

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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: *Loving Creator, you created men and women to be your partners in creation and to love one another. Teach us how to live in harmony with each other. Free us from all hardness of heart that blocks us from understanding and embracing your ways. 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: For the past several weeks, Mark has been giving us lessons on the *true nature of Christian discipleship*. This week, we receive a **fifth lesson** which has to do with the permanent and exclusive nature of marriage, and of "hardness of heart" which is a big obstacle to all seeking union in marriage. The first reading speaks of God's original plan for marriage. The Gospel touches on "hardness of heart" which can lead to the break-up of a marriage. Jesus also speaks about the dignity of children in God's kingdom. The second reading speaks about Jesus' solidarity with the human race and how his saving death made us children of God. For individuals who have gone through a divorce and/or remarriage, today's Gospel may be a painful one to listen to. It is good for us to remember that in his Gospel, Jesus presents us with many difficult challenges which none of us live *perfectly*. Hence, all of us are always in need of God's mercy for the failures in our lives.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Genesis 2:18-24

In Genesis 1-2, we find *two accounts* of the creation of man and woman and the institution of marriage. The first account stresses the *procreative* dimension of marital love while the second—which we hear today—stresses the *unitive* dimension: man's need for a companion who will be his partner in life.

The reading begins by stating the need we have for human companionship: "*It is not*

good for man to be alone." None of the lovely animals are found to be suitable partners for the man whom God made in his image and likeness. So God casts the man into a deep sleep, takes a rib from his side and creates a woman—one who is both like and different from the man. For many centuries, this creation story has been used to point out the inferiority of women to men. This, unfortunately, is a wrong interpretation of the story. The woman may have been created from a part of man but he

had no part in her creation nor did he even witness it. Like the man, she is brought forth by a deliberate and unique act of God. Both are equal in the eyes of God and given to each to be companions and partners in life's journey. "Bone of my bone" and "flesh of my flesh" is a poetic way of expressing the male and female's physical and psychological attraction to each other. The final verse of the reading is a reference to the divine institution of marriage, a union characterized by *permanency and exclusivity*.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 128

This Psalm highlights the notion of blessings that find their origin in God. It speaks about the blessing of labor, family life and, finally, God's blessing on Zion (Jerusalem), which will be a peaceful land where one can see "your children's children." Against the background of the Genesis story of creation, the Psalm focuses on divine blessings and reminds us that marriage and family life rank high among the many gifts that come to us from the hand of the Creator.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 2:9-11

For the next seven weeks, the second reading will be excerpts from the Epistle to the Hebrews. In an introductory note to this Epistle, Patricia Sanchez writes:

The author of this theological Epistle was writing to Greek-speaking Christians living in exile, who had grown weary with the demands of their Christian commitment. To bolster their faith, the writer presents them with a deep theological portrait of Jesus, as the High Priest of a New Covenant, the sacrifice of which had redeemed all of sinful

humankind and forever obviated every other priest-hood covenant and sacrifice.

The ancient writer underlines the *solidarity* that exists between Jesus and his followers. By virtue of his Incarnation, Jesus so unites himself to the human condition that he becomes one with all who suffer. Jesus suffers for the sake of all and even experiences the ultimate human crisis—death. For "a little while," the eternal son becomes part of time and space to bring about the redemption of all peoples. By so doing, all the redeemed are free to enter by faith into solidarity with Jesus as brothers and sisters of the one Father.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:2-16

This is Mark's *fifth lesson on discipleship* focusing on the "hardness of heart" which prevents two disciples from remaining married.

The Pharisees are asking Jesus a question on whether it is permissible for a man to divorce his wife. They want to see if Jesus will contradict Moses' "pastoral solution." As a concession to human weakness and sin

(another word for “hardness of heart”), Moses permitted the Israelites to divorce (Deut. 24:1-4). But then Jesus points the Pharisees back to God’s *original intention* for marriage, namely, that two people, especially two *disciples*, shall remain married until death do them part: “*What God has joined together, no human being must separate.*” By teaching this, Jesus is raising the status of women as equal to men. In Jewish ancient law, women were always the victim since they could not ask for a divorce, whereas men could seek a divorce for the smallest of reasons. In the Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating, men and women are to be treated as *equal* and they are to treat each other as *partners*. This is a very radical new teaching in Jesus’ time. In Mark’s Gospel, no exception to Jesus’ teaching is mentioned. However, by the time Matthew’s Gospel is written, the church evidently has begun to make some exceptions (see Matt 19:9).

In verses 13-16, Jesus also seeks to *raise the status of children* in a society in which they too have no legal rights. Jesus tells his listeners that children, like women, must be treated with dignity and respect, and that their religious training is to be taken seriously. Secondly, children’s attitude of *openness* and *receptivity* to Jesus is held up as something to be emulated by adults. (As Jesus spoke these words, one must have heard the “Wow!” Afterwards, down at the pub or coffee shop, the conversation must have been very interesting as the folks buzzed about what Jesus had said about marriage, divorce, women and children.)

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 home and Church environment you grew up in, did you get the message that women were equal to men? Or did you receive subtle or not-so-subtle hints that men were more important or superior to women?

3. When you personally experience “hardness of heart,” what are you feeling? What helps you most to move past the “hardness of heart” feeling?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about marriage, divorce and remarriage. What can our Church or parish do to:

- strengthen marriages?
- bring comfort and consolation to the divorced?
- show mercy to divorced Catholics who have remarried outside the Church?

5. If *both* husband and wife are committed disciples of Jesus, divorce will never occur. Agree? Disagree? Why?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion; If married: *Lord, help me to see my spouse truly as your gift and my own flesh—OR—Lord, help me to see my own children and all children as your gift, and open my eyes to see all of life with their wonder and awe.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: If you are carrying a "hardened heart" about some relationship, plan this week to take practical steps to work with Jesus to create a new heart. Pray Psalm 51.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray for all engaged and married couples, especially those who are struggling. Pray for couples going through a divorce at this time. Pray for all who feel excluded from the Church because of their marital situation.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Prayer for Family Unity

Lord Jesus, with Mary and Joseph,
you lived in a family;

Teach me to appreciate the gift
of being part of a family.

Show me ever new ways of protecting
and comforting those closest to
me; and, each day, let me do
something that will say 'I love you'
without speaking those words.

Let me never part from any of my
family in anger; prompt me always
to turn back without delay to
forgive and to be forgiven.

Let me see your image in my family, in
each of them, and in my larger
family too, knowing that, in your
kingdom, we will be truly one
family, united by your sacrifice on
the cross. Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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 of Wisdom, pour out your spirit of wisdom upon us as we gather to share your word. Help us to value you above all things. Open our eyes to see the “one thing” that prevents us from having a closer relationship with you. 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: In the past weeks, Jesus has been giving his followers and prospective followers lessons in discipleship. Today’s Gospel offers us a *sixth lesson*. It concerns the danger of earthy riches and how they can get between us and our relationship with God. Both the first reading and Gospel contrast heavenly and earthly riches and wisdom. The second reading speaks of how God’s Word pierces our hearts, enabling us to distinguish truth from falsehood.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Wisdom 7:7-11

The speaker is depicted as a king who prays for wisdom. Presumably, it is the kind of wisdom that will enable him to be a fair and wise ruler. He proclaims that he prefers Lady Wisdom to all material riches, to health, to beauty, to everything that women and men normally cherish. In comparison to Lady Wisdom, all other riches are of little value. By making Lady Wisdom his first aim, all other earthly riches are also given to him. (In those days, people believed that the good life was rewarded with earthly riches.)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 90

This Psalm is a collection of petitions from a community in great distress. The phrase “that we may gain wisdom of heart” connects this Psalm to this week’s readings.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 4:12-13

God’s Word is likened to a “sharp, two-edged sword” that can reach into the most secret recesses of our heart, unmasking what is there. This two-edged sword will help us to distinguish truth from falsehood. It can also challenge us and comfort us.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:17-30

This is *lesson six* on the characteristics of true discipleship. It deals with the dangers of material wealth.

A rich young man is asking Jesus: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” His concern raises an important theological question: Can one *gain* eternal life on his/her own, or is it a *gift* from God? It seems the young man thinks he can gain eternal life by performing good actions in addition to keeping the commandments. The fact that the young man is a keeper of the commandments shows that he is indeed a good man. But then Jesus pulls out his “two-edged sword” and penetrates into the heart of the man. With his “lightning rod,” Jesus shows the young man that he is not nearly as devoted to God as he thinks. Jesus invites him to let go of *passing* wealth so that he can acquire *everlasting* wealth. His *attachment* to his material wealth has become an obstacle to a deeper relationship with God. His riches are his real god and security.

The verses which begin with “*how hard it is for a rich man*” would have blown Jesus’ audience away, given that the contemporary belief is that wealth is a sign of God’s favor. Here Jesus is taking the traditional teaching about wealth and standing it on its head. The reference to “*a camel passing through the eye of a needle*” is a hyperbole stressing the great danger of riches and how attachment to them can be a great threat to our salvation. Material wealth is *not* an obstacle to salvation if one knows that he/she cannot buy his/her way to heaven and if one generously shares his/her material riches with the poor. With God, all things are possible. It is even possible, if not likely, that one can look upon wealth as always inferior to his/her relationship with God, and use wealth to bless others.

Verses 28-30 deal with the benefits of *renunciation*. Peter, feeling a little self-righteous, and having left his fishing business, asks: “*What of us? We have left all to follow you.*” Jesus responds that there will be blessings in this life and the next.

This Sunday’s Gospel is a serious warning on how material riches can be a big obstacle to one’s relationship and discipleship with God and others. Riches and our love of them may steal our hearts.

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 person in the first reading is praying for prudence and wisdom. What is your

deepest prayer of petition for yourself?
What is your deepest desire?

3. Attachment to material possessions hampered the rich young man's relationship with God. What one thing might be blocking you from having a closer relationship with Jesus?

4. In the last sentence, Jesus promises his followers "*a hundred times more now ... with persecutions.*" Have you experienced the '*hundred times*' and the '*persecutions*'? What has kept you a follower?

5. What one thing might be blocking you from having a closer relationship with others? In your family, with friends, at work, in your parish family, with the poor?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion; *Lord, you know that none of us are going to sell everything, but please do help me to be generous with my blessings when it comes to the poor in the community—OR—Lord, help me to have the courage to accept the persecutions and to witness to you.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday's Gospel. Suggestions: Perhaps you already know, but if you don't, look at what percentage of your income is set aside for Church and charity. If you do not presently give a particular percentage, consider doing so. Also, consider looking in your closet and taking to the local thrift store those clothes and shoes you rarely use. Pray for the gift of wisdom.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray for detachment from whatever comes between you and a closer relationship with God.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Prayer of a Good Steward

God our Father, I thank you for your Son
Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all people.

Help me to take every talent and gift
which I possess and to lay them on the
altar of your service, that I too may be
used to bring others to you.

Help me to be ready to give, and even to
sacrifice, my time, my energy, and
money, to spread Christ's message
wherever I live and to share with others
the life of Christ which is in us.

Help me so to live that by my word and my
life, many more may be moved to give
their minds and hearts to you.

God our Father, hear this prayer through
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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: *Loving God, you ask us to believe that in accepting the Cross, we will come closer to you. Help us to understand the mystery of the Cross through the example of Jesus. Speak your word to our hearts as we reflect and pray together during this time. We ask this through Jesus who obediently took up his Cross for our redemption. 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 speaks of a mysterious suffering servant. In the Gospel, Jesus presents us with a *seventh lesson* on discipleship, namely, servant leadership. The second reading is a beautiful statement about the humanity of Christ, which should give us confidence when we approach him.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Isaiah 53:10-11

The opening words: *"The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity"* could leave us with a pretty cruel and nasty image of God. We need to remember that what pleased God was *not* the suffering of the servant but rather the servant's willingness to carry out his mission—even if it meant suffering and pain. God was pleased to use the servant's suffering and sacrifice to bring good to many people, just as God used the suffering and death of people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., to bring justice and liberation to many people. Or just as God used the sacrifices of Mother Teresa to bring dignity to many who had lost their dignity. It was by meditating on passages

like this that the early Christians came to understand why Jesus had to suffer in order to save us.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 33

This psalm might well have been on the lips of the suffering servant or Jesus himself during his passion. It is a prayer of trust from one who has pondered deeply God's love and the promise to save God's faithful ones. The assertion that the Lord will "deliver their soul from death" takes on new meaning in the context of these readings, which speak so graphically of the paschal mystery through which God offers deliverance.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 4:14-16

This reading contains a double exhortation to hold fast to faith and to approach the throne of grace with confidence. Jesus' exalted state has not distanced him from us. On the contrary, he knows our limitations. As a man, he shared them with us. As an authentic human being, he carries with him all of the members of the human race and their needs to the heavenly throne of God. The second exhortation pertains to our relationship with Jesus and how that should give us great confidence to approach God's throne boldly.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:35-45

This Gospel is filled with misunderstandings, paradoxes and reversals. James and John seek places of prominence in Jesus' kingdom. They represent that part of us that desires to wield power and authority over others. Jesus offers a reversal of the common perception of power and authority: "*Any one among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest.*" The Gospel shows how little the Apostles have come in their understanding of the nature of true discipleship. When they assert that they can drink from his cup

and share in his baptism, they have no idea of the implications of their answer. The 'cup' and 'baptism' are references, of course, to Jesus' suffering on the Cross. For the disciple, this baptism will in time involve the same daily dying of humble and selfless service—the lesson of discipleship being taught in today's Gospel. In the Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating, true greatness will involve a willingness to be humble servants of 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 questions, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.

2. Do some of the stories or verses that you read in the Bible cause you to wonder if God is the loving person we say God is? (See the words in today's Sunday reading.) How do you deal with verses that portray God as cruel and punishing?

3. Do you find it easy or hard to believe that Jesus "was tested in every way" that we are? How hard is it for you to believe that Jesus was *fully* human? What does this mean to you? What implications might a deep belief in the humanity of Christ have on our prayer life?

4. The world pushes us to climb the ladder of success and to be powerful. Christ tells us to be humble servants. The world tells us that "great" people are those with prominent positions. Jesus tells us that great people are those who humbly serve others. How do you reconcile these opposites in your heart?

5. What helps us to develop a humble servant-like spirit that Jesus speaks about, a spirit that is so obvious in the life of Pope Francis and was present in the life of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Lord, I ask for things from you constantly, help me to ask rightly—OR—Dear Jesus, teach me to serve like you.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Try to relate with a humble servant's heart to members of your family and community. Serve the needs of someone who is hurting. Pray for people crushed by infirmity or other forces in our world.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray

for all in authority, that they will be servant leaders like Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Prayer of Surrender

Lord Jesus, I give you my hands to do your work.

I give you my feet to go your way.

I give you my eyes to see as you see.

I give you my tongue to speak your words.

I give you my mind that you may think in me.

I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.

Above all, I give you my heart that you may love in me—love the Father and all humanity.

I give you my whole self that you may grow in me, so that you, Lord, may be the one who lives, and works, and prays in me.

Amen.

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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 of Light, in today's Gospel you restore sight and light to the blind man, Bartimaeus. As we gather in your name, heal the blindness in our hearts. Give us a clearer vision to see you and your ways. Open our hearts now to hear your word and help us to respond to it with generosity. 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 Lord has done great things for us"* (Responsorial Psalm 126) sums up the sentiments of the first reading (exiles joyfully returning home) and the Gospel (blind man receives sight). In this ***eighth lesson*** on true discipleship, Jesus tells us that the true disciple is one who *sees* who Jesus is and *follows* him. The second reading points to the superiority of Jesus' priesthood.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:7-9

There is great joy in the community on returning to their homeland after a long period of exile. The "remnant" is the name given to the small number of people who remain faithful to God during the time of exile. The joy of the exiles, and the blind being cared for, connect this reading to the Gospel where we meet a man full of joy after Jesus heals him of blindness.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 126

This joyous psalm reflects the joy of the returning exiles: *"Our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with rejoicing."*

SECOND READING: Hebrews 5:1-6

One must possess two essential qualities to assume the responsibilities of the office of high priest. He must be (1) called by God, and (2) able to empathize with the fragility of those he serves. Jesus, of course, was called and anointed by God. Because he was fully human, he was able to empathize with the weaknesses and sufferings of others.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:46-52

For several weeks, Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem. As he travels, he acts as teacher, offering several lessons on the nature of true discipleship, and he speaks about his own identity and mission. For the most part, his disciples and would-be disciples are blind and uncomprehending. They simply “do not see.” But, finally, we encounter one who does see, namely, Bartimaeus. First, he shows that he recognizes the true nature of Jesus by calling him “Son of David,” a title reserved for the Messiah. After he receives his physical sight, he becomes a follower of Jesus: “*He started to follow Jesus up the road.*” In contrast, the disciples do not know who Jesus is; they have not yet become true disciples. No doubt, it is Jesus’ hope that the presence of Bartimaeus (a new convert) in the midst of the disciples would help them to *see* who Jesus really is and also help them to become true disciples of Jesus, surrendering everything to follow 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. Can you think of something that your eyes of faith helped you to receive that you previously did not see?

3. What is one of the great ‘eye-opening experiences’ that you have ever had?

4. What is your general response to beggars?

5. In the Gospel, Bartimaeus shows great persistence in the face of opposition. What kind of situations call for you to be persistent? Would you say you are a persistent person?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Lord, help me to see where I am blind—OR—Lord, when I want to grumble, help me to remember those less fortunate than myself.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you on way you can act on this week’s readings.

Suggestions: Pray for those researching cures for blindness. Try to see every person with the compassionate eyes of Jesus. Ask Jesus to help you see one blind spot in the way you live your life.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for those involved in finding a cure for blindness. Pray for those with no faith. Pray for the virtue of perseverance.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

For Trust And Confidence In God

My God, I want to have confidence in your love, but so many things seem to hold me back:

past wounds, past hurts, past betrayals, past sins—mine and others.

Open my eyes. Open my heart.

Enable me to take the leap of faith that is needed now.

Holiness isn't a matter of starting to love you some time in the future, or even tomorrow.

I don't have to wait until I become a better person, more worthy, more virtuous.

It's a matter of trusting in your mercy today, just as I am.

You showed this to the saints; show me, too, and give me a spirit of great confidence.

I ask this through your beloved Son, our merciful Saviour. Amen.

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

From *Treasury of Prayers* by
Father Eamon Tobin

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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: *Loving and providing God, we give you thanks for harvest blessings. You give us food to nourish our bodies and give us your Word to nourish our souls. Open our minds and hearts so we can hear your word for us today. Teach us how to walk the path of love.*

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 Great Commandment of love is the focus of the first reading and the Gospel. In this **ninth lesson** on the nature of true discipleship, Jesus tells us that the true disciple is one who lives the Great Commandment of love. The second reading speaks of the new covenant sacrifice and its single priesthood.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

This first reading is to the faithful Jew, what the Creed is to Catholics. It is a summary statement of Israel's beliefs called the "Shema Israel" ("Hear, O Israel"). "*Hear, O Israel, that the Lord your God is one.*" There is only *one* God. The *Shema* also proclaims Israel's call to love God with all her heart, soul and mind—with her whole being. This is in *response* to a God who loves Israel unconditionally and who is present and active in her history and life. If the people are faithful to God, they will experience a long and good life.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 18

This is a royal psalm of thanksgiving, a suitable response to a God who loves us totally.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 7:23-28

This reading highlights the singular character of the priesthood of Jesus and the sacrifice he offered. The author compares Jesus' priesthood to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant. The author insists that Jesus' priesthood is superior in every way. For example, Jesus' priesthood is eternal, whereas the Levitical priesthood is temporal. The latter had to offer sacrifice for their own sins, whereas Jesus' priesthood is sinless and undefiled. Furthermore, Jesus' priestly status was sealed with a divine oath.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 12:28-34

Jesus is asked which of the commandments is the greatest. His response links two Old Testament texts: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Both texts joined together are a summary of the whole law. Our response to a God who loves us unconditionally must be total. Linking love of God to love of neighbor is distinctively Christian. In his first letter, John says to us: *“If anyone says ‘I love God’ but hates his brother, he is a liar ... This is the commandment we have from him: ‘Whoever loves God must also love his brother’”* (4:20-21).

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. “Love is a many splendored thing,” as the song goes. What criteria would you use to judge:
 - a person’s love for God?
 - a person’s love for others?

3. What does “to love God with one’s whole being” mean to you? Name one thing that hinders you from loving God with your whole mind and heart?

4. What hinders you from loving your neighbor?

5. What is true love of self? How is it different from selfish love of self?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Lord, help me to love you more—OR—Lord, help me to appreciate that in loving my neighbor, I am loving you more.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Suggestion: You can begin to pray for someone you find very hard to love.

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

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for those who daily have to try to love persons who are very difficult to love.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

GOD AS MY FIRST LOVE

Lord God,
I know that if I do not love you
with all my heart, with all my mind,
with all my soul and with all my strength,
I shall love something else
with all my heart and mind
and soul and strength.
Grant that, putting you first in all
my loving,
I may be liberated from all lesser loves and
loyalties, and have you as my
first love,
my chief good and my final joy. Amen.

(Adapted from George Appleton)

From Treasury of Prayers by
Father Eamon Tobin.

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.

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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: *Loving and gracious Lord, thank you for gathering us together. Bless our time together and open our minds and hearts to hear the Word you want us to hear in this time of faith-sharing and fellowship. 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: This week's readings are powerful examples of God at work in the word of his prophets. In this *tenth lesson* on the nature of true discipleship, we are told in the first reading and the Gospel that the true disciple is one who places his complete trust in God to provide for his needs. When it comes to sharing our financial resources, the true disciple is one who gives sacrificially—out of his/her needs and not out of his/her surplus. The second reading speaks of Jesus' sacrifice which lasts forever.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: 1Kings 17:10-16

There are several themes or stories in this reading. One story tells of the hospitality of a destitute widow who shares from the little she has. Generous with her limited resources, she receives a promise that God will care for her in her time of need.

The other story is about the power of God at work in the word of his prophet. The pagan widow of Zarephath is doubly disadvantaged. When her husband dies, her rights die with him. And now there is a famine brought on by a severe drought. Despite the difficulty of her situation, she offers hospitality to God's prophet even if her giving means that she and her son will

go without. The prophet then invites the widow to place her trust in God's providential care. When she gives from the little she has, God rewards her with an abundance of oil and flour. The prophet's word proves to be very effective. In a time of drought, God provides for what is lacking.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 146

Praise dominates this psalm which was often sung during morning prayers in the synagogue. The very God who made the heavens and the earth also cares enough to give a healing touch to the hungry, the blind, the widowed and the oppressed.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 9:24-28

The author of Hebrews continues to contrast the priesthood of Christ with the Levitical priesthood. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest of the tribe of Levi enters a sanctuary made by human hands to offer the blood of animals for the sins of the people. He performs this ritual act each year for the sins of the people.

In contrast to the high priest, Jesus enters a sanctuary *not* made by human hands; rather, he enters ‘heaven itself.’ Moreover, it is not the blood of animals that Jesus offers, but his own blood. Finally, there is no need for Jesus to repeat his sacrifice for he was “*offered once to take away the sins of many.*”

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 12:38-44

Jesus differentiates the false religious spirit with the true one. He does not condemn scribes who are the religious professionals, but he roundly denounces the ones who misuse their authority. He rebukes them for (1) their hunger for prominence, (2) their desire for deference, and (3) their propensity

to use their position for self-gain and self-advancement.

In stark difference to these false disciples, there is the poor widow who seeks no attention and is a wonderful example of sacrificial giving. Mark tells us that Jesus wants to make sure that his disciples notice the generosity of the poor widow: “*Jesus calls his disciples to himself. ‘Look, she has given more than all the rest. For they all contributed from their surplus wealth while she gave from her poverty.’*” Jesus is not telling us to bankrupt ourselves and put all our money in the next collection. But he is holding up the poor widow as a symbol of faithful discipleship, an example of one who has radical trust in God to care for all her needs. The sacrificial giving spirit of the poor widow also symbolizes Jesus who sacrificed all for us. In today’s lesson on true discipleship, Jesus tells us that true disciples never seek to draw attention to themselves. Rather, they are known for their spirit of sacrificial giving to God and 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, the widow is told in a crisis situation, “Do not be afraid, the Lord will provide.” Recall an experience when “your back was to the wall”, but you trusted the Lord to provide and He did.
3. Placing one’s total trust in God is very hard for the vast majority of us. What has

helped or currently helps you to be trustful in difficult situations?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for seeking to take places of honor and draw attention to themselves. What word is at work in us when we seek attention? What can help us to do good without seeking attention or applause?

5. What helps you to be a good steward of your time, treasure and talent?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Lord, help me to look only at my own giving and not compare with others—OR—Lord, when I want to grumble at my own wants, help me to give sacrificially like the widow.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Look into your heart and see if you seek recognition for your good deeds. Do an inventory of your giving when it comes to time, treasure and talent. Do God, the Church, and the wider community

merely receive your leftovers or do they receive from your substance?

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for a spirit of generosity and for the faith to place your total life in God's hands. Pray for the souls in purgatory.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Prayer of a Good Steward

God our Father, I thank you for your Son Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all people.

Help me to take every talent and gift which I possess and to lay them on the altar of your service, that I too may be used to bring others to you.

Help me to be ready to give, and even to sacrifice, my time, my energy, and money, to spread Christ's message wherever I live and to share with others the life of Christ which is in us.

Help me so to live that by my word and my life, many more may be moved to give their minds and hearts to you.

God our Father, hear this prayer through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

From Treasury of Prayers by
Father Eamon Tobin.

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME 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 of creation and history, you created all things to be fulfilled and brought to completion at the end of time. Make our hearts ready to greet you in glory in the fullness of time. Let your coming in glory be a time of rejoicing for each of us. Break open the meaning of your Holy Word as we share it together this day. 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: As we come to the end of the Liturgical Year, the focus of our readings is the end of the world—an event which is intended to raise terror in the hearts of the unjust and the unfaithful, but joy and consolation in the hearts of faithful Jews and Christians. Both Mark and Daniel are writing to persecuted communities. They seek to offer them hope in a time of great suffering. God and Jesus will bring them safely home, giving them new life that will last forever. In the second reading, the author contrasts Christ's single offering to the daily sacrifices offered by the temple priests.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Daniel 12:1-3

Daniel is writing to a people who have undergone terrible persecution by pagan rulers. His message to them is one of hope and consolation and a firm assurance that, in the end, God will triumph over all evil, and God's faithful will ultimately experience deliverance. Michael, whose name means "one who is like God," is presented as the champion and guardian of Israel. On the Day of Judgment, both the just and the wicked "*who sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise,*" and each will reap the consequences of his/her time here on earth. The wicked will experience "everlasting

horror and disgrace" while the faithful will be "like the stars forever." This is one of the earliest references to belief in life after death in Old Testament literature.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 16

Today's psalm is a beautiful prayer of trust and confidence in God in a time of distress.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

This reading continues to contrast Christ's single offering, which removes all sin, to the daily sacrifices of the temple priests. So

efficacious is Christ's sacrifice that he now has no work to do other than to await the final judgment of his enemies.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 13:24-32

Chapter 13 of Mark is not easy reading. In the Bible, it is an example of a literary genre called Apocalyptic ("hidden") writing. This type of writing is not only obscure but it is difficult to interpret. It is meant to give hope to faith communities who are oppressed and to be a warning to those who oppress them. Apocalyptic literature is known for visions, allegories and complicated symbols. It looks ahead to the time when God will triumph over the powers of darkness. Mark has five different strands of thought: prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem (vv 1-2,14-20); warnings about persecutions to come (vv 9-13); warnings about the dangers of the last days (vv 3-6,21-22); warnings about the second coming of Christ, also referred to as the Day of the Lord (vv 7-8,24-27); and the importance of vigilance (vv 28-37).

Mark, using typical apocalyptic symbols (darkened sun, unlit moon, falling stars),

seeks to give hope to his persecuted community by referring to the triumphal return of the gloriously risen Christ who will soon put an end to their struggle. Obviously, Mark believes Jesus' Second Coming will happen during his lifetime.

Jesus uses the image of the fig tree to further assure his readers of the imminence of the Parousia (his Second Coming). Just as we know that summer is coming when the fig tree begins to blossom, so are the disciples to recognize the coming of the Son of Man when a period of affliction and cosmic signs occur. Then Jesus appears to contradict his earlier assertion about the imminence of the Parousia when he says: "*As to the day and hour, no one knows... except the Father.*" This saying of Jesus is a warning to future generations not to get into the business of predicting the time of his return. Instead, we should busy ourselves with leading good and just lives, always ready for the Lord's return which will come like a thief in the night.

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. Daniel and Mark are writing for communities undergoing great distress in their lives. Who are the communities in our world undergoing persecution? What do you think motivates people to persecute people of faith? What causes religious bigotry?

3. We all have stress in our lives. What are some good and not so good (drinking, eating) ways we can deal with stress?

4. If you could ask God one question about the next life, what would that question be?

5. What inscription would you like to have written on your tombstone?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life—OR— Lord help me to look at your creation like the fig tree and know that you are near.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Pray for the souls in purgatory and for the grace of a peaceful death for all who are dying at this time.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray for all who are dying at this time and for Christians who have been persecuted for their faith.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

PRAYER TO SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

**St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness
and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him,
we humbly pray.
And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly
hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan
and all the evil spirits
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.**

SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING 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 King, you are the Ancient One promised from the beginning. Your earthly coming and Death on the Cross freed us from sin and made of us a royal nation in the service of God. Your Kingdom is an everlasting reign, steadfast and glorious. For you are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. You will come on a throne of glory and power to judge the living and the dead at the end of time. May the power of your kingship over the cosmos deeply touch our hearts today as we probe 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: On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King. Instituted by Pope Pius XII in 1952 to combat the growing secularism and atheism of his time, it is one of the so-called "idea feasts" that do not celebrate an event in the life of Jesus but rather some aspect of his identity. In it, we recognize and honor Christ as ruler of all. Today's Responsorial Psalm: "*The Lord is King, he is robed in majesty,*" captures well the mood of the readings on this Feast of Christ the King. The Gospel emphasizes the exaltation of Jesus as King. But before he was exalted, he was first 'handed over,' 'put on trial,' and 'pierced.' A setting of persecution and oppression forms the backdrop of today's first and second readings. Both readings record a vision given to one of God's holy ones. The message received is one of hope and assurance that God's people will be vindicated.

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 write it down to remember.

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

FIRST READING: Daniel 7:13-14

The Book of Daniel was written to give hope to persecuted Jews during the rule of a cruel leader. Today's verses are taken from the *middle* of one of Daniel's visions. The vision begins with God, the Ancient One, sitting on his throne. It is a time of judgement. It is at this point that today's reading begins:

"As the visions continued during the night, I saw one like the Son of Man coming..."

In these verses, the author is assuring the persecuted Jews that God will send someone to save them from their persecutors.

When we hear these words on the Feast of Christ the King, we know they are describing Jesus. This passage must have

contributed to the people's expectations that Jesus will be a political leader who will overcome the Romans. Of course, these hopes are dashed when Jesus was crucified.

However, after the Resurrection, the early church realizes that Jesus has fulfilled the hope expressed in this passage in a way that is completely beyond their most fervent dreams. Jesus establishes a spiritual kingdom. His "*dominion is an everlasting dominion,*" and his "*kingship shall not be destroyed.*"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 93

This psalm celebrates God's re-enthronement as King of Israel. It sings of God's domain over all of creation. Christian tradition applies these verses to Christ the King in his role as cosmic ruler.

SECOND READING: Revelation 1:5-8

Christ is identified as the "faithful witness" who testifies to God's truth to the point of death—one who has made us "a royal nation of priests in the service of God." When the Son of Man comes in the clouds, people shall lament him because of the way he was pierced and put to death. The words Alpha (beginning) and Omega (end) refer to the eternal nature of God who initiated history and who will bring it to conclusion.

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 write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 18:33-37

Today's Gospel is an excerpt from Jesus' trial before Pilate. The chosen verses are a dialogue between Jesus and Pilate on the nature of Jesus' kingship. When asked by Pilate if he is a king, Jesus points out that his kingship is not of this world but rather about "testifying and witnessing to the truth." Jesus' kingship is one that seeks "allegiance of the heart" from his people. Jesus wants to be "King of our hearts." Jesus' kingship does not seek to lord it over people but rather to serve. We know from watching Jesus that the only way to enter his kingdom is through trust in God and a life of service.

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, Daniel gives us a vision of Jesus standing before God. Someday each of us will have that opportunity. What do you envision for yourself?
3. Have you ever been falsely accused? If so, what was that experience like for you? If not, what do you think that experience must be like for others, some of whom end up in jail for 20+ years?

4. What does it mean to you to say that Jesus is the Lord of your life? What are some things we can do to make Jesus the Lord of our lives?

5. This weekend, we conclude another liturgical year. Was there one liturgical celebration or one event in your spiritual life that stood out for you?

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

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:
Lord, please help me to make you the King of my life—OR—Lord, help me to always listen to your voice, especially when I find it inconvenient.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make Jesus the Lord of your life.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYER OF PETITION, THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Suggestion: Pray especially for earthly rulers—that justice, peace, love and truth may be the hallmarks of their “kingdoms.” Thank God for the graces received during the past liturgical year.

CLOSING PRAYER (TOGETHER)

Morning Prayer

I thank you, Lord,
for the wonder of my being,
for giving me another day to love
and serve you,
And enjoy the awesome beauty
of your creation.

May I often think of you during this day
Inspire everything that I say and do.

May it all begin from you
And with your unfailing help,
be carried through for your glory;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

From Treasury of Prayers by
Father Eamon Tobin.