, but he is still *who he was*.

The miraculous catch symbolizes the mission of the Apostles and the central role of Jesus in the mission. They are called to be “catchers of people” but only *if* they rely on Jesus. The 153 fish represent *every* type of fish. The Church welcomes and offers salvation to all who are open to the message of Christ. Then in a gesture of humble service, Jesus prepares a meal for his disciples. He is the one who provides nourishment (Eucharist) for us.

In the second scene, we have the reinstatement of Peter as leader of the new Church. He who denied Jesus three times is now given three chances to profess his love. He is then given the mandate to care for and feed the flock of Christ. In giving authority to the one who denied him, Jesus wants to show that he is establishing his Church, not on human strength but on his own love and faithfulness. Finally, Jesus tells Peter that his ‘yes’ to him will lead him into conflict with the authorities.

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 says: “*We must obey God rather than men.*” Can you think of a situation when this was true or might be true for you — when obeying God may mean disobeying some government law or even Church law?

3. If asked *how* we love Jesus, what would we answer?

4. What hinders you most when it comes to sharing your faith with others? If you have grown in this area, what, besides God's grace, helps you to be more courageous in this area of your Christian life?

5. Share an experience in your life where Jesus transformed your efforts into a mighty work giving glory to 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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions:

Jesus, when tempted not to speak up for you and your Gospel, give me courage.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on me.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestion: Come up with a plan of action on how you can "catch" someone for Christ.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for the courage and grace to witness to Christ.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

PRAYER FOR EVANGELIZATION

*God of truth,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
hear our prayer for those
who do not know you
so that your name may be praised
among all people of the world.
Sustain and inspire your servants
who bring them the Gospel.
Bring fresh vigor to wavering faith;
sustain our faith when it is still fragile.
Renew our missionary zeal.
Make us witnesses to your goodness,
full of love, of strength, and of faith,
for your glory and for the salvation
of the world. Amen.*

- Pope Paul IV

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cycle 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: *Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd who calls each of us by name. You lead us to the rich pastures of your Word. Open our hearts today that we may hear the Word you wish us to hear as we gather in your name, 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 Fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The readings in all three cycles use images of sheep and shepherd to explore the relationship between Jesus and those who belong to him. In today's second reading and Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as shepherd and lamb who cares for his flock. In the first reading, Paul and Barnabas preach the Good News. The Jews reject it, but the Gentiles receive it with joy.

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 13:14, 43-52

In the early chapters of Acts, Peter has center stage. In the later chapters, Paul's missionary journeys are highlighted. During these journeys, Paul always tries to reach his own people first; hence, the reference to him preaching in the Synagogue. Only when his own people reject him does he turn to the Gentiles. When Paul starts to draw big crowds, the Jewish leaders become jealous of him and Barnabas, and throw them out of town. But neither Paul nor Barnabas are easily quieted. *"Both spoke out boldly."* After being ejected from the town by "women of prominence" and "leading men of the

city," Paul and Barnabas, like Jesus' disciples, shake the dust from their feet and leave.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 100

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for his goodness to Israel, a suitable psalm for Paul and Barnabas as they see the Gentiles open their hearts to the Gospel.

SECOND READING: Revelation 7:9, 14-17

Jesus, the victorious Lamb, is surrounded by a huge crowd of people from every nation on earth, who listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow his ways

despite difficulties and persecutions. Because of their faithfulness to Jesus, they will be safe forever and share in his divine life.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 10:27-30

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 10:27-30

Jesus the Good Shepherd speaks of his relationship with his flock and with his Father. Jesus' flock are those who hear his voice and follow it. Then Jesus makes *two bold promises*: (1) he will give eternal life to those who are his sheep, and (2) he will not allow anyone to take them away from him, assuming of course that they continue to listen to his voice. Because Jesus has power over death, he can offer his followers eternal life. Those who heed his voice will never perish, nor will they be snatched away from 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 the first reading, Paul and Barnabas hear the Word of God and act upon it. Do you listen and respond too?

3. When the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. What kinds of situations does or might fill us with jealousy? What can help us deal with jealous feelings?

4. What helps you to hear Jesus' voice in the midst of the sounds that compete for your attention?

5. What can pastors and parishes do to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life? Should they be doing more?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:

Jesus, help me to always know you as my Good Shepherd.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Pray for priests and the religious life, especially those who minister in hostile environments. Pray that each of us whom the Good Shepherd is calling to eternal life will hear and answer God's call.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

FACILITATOR: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray for an increase in vocations: for all to hear and respond to the call to priesthood, religious life, commitment to married life and consecrated single life.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

PRAYER FOR PRIESTS AND VOCATIONS

*Jesus, good and gentle Shepherd,
I thank you for the men
who have heard and responded
to your call to the 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.*

- Fr. Eamon Tobin

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cycle 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: *Jesus, during this Easter season we celebrate the new life you gained from your death and Resurrection. Help us to open our hearts more and more to your gift of new life. Bless our sharing of 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: All three readings speak about “newness.” The first reading speaks of new converts, the second reading about a new heaven and a new earth, and the Gospel about a new commandment of 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 14:21-27

Paul and Barnabas have just concluded their first missionary journey. They are now retracing their steps back home. Along the way, they pay a pastoral visit to churches that they have founded and formed. They encourage the newly formed communities to persevere—even if suffering comes their way, as it most surely will. After all, Christ suffered. Hence, his followers cannot expect to escape the cross. Finally, Paul shares with the communities their evangelization successes, stressing that *God* is the reason for the success.

SECOND READING: Revelation 21:1-5

John presents us with this final vision – of a new heaven and a new earth – when all the enemies of God will be destroyed. The old order will pass away, and the sea (the place of chaos and evil) will be no more. The New Jerusalem is depicted as God's Bride. God is imaged as one living in the midst of his people – loving them and they loving him. When God brings about a New Heaven and a New Earth, his people will no longer experience trials, times of testing and purification. Instead, they will only experience glory, happiness and peace.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 145

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to God for his goodness and salvation.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 13:31-35

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: John 13:31-35

Judas' departure sets the scene for Jesus' last discourse and glorification. The die is cast; there is no going back now. Jesus' hour has come. The events of salvation are about to start. Jesus begins by speaking about his "glorification," i.e., his passion, death and Resurrection. Jesus says, "*The Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.*" The Son of Man is glorified both in his willingness to obey God even unto death and in the fact that God will glorify him by making his sacrifice effective for the salvation of all. By pouring out his life for us, Jesus not only saves us, but also gives us a perfect example of what love is.

Jesus speaks to his disciples about a *new* commandment—to love one another. What is *new* about Jesus' commandment is that it calls his followers to show the same self-sacrificing love that he has shown them. The mark of a true disciple is his willingness to lay down his life for the

Gospel. This new commandment of love is at work in the hearts of Paul and Barnabas for their willingness to be persecuted for the sake of the Gospel. It is at work in the heart of the beloved disciple, John, and the community he is writing to in the Book of Revelation. It was at work in the hearts of people down through the ages when they laid down their lives to preach the Gospel in hostile environments and to serve the poor. It is at work in many faith communities today who live in places very hostile to Christianity.

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, Paul states that "it is necessary to undergo many hardships for us to enter the kingdom of God." What are some of the hardships or trials involved in living a Christian life? What helps us to cope with them?
3. In the second reading, John speaks of God who will "*wipe away our every tear.*" Can you recall a teary time in your life when you experienced God or Jesus to be a consoling and comforting presence?
4. List five concrete ways you can obey the new commandments to love others. At the end of the week, look at the list and see how you did.
5. Jesus said "My children, I will be with you only a little while longer." Discuss

when in your life you have experienced the imminent departure of a loved one.

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:

Jesus, fill me with your love so that I can love others, especially those I find it hard to love.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Pray for those undergoing hardship at this time. If you know someone in this situation, personally reach out to him/her.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

FACILITATOR: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for those in their final hour and those who love them.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Loving God,
you became one with us
that we might become one with you
and with one another.
May your love for us
made uniquely visible in Jesus,
teach us how to love one another
as he did,
so you can make all things new.
Amen.*

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Cycle 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: *Spirit of Peace, dwell with us as we gather in your name. You have been sent to be our counselor, comforter and strength. You are the divine guide for our Church. Light a fire of love in our hearts that we may become signs of peace in our world. 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 Gospel, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. In the first reading, we see the Holy Spirit guiding the early Church to resolve a major pastoral problem. In the second reading, John speaks of heaven as the New Jerusalem.

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 15:1-2, 22-29

In John's Gospel, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to his Apostles to "teach them everything." Here we have a practical example of the Holy Spirit teaching the new Church that Gentiles who want to become Christians do not need to be circumcised nor follow Jewish dietary regulations.

This Sunday's reading is an excerpt from Acts 15 which recounts what is sometimes called "*The Council of Jerusalem*"—the first council in the history of our Church. It was convened to resolve the issue of what to do about the Jewish Christians who are saying that Gentiles who want to become Christians must first be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas,

representing the Gentiles, oppose circumcision for Gentile converts.

After much discussion, and perhaps heated debates, a compromise decision is made. Gentiles who wish to become Christians do not need to be circumcised, but they will be asked to observe certain Jewish dietary regulations out of sensitivity for their fellow Christians who have converted from a strict Jewish religion, for instance, abstinence from meat sacrificed to idols. Notice how the letter sent out contains the words, "*It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us....*" This council, just as the bishops at Vatican II Council, has a keen sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding them in their deliberations.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 67

This psalm of thanksgiving, among other things, states that salvation is for *all* of God's people and not just a chosen few.

SECOND READING:

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

John, the visionary, is taken by an angel to a mountain where he is given a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a magnificent sight of a city filled with the radiant presence of God. Scripture scholar, Patricia Sanchez, writes: *"John's vision of a New Jerusalem should be understood as a description of the Church, rooted initially in time and space, but growing and evolving toward a heavenly future."*

The city has no temple because in the new Christian era, the Risen Christ and his presence amongst his people are now the focus of worship. Torches and oil lamps will be replaced by the light of Christ, which will illuminate all gathered to worship. The reference to the 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 corners of stones with the names of the 12 Apostles, speak of the link between the old and new covenants. People coming from all directions and backgrounds will be welcomed to enter through the gates.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 14:23-29

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 14:23-29

These verses are from Jesus' Final Discourse. He begins by saying that true love for him means adherence to his Word. By keeping Jesus' Word, his disciples will be drawn into the love and presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is called the "divine indwelling" in the life of the believer.

Jesus speaks of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will *"teach them everything and remind them of what Jesus told them."* Then Jesus talks of the *peace* that he will impart with the coming of the Holy Spirit. This *peace* refers to the restoration of harmony between God and the believer, which was lost in the rebellion of Genesis and regained in the saving death of Jesus.

Jesus' going away should be a reason for joy, not sorrow, because after he departs, he will send the Holy Spirit. *"The Father is greater than I."* How is this possible that each of the persons of the Trinity is equal? Scripture scholar Fr. Roland Faley writes: *"Jesus' inferiority lies in his filial obedience and submission to the Father in the fulfillment of his mission."*

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. How to treat Gentiles who wanted to become Christians was a huge issue in the early church. What are some big pastoral issues for the Church today? Can we learn anything from the Council of Jerusalem on how to resolve these issues?

3. How do you image heaven? What would you like it to be? What is the most heavenly experience you have had here on earth?

4. Do you struggle to keep Jesus' word? Do you experience an absence of his presence which helps you realize you have not kept his word? What then?

5. What brings peace to your life? What for you is a peaceful 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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:

Come, Holy Spirit, help me to see what you want me to see."

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Between now and Pentecost, pray daily for a fresh awareness of the Spirit's presence and movement in your life. Pray and work for peace in your family.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Suggestion: Pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in all our hearts.

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' Ascension 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 the Friday before, you are invited to pray the following Novena to the Holy Spirit for any particular intention. 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,
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 (see next page).
- 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.

Scriptures 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 4: 32-37 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.”

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Cycle C

(In the Diocese of Orlando, the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the 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.

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 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 two. They are to carry on the mission of Jesus just as

Elisha was to continue the ministry of Elijah.

The words '*taken up into the clouds*' leads us to image heaven as up above us. This wording is conditioned by the limited understanding that the author had of the universe. Heaven is not some place 'up there.' Rather, heaven is a state of being outside our concept of time and space. When we read that Jesus "*sits at the right hand of God*," we mean that he fully shares in the power of God.

This reading shows us that the Ascension of Jesus marks the end of his journey and signals the beginning of a new era. The

mission of the Church begins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

Based on a liturgical celebration at the Jerusalem temple, this psalm rejoices in the universal reign of God. The world processes to this holy place to honor God who rules with great compassion

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 1:17-23

[**Note:** The second reading may also be from Hebrews 9:34-28, 10:19-23]

If the reading in your missal is from Hebrews, you will see that its focus is on the one sacrifice that Jesus offers to remove our sins. His sacrifice opens the gates of heaven so that we can approach God with confidence.

Commenting on this reading, the authors of *Living the Word 2013*, write:

The prayer from Ephesians is for a threefold spiritual enlightenment, an enlightenment of the inner eyes. The petitioner asks that believers might know 1) the hope of the calling that they have received from God, 2) the riches of the glory of God's inheritance, and 3) the surpassing greatness of God's power to those who believe. These marvels have already taken place; it is for the believers to acknowledge them in awe. The view of Christ contained in this passage is quite exalted. Having been raised from the dead, Christ now sits at God's right hand, high above all of the other heavenly creatures.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 24:46-53

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 24:46-53

The end of Luke's Gospel contains his first account of the Ascension, which is presented here as occurring on Easter Sunday. The risen Lord shows the Apostles how the Scriptures had foretold that the Christ would suffer and rise again. Jesus also gives them a mission (the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins) and promises to send the Holy Spirit to them. They return in joy to Jerusalem to await the Spirit.

Luke shows that "the time of Israel" has yielded to "the time of Christ." Now, "the time of Christ" is to yield to "the time of the Church." The Word of salvation will go forth from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Luke tells us about that in his second book, Acts of the Apostles. The Ascension is seen as the culmination of Jesus' life and the start of the Church's mission.

Jesus' Ascension into heaven

When we hear the *phrase* “took his seat at the right hand of God,” it is not intended to paint heaven as some place in the sky where Jesus is seated by God’s right hand. The phrase is intended to convey that Jesus, the glorified Christ, is Lord of the universe and is equal in power and dignity to God the Father. From there, he constantly intercedes for us with his Father.

The Ascension event concludes Jesus’ ministry on earth. It brought his human body and soul into the Trinity. As a result of the Ascension, the second Person of the Trinity is forever human as well as divine.

The Ascension event does not mean that Jesus has abandoned us. The last words of Matthew’s Gospel have Jesus saying: “*Know that I will be with you always until the end of time.*” Jesus is present to us through the Holy Spirit, in and through the liturgical celebrations of our Church, and wherever two or three are gathered in his name.

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 returned 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 gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” should be preached to all nations, how well is this message communicated today?

4. Jesus’ last message to his disciples was to commission them 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. Can you share an ascension story from your life, a time when you were “lifted up” from pain to healing or hope?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, may we know what you are calling us to be and to do.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestion: Continue to pray the

Novena to the Holy Spirit in preparation
for the feast of Pentecost.

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF
THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND
INTERCESSION**

FACILITATOR: What are we grateful
for? For what and for whom do we wish to
pray? Suggestion: Pray for a universal
outpouring of repentance for forgiveness
of sins.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you promised that we would receive power
when the Holy Spirit comes to us.
In the midst of life's downward movements,
remind me to pray, "Come, Holy Spirit,"
that I might ascend to find you with me,
leading me to new life, renewed hope,
and joy.*

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Cycle 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: *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: 1Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Paul seeks to make 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. Who is the Holy Spirit to you? If you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, how did it begin and develop?

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

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

5. Whose sins do you need to forgive? Holding a grudge or resentment is retaining sins. What can you do to release those sins and forgive?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: 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.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: This week, spend some time reflecting on how God has empowered you to do some work in our Church or world.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

FACILITATOR: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray? Pray for a universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gift of peace.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

BREATHHE 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
Glow 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

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 the 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 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)