

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Father, you sent your Word to bring us truth and your Spirit to make us holy. Through them we come to enter into the mystery of your life. Help us to worship you, one God in three Persons, by proclaiming and living our faith in you. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever 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 Easter Season ended with the Feast of Pentecost. We now return to Ordinary Time. Each year at this time, Ordinary Time resumes with two Solemnities: The Most Holy Trinity and the Body and Blood of Christ. On the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, our readings give us some clues into the mysterious nature of God. In the first reading, God reveals himself to Moses as One who is faithful to his promises and rich in tenderness and compassion. In the second reading, Paul encourages the Corinthians to live in peace and love. The reading also contains a Trinitarian blessing. In the Gospel, John tells us that God has shown his love for us by sending his Son to save us all. All who believe in him will be saved.

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: Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9

Chapter 34 of Exodus is the story of the second giving of the Law (Ten Commandments) after the people of Israel break their covenant with God by worshipping the golden calf. Moses is asked by God to bring a second set of blank stone tablets up the mountain. Another backdrop to this reading is Moses' desire to see God face to face—a request denied. But God does allow Moses to experience a “little glimpse” of his nature. God reveals himself to Moses as One who is *merciful and gracious, slow to anger, rich in kindness and fidelity*.

It is very important for the Israelites (and us) to remember that God in his essence is filled with *compassion*. Moses responds by bowing down before such a kind and merciful God. Then surely Moses thinks: *Boy, do we ever need a God like you! This stiff-necked people will need a lot of mercy. Please join us on our journey through the desert.*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Daniel 3:52-56

These verses are a song of praise to God by the three virtuous young Jewish leaders in Babylon whom the King had thrown in a fiery furnace because of their refusal to worship a golden idol at his command. There is a

contrast between their faithfulness to God and the infidelity of the Israelites who worshiped the golden calf. More importantly, the psalm is a good example of a song of praise to a God who saves his people. The three young men are protected by God in the burning furnace as they sing his praises.

**SECOND READING: 2Corinthians
13:11-13**

This brief reading was chosen for today's solemnity because of its concluding verse which contains a Trinitarian greeting. It begins with an exhortation to the contentious Corinthians to "mend their ways" and to live in peace and harmony with each other. If they follow Paul's admonition, they will experience the presence of God.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
John 3:16-18**

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 3:16-18

These verses are taken from the end of a long discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus about rebirth through water and the Spirit.

Commenting on this text, Patricia Sanchez writes: *This text encapsulates the very essence of the Good News. First, these words*

underscore the truth that the initiative for our salvation lies with God. "He gave his only Son." Second, these verses bear witness to God's motivation for all his salvific actions, namely, love: "God so loved...." Third, John made it clear that the scope of God's loving and saving initiative was universal: "God so loved the world...." Fourth, the proclamation of the good news outlines the purpose of the Son's mission: "God did not send the Son...to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him and may enjoy eternal life." Our response to this offer of salvation will, however, determine our end — heaven (which begins here when we begin a relationship with God) or eternal condemnation.

In the Trinitarian experience, which is Christian existence, a loving God sends forth his Son to save sinners. By the power of the abiding Spirit, believing sinners continue to know both the saving power of the Son and the loving grace of the Father and to share with them, the present joy and future promise of eternal life.

(Used with permission *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years A, B, C*, by Patricia Sanchez, -Sheed & Ward publisher (9-1-89.)

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, Moses asks God to join him in his journey. In what ways do you experience God as your companion on the journey?

3. In the second reading, Paul encourages us to live in peace with one another. What helps or hinders you from living this message?

4. God so loved the world that he died for us. What can help us internalize this awesome truth of God's unconditional love for us?

5. To what extent is your spirituality Trinitarian? Do you have a relationship with all three persons of the Blessed Trinity?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

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

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: This week, contemplate the beautiful belief that we are human tabernacles of the Holy Trinity. At Baptism, we were baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the Most Holy Trinity.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for persecuted Christians and for a new awakening to Jesus' presence in the Eucharist.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

A Mystic's Prayer

*You, Eternal Trinity, are a sea so deep
that the more I enter in, the more I find;
and the more I find, the more I seek of
you for when the soul is satisfied in your
abyss,
it is not satisfied,
but it ever continues to thirst for you,
Eternal Trinity, desiring to behold you
with the light of your light.
As the heart desires the springs of living
water, so does my soul desire to leave
the prison of this dark body
and to behold you in truth.
O how long shall your face be hidden
from my eyes?
O abyss, O eternal Godhead, O deep sea!
Clothe me with yourself, Eternal Trinity,
so that I may run this mortal life with
true obedience,
and with the light of your most holy
faith. Amen.*

- St. Catherine of Siena

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you living among us in the sacrament of your Body and Blood. May we offer to our Father in heaven a solemn pledge of undivided love. May we offer to our brothers and sisters a life poured out in loving service of that Kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever 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: Each of today's readings illuminates some aspect of today's feast. Each reading points to the Eucharist as the heavenly bread that feeds us in life's journey.

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: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16

This reading is intended as a reminder to the people of Israel of how God fed them in the desert with manna, miraculous food which Christians would later see as a prefiguration of the Eucharist. In this sermon, Moses seeks to remind his people that they are not to live on bread alone but on every Word that comes forth from the mouth of God. The author of this book, writing hundreds of years after the desert event, issues a strong reminder that just as Israel relied on manna for life in the desert, so the people now must continually depend on the Word of God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 147

Most likely, this psalm of praise is chosen for its reference to the wheat with which God fills his people.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 10:16-17

Paul is writing to a community that is experiencing a lot of division. He uses the Eucharist, which is the celebration of Christian unity, to appeal to the Corinthians to work for and maintain unity. The Eucharist unites us with Christ and with each other and commits believers to work for unity with Christ and with each other.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 6:21-58

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 6:51-58

The culmination of Jesus 'Bread of Life' discourse in these verses sends a bold promise of eternal life for all who believe in him and partake of his presence in the Eucharist. In unmistakable language, Jesus identifies himself with the elements of our eucharistic sacrifice, namely, the bread and wine. We feed on Jesus by believing or "taking in" his Word and acting on it, and by believing in and 'taking in' his divine presence in the bread and wine. Just as we and the substances we eat and drink become one, so Jesus and those who feed on him form an intimate union.

Jesus does not only visit those who feed on him, but he also dwells in them permanently. The reading concludes with a contrast between Jesus and the manna which the Israelites received. Jesus, not the manna, is the Bread that came, not from the sky but from the very being of God. Those who ate manna died; those who feed on Jesus will live forever.

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, Moses exhorts his people to feed on the Word of God. What keeps people from acting on this exhortation? What motivates you to do it?

3. In the second reading, Paul tells us that participation in the Eucharist implies a commitment to living a Christ-centered life. What for you is the biggest help and obstacle to doing this?

4. How has your understanding of the participation in the Eucharist changed or developed over the years?

5. What causes so many people raised Catholic to lose faith in the Eucharist? What helps you to keep faith in the Eucharist?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, thank you for being heavenly food and drink for our faith journey. Open the eyes of our hearts to this special presence.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

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

Suggestion: The Eucharist calls us to be eucharist for others. Be attentive to how you can give and share life with others.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for persecuted Christians, and for a new awakening to Jesus' presence in the Eucharist.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds hide me.

Separated from you let me never be.

From the Evil One, protect me.

At the hour of my death, call me.

And close to you bid me.

*That with your saints I may be praising you
forever and ever.*

Amen.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God of the Covenant, you call us to walk in your ways. Shepherd us as the people of your flock. Bless us as we gather to share your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: God's initiative on our regard is one theme running through all three readings. In the first reading, God takes the initiative in electing to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel. In the second reading, God through Jesus reaches out to sinners while they are still in their sin. In the Gospel, Jesus the Good Shepherd reaches out to his lost sheep. If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

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: Exodus 19:2-6

Israel has arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the place where they will enter into a solemn covenant with God. Of all the nations in the world, they will become his "special possession", bonded to him by a special covenant. They will be a priestly people and their priestliness will be manifested in fidelity to the law and in worship.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM:

Psalm 100: 1-2, 3, 5

This joyous psalm echoes the gospel emphasis on Jesus as the Shepherd of his flock.

SECOND READING: Romans 5:6-11

In this letter, Paul's central teaching is that salvation comes to us as a gift and not because of our efforts. It is our faith in Jesus and not our observance of the rules that puts us in touch with God's mercy. God's love for us is proven in the sacrifice of Jesus. We did nothing to deserve such an act of love. Our response is to graciously receive God's gift of love and to live loving lives.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

Matthew 9:36 – 10:8

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Matthew 9:36 -- 10:8

The first verses of this Gospel speak of Jesus' compassion for a leaderless flock. Then Jesus calls his twelve apostles and sends them on a mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Commenting on these verses, Patricia Sanchez writes: "By naming the Apostles and sending them off to extend his mission of shepherding, healing and proclaiming the Good News of God's reign, Jesus makes clear that the authority of leading God's people has been transferred. Whereas formerly the scribes, chief priests and Pharisees were the recognized leaders, charged with the responsibility of shepherding the people, these had failed as did so many of Israel's rulers before them." Until now, Jesus had been God's sole missionary, now he calls twelve men and grants them a share in his mission -- to heal as he has healed. Later this healing mission will be complemented by a teaching element. "Teach" and "Heal" are two big mandates of Matthew's Gospel. In these verses, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' power over demons and sickness. At this point, the Apostles receive no teaching mission since their instruction is still incomplete. Also, at this point during Jesus' earthly life, their mission is just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. After the

resurrection, the mission to the Gentiles will be inaugurated. Finally, they are told to give freely what they have freely received.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The first reading speaks beautifully of God's affection for Israel. What helps you to believe that you too are the special object of God's affection?
3. How easy or hard is it for you to believe that God's unconditional love for us is in no way diminished by our sins, even terrible sins?
4. What is the best way for the church to go about getting more laborers into the harvest?
5. Jesus sent out the apostles with instructions to "Cure the sick" etc. and with the admonition, "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give." How does this apply to us today?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help me to be more aware of your mercy and love, despite my sins and help me to extend the same to others.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: By baptism you are a missionary of Jesus' message and love in your home and marketplace. Seek to be more faithful to that call this week.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for the grace to not allow the worries and preoccupations of the world to distract you from your primary mission and work -- to be an evangelizer of Christ's values in your environments. Pray that all whom Jesus is calling to the priesthood and religious life will hear and answer his call.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*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.*

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving God, thank you for gathering us together to share your Word and our lives. When fear, betrayal and threats of any kind enter across our path, help us to turn to you and believe that with your help, we can fight any battle. 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: *Trust God in times of fear* is a thread that ties all three readings together. In the first reading, people are trying to intimidate Jeremiah. He is able to withstand their threats because of his trust in God. *"God is with me as my mighty champion."* In the Gospel, Jesus prepares his disciples for the hostile reaction to the preaching of his message. In the second reading, Paul celebrates salvation in Christ as a gift which empowers us to deal with fear and free us from the only things that should truly make us fearful, namely, sin, death, and separation from God.

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: Jeremiah 20:10-13

Jeremiah has often been called a "reluctant" prophet. When God calls Jeremiah, he tells God that he is not much of a talker. But once he says 'Yes' to God's call, he speaks what he feels God wants him to say, even if his message enrages religious and civil leaders and his own peers. He has to frequently call the leaders and people to repentance of infidelity to their covenant with God.

Today's reading is an excerpt from what is called the "Confessions of Jeremiah" – a revelation of the personal anguish the prophet experiences in his soul as he carries out his ministry (e.g., "Why is God allowing all this bad stuff to happen to me?"). Jeremiah is being persecuted by the people for his

unwelcome words. They cry out: "Denounce, let us denounce him!" We can almost feel Jeremiah's sense of rejection. But his trust is in God, his mighty champion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to let fear intimidate them but to place their trust in God. Jeremiah is a wonderful example of someone who acts on this Word of Jesus. We also notice how Jeremiah has no problem asking God to avenge his persecutors, "Let me witness the vengeance you take on them."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 69

This is a psalm of lament used during a worship service by an individual undergoing a time of personal suffering. It clearly echoes Jeremiah's experience of rejection.

SECOND READING: Romans 5:12-15

For the next 12 weeks, our second reading will be from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

The opening verse: *“Through one man, sin entered the world...”* is the basis of the Catholic Church’s doctrine on original sin as taught by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.

Paul contrasts Adam (the cause of sin) to Christ (the cause of grace). Whereas the universality of sin springs from the disobedience of Adam, the super-abundance of grace flows from Christ.

Adam’s sin unleashed as it were a ‘sin force’ into the world. Because of Adam’s sin, we are born flawed and with a proclivity to sin. We know that sin is present in our world and in our family tree when we see children emulating the misdeeds and imperfections of their parents and of society. Sin is also manifest in the greed and self-centeredness that prevail in our world today. But the grace that comes to us in the sacraments and in other ways is, of course, greater than the sin we have to deal with.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt 10:26-33

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus is well aware of the many challenges that will face all who choose to follow him in faith and preach in his name. A little earlier he says: *“I am sending you like sheep among wolves” (Mt.10:16)*. Jesus gives an exhortation that will be recalled in the future when the Church will face persecution: *“Fear no one. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”*

In order to underline his message to “not be afraid,” Jesus uses two images to speak of God’s care for each of us. He says: “If God cares for sparrows” (regarded as the least of all animals) and “if God numbers even the hairs of our head” (assuming we still have some 😊), how much more will he care for us who are more than many sparrows?” Then he adds a solemn warning: *“Whoever denies (Jesus) before others will be denied by his heavenly Father.”* In the verse: *“Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known,”* the thing hidden is probably a reference to the teaching of Jesus. In time, his disciples will proclaim from the housetops what was previously whispered.

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 recall a time or experience when God was with you like a ‘mighty champion’?
3. Have you ever asked God to strike down those who have hurt you grievously?

4. What can strike fear into your heart? What helps you deal with fear?

5. Have you ever been afraid to acknowledge Jesus before others? What helped you overcome that fear?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. *Lord, you know when fear strikes my heart, I find it hard to combat it with trust in you. Fill me with the courage and trust I need to deal with what frightens me.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Be aware of where fear rules in your life and seek to combat it with courage and trust in God.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all who have recently received a bad

medical diagnosis and for all who are fearful of losing their jobs and homes.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

When Fearful

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

**Help us, Father, by your grace to love
you above all, and to fear nothing.
Fill our hearts with cheerful courage
and loving trust in you.**

**Through our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

A Reflection

Dr. Sheila Cassidy went to Chile to work among the poorest of the poor. One day she treated an opposition leader. The secret police learned about it, arrested her, and tortured her. She writes in *Audacity to Believe*:

"After four days of physical pain ...I was left completely alone in a small room.... Incredibly ...I was filled with hope, for I knew ...that God was with me, and that nothing they could do to me could change that."

Sheila then understood Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

(© January 1, 1978, Dr. Sheila Cassidy, "Audacity to Believe", by Harper Collins Publishing Company, New York, New York.)

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and caring God, you welcome us as we gather in your name to share life and your Word. Just as the woman in the first reading welcomed the prophet, may we always welcome your Word and allow it to be the light that guides our lives.*

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 theme of hospitality connects the first and third readings. The Gospel speaks clearly about the cost and rewards of discipleship. In the second reading, Paul reminds the Romans that baptism into the Death and Resurrection of Christ calls them to daily die to sin and to daily allow the new life of Christ to rise in them.

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

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

FIRST READING: 2Kings 4:8-11

This reading is part of a series of stories about the prophet Elisha. The reason for its choice is clearly the reference in the Gospel that those who welcome a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. The unnamed woman is described as a "woman of influence." She is a woman of means able to offer the prophet, Elisha, room and board on a regular basis. It seems that the prophet has a special place in the home and heart of this woman. The life of a traveling prophet, like that of traveling business people, could be lonely. The prophet most likely looks forward to his visits with the woman who seems to love having him. The woman's hospitality is rewarded by the promise of a son that she and her husband have been longing for.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 89

These verses reflect the couple's joy on hearing that they will be blessed with a son.

SECOND READING: Roman 6:3-4, 8-11

Paul reminds us that baptism into Christ Jesus involves a death to self so that we can allow Christ and his values to rise up in us. This dying and rising is ritualized in Baptism especially when done by immersion. In our going into and under the water, we are dying to sin and self. In rising up out of the water, we are rising to a new life in Christ. Living life as a baptized Christian involves a daily effort to die to the false or sinful self (jealously, unforgiveness, greed) and a daily effort to allow our true self in Christ to radiate through us (love, kindness, compassion).

Just as death had no lasting power over Christ, so sin need not have lasting power over baptized Christians. If we draw on the power of the resurrected Lord, we can withstand the assaults of sin. However, this will not be an easy battle. It will demand constant vigilance and denial of our old self.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
Matt 10:37-42**

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Matthew 10:37-42

This Gospel has two sections. The first contains a number of miscellaneous sayings by Jesus concerning the cost of discipleship. The second relates to the authority of the Apostles and the fate of those who welcome them.

In the first section, Jesus offers a number of what are sometimes called ‘hard sayings’:

- He who loves another more than Jesus is not worthy to be his disciple.
- He who fails to embrace the Cross is not worthy to be his disciple.
- He who seeks self-fulfillment more than self-surrender to Christ is not worthy of him.

In these “hard sayings,” Jesus is conveying to us that our commitment to him must supersede all other commitments and relationships, even those as binding and as precious as the relationship between a parent and a child. The Gospel does not advocate abandonment of familial ties and responsibilities, but places the commitment to Christ above all. The reality is, of course, if one is truly a committed disciple of Christ, he/she becomes more capable of loving family members and all others with a selfless love. The third “hard saying” reminds us that if we are only out to satisfy ourselves, we will in the end be losers. On the other hand, if we seek to give of ourselves, we become our best selves and most pleasing to God.

The second part of today’s Gospel calls us to be hospitable to those who carry the message of Christ to us. In welcoming the messengers of the Gospel, we are welcoming Christ himself. The gift of even a cup of water to little ones will not go unrewarded.

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. Did you grow up in a home that offered hospitality to others? In what ways does your parish show hospitality to newcomers? In what ways could it do a better job?
3. Dying to the false self is usually not easy. What can help us in this process?
4. Discuss which of the “hard sayings” in the Gospel is most challenging for you and what you might be able to do to embrace it.

5. In the Gospel, Jesus says that the giving of a glass of water will not go unrewarded. What are other examples of small acts of love that you and I can practice?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, in the Gospel you tell us that commitment to you must be the number one priority in our lives. Help me to recognize what, if any, other loves I have that distract me from you, and help me to move towards putting you first in my life.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Live the message of hospitality in your home, neighborhood, workplace and Church.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially for those who must flee their homes because of poverty and persecution.

Pray also for those carrying a heavy cross at this time.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Prayer of Abandonment

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me as you will.

For whatever you do, I thank you; I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let your will be done in me as in all creatures; I ask nothing else.

Into your hands I commend my soul; I give it to you with all the love of my heart.

I love you and I want to give myself into your hands with a trust beyond all measure because you are my Father.

- Charles de Foucauld

I thank God for my handicaps, for through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.

- Helen Keller

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Jesus, meek and humble of heart, you invite us to come to you when we are weary and find life burdensome. You do not promise to remove our burdens, but you do promise to help us carry them and to give us refreshment when we are tired. Be with us today as we share your Word. Bless us with your wisdom and discernment so that we may know the message you have for us. 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, Zechariah paints a picture of a gentle, meek and peaceful Messiah. This image is fulfilled in the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel, where he describes himself as meek and humble of heart. In the second reading, Paul calls the Romans to live in the spirit of Jesus.

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: Zechariah 9:9-10

These verses are chosen for this Sunday because they describe a meek and humble Messiah, which Jesus is. The meek donkey is contrasted to the warrior horse which is a symbol of war. Zion (another name for Jerusalem) will shout for joy when the King arrives in the city – not as a mighty conquering warrior but as a just Savior who will banish war and institute peace.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 145

This psalm extols God's kindness and compassion as well as his outreach to the lowly and forgotten.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:9, 11-13

Paul continues his discussion on baptism. Living out one's baptism means that one will live in the spirit of Jesus as opposed to "living in the flesh." To live "life in the flesh" is to live life independent of God: self-sufficient and self-reliant with no relationship with God. On the contrary, one who uses his/her personal freedom to tune in and respond to the leadings of the Holy Spirit lives a "life in the spirit" which is centered on God and his values. Life in the flesh leads to death while life in the spirit leads to eternal life.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt 11:25-30

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: Matthew 11:25-30

This Gospel begins with Jesus' shout of joy, *not* on account of the so-called "wise and learned" who do not recognize his true identity, but for the "little ones" with humble and open hearts who 'get it.' A 'know-it-all' attitude is a huge block hindering us from receiving God's self-revelation.

Jesus speaks about the special and unique relationship that exists between him and his Father. It is really a statement about the divinity of Christ. In Jesus we find the Wisdom of God. He reveals the mind and heart of God to us.

The reading ends with Jesus' beautiful invitation to the "heavy burdened" to come to him. The Pharisees and scribes have made the Law of Moses a heavy burden by adding to it a multitude of legalisms. On another level, faith in Christ helps all of us to deal with the burdens of life.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

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

2. What makes you "shout for joy"?

3. What might cause us or others to live self-sufficient lives independent of God?

4. Can you name any heavy burden or cross that has turned out to be a blessing?

5. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that he is gentle and humble of heart. Who models this spirit for you? What can help us grow in gentleness and humility?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart more like yours.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Tackle with prayer and effort one 'flesh attitude' that hinders your spiritual growth. Give your burdens to Christ. Reach out to someone who is carrying a heavy burden.

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

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? If someone in the group is carrying a heavy burden at this time, perhaps the group can gather around that person and pray over him/her. Pray for the grace to be meek and humble of heart and do what you can to lighten the burden of someone who is carrying a heavy load.

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

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord of the Harvest, you send your Word into our hearts, Church, and world so that it may provide fruit in our lives. Open our sluggish hearts to receive your Word. May our sharing of your Word this day lead us to live more fully in your light. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings celebrate the power and effectiveness of God's Word which eventually bears fruit in us despite many initial obstacles. In the second reading, Paul calls believers to accept the Word of God with hope and confidence. He reminds his readers that every struggle and pain will ultimately be overcome by shouts of joy and glory. Or we might say that all three readings may be linked by the theme of the Word made fruitful in us through the Spirit, who is God's pledge to us.

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

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

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:10-11

Isaiah celebrates the power of God's Word to achieve its goal. God's Word is compared to rain and snow. Just as water and snow soak into the ground, making the earth upon which they fall fertile and fruitful, so too can God's Word make the human heart on which it falls fertile and fruitful. God's Word does not return back to him void, but achieves the end for which he sent it. In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks about the different kinds of soil on which God's Word falls.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 65

The use of agricultural imagery continues in today's psalm illustrating God's providence. The response: *"The seed that falls on good*

ground will yield a fruitful harvest" connects the psalm to the Gospel.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:18-23

Paul seeks to reassure his readers that their present sufferings, difficult though they may be, are nothing compared to the joy that awaits them in heaven. The hope and promise of eternal happiness are intended to help all of us to persevere and ideally be transformed in and through our sufferings. Our sufferings are like birth pangs as we await the birth of a new being in us.

Paul further speaks of creation as also awaiting transformation. Creation, just like humans, was wounded by the Fall and now looks forward to its redemption. We catch

glimpses of this each year when trees lose their leaves in autumn and winter, then sprout new leaves in spring, and once again produce beautiful blossoms in summer. These recurring changes in nature are reminders of a far greater transformation being effected by God in those who welcome the Word, listen to it, and allow it to bear fruit in their lives.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:
Matt 13:1-23**

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: Matthew 13:1-23

Chapter 13 in Matthew's Gospel is sometimes called "the day of parables." He presents us with seven parables that are all focused on the Kingdom of God. They are parables seeking to give us a glimpse into the nature of the Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating.

Parables have been called "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Jesus tells a story and then challenges the listener to figure out the message for himself. On the other hand, parables can, in the words of William Barclay, *conceal truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see.* It puts the responsibility fairly and squarely on the individual. It *reveals* truth to those who desire truth; it

conceals truth from those who do not wish to see the truth (Commentary on Matthew, Vol.2, p. 13).

Today's parable of the sower is very much based on the everyday experiences of the audience. They often see sowers sowing seed. The main point of the parable is God's offer of his Kingdom (salvation) to *all*. God is the Sower and we are the soil – of different types. If the seed falls on good soil (an open heart), it will likely produce an incredible harvest. Jesus encourages his audience to be good soil, receptive to his message. Jesus' offer of the Kingdom to *all* people would have stretched the mindset of those who believed that only the Jews belonged in the Kingdom. The parable invites each listener to look into his/her heart to see what kind of soil he/she is and to see how open and responsive he/she is to Jesus and his message.

In section two (verses 10-17) of today's Gospel, Jesus responds to the question as to why he teaches in parables. This is one of the most difficult sections in the whole of Matthew's Gospel because in it Jesus appears to be saying that God deliberately blinds the eyes and hardens the hearts of some from hearing and understanding his Word. Of course, the truth is that Jesus wants everyone to hear, understand, and follow his message. But, unfortunately, that does not always happen because of the spiritual condition of people's hearts.

Those who have open, receptive hearts will hear and understand and bear much fruit. These are also the people to whom 'more will be given.' They will be given more as they grow in openness and receptivity to God's Word.

On the other hand, those with unreceptive hearts, those with closed and hardened hearts, will miss the message of the parables and so the little they have will be taken from them.

Jesus then says that Isaiah had the same problem as he has. He too had to deal with people who closed their minds to his message. Then Jesus calls attention to the great privilege the disciples have in hearing and understanding what righteous men and women in the past longed to see and hear.

In the third and final section of today's Gospel (verses 18-23), Jesus speaks about the various kinds of soil on which the seed falls and the factors that prevent the Word from bearing fruit abundantly. The Evil One may come and steal the Word. Also, the Word may not take root because of persecution, preoccupation with other things, including the loss of riches. Even though four types of soil or persons are envisioned, it is more realistic to understand each seed as belonging to all of us. At one time or another, each of us can lose the Word to the Evil One. We can be enthusiastic but not persevering, and we may allow the pursuit of material things to distract us from paying attention to our soul. But then at some time, the Word may bear abundant fruit in our lives.

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 or what sowed God's Word in your life? When did your love for Scripture begin to blossom?

3. In the second reading, Paul speaks about creation as "groaning in labor pains." What might be groaning in you at this time seeking to be born?

4. What can hinder or help us from being good soil for God's Word?

5. What are simple ways that you can be a sower of God's Word in the lives of others?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you seek to sow your Word in my heart in many ways. Help me to be more attentive and responsive to your Word.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Spend some time thinking about how the Word can bear more fruit in your life. Also, think of how you can be a sower of the Word this week.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially ask God to remove from your heart all that prevents you from being good soil for his Word. Pray for all those who work hard to help us be better stewards of the earth and its resources.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Loving God,
We thank you for sending your Son Jesus
to sow the seed of your life-giving
word in our hearts,
so that it might do your will
and achieve your purpose in our world.
Open our hearts to receive this word.
Increase our desire to live it out
wholeheartedly.
Amen.*

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and caring God, thank you for gathering us together to share your Word. Send your Holy Spirit into our midst so that we may hear the message you want us to hear in these readings. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings speak of God as both patient and merciful with sinners. Paul tells his readers that one of the functions of the Holy Spirit is to help us to pray, especially when we feel inadequate and weak.

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: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

The Book of Wisdom is written by a Greek-speaking Jew living in an urban area of the Diaspora (Jews living outside of Israel). His Goal is to defend Judaism against the pervasive influence of Hellenism (Greek pagan philosophies). He wants to make sure that his people will not become "tainted" with foreign ways.

We are reminded of God's tolerance and merciful patience. Though God is all-powerful, he uses his power to show mercy and clemency. By doing this, God is seeking to teach people to treat each other (including non-believers) with the same kindness and to temper justice with mercy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 86

This lament places emphasis on God's patience and forbearance in line with the theme of the first and third readings.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:26-27

Paul reminds us that we are not alone in our prayer moments. The Holy Spirit accompanies us and is always praying in us. The 'groanings' of the Spirit are linked to those of creation, that is, the world and our desire for redemption. If we turn to God, we will understand the ways of the Spirit. Commenting on these verses, Patricia Sanchez writes these comforting words:

Happily, Paul reminds us today that – even in our weakest moments of inarticulate struggle in prayer, even in the rut of the banal and routine, even in the throes of seething resentment or in the tears of burdensome sadness – the presence of the Spirit guarantees that our wordlessness be translated into a prayer which centers us once again and renews the communion which sustains us.

(Used with permission *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years A, B, C*, by Patricia Sanchez, -Sheed & Ward publisher (9-1-89.)

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt 13:24-43

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:24-43

Matthew presents us with three more “kingdom parables” intended to teach that the coming of the Kingdom is a growth process that occurs over a very long period. Thus, patience and tolerance are needed for the followers of Jesus.

The Parable of the *Wheat and Weeds* would be a familiar story to Jesus’ listeners. They have all seen weeds sprouting up among good seed. The servants want to rush out into the fields to pull up all the weeds. In Jesus’ time, the religious leaders have no patience or compassion for sinners. They want all of them weeded out. And so it will be in Matthew’s community several decades later when some members under religious persecution will deny their faith and will be shown very little compassion by some leaders in Matthew’s community.

In the parable, the Master (representing God) calls for patience, “*Let both weeds and wheat*

continue to grow.” Ezekiel tells us that God desires not the death of the sinner, but that he repents and lives. The parable illustrates God’s patience with sinners until the Day of Judgment (harvest time).

Jesus condemns elitism and underscores the fact that the Christian community and we, individually, will always be a “mixed bag” of good and not so good people: saints and sinners. The role of Church leaders is to preach and practice repentance, mercy, patience and compassion, and to leave judgment to God.

The parables of the mustard seed and yeast tell us that small beginnings can lead to big endings. God is at work making things happen even if we are not aware of it.

In the third part of this Gospel (verses 36-43), in response to the disciples question, Jesus comments on the parable of the wheat and weeds. Until the Day of Judgment, the Church should love, repent, show mercy, and stay out of deciding who will be saved. But a final Day of Judgment will come when those who are evil and unrepentant will pay the ultimate price for their sin, but those who have remained faithful or have repented from their sins will be welcomed into heaven. Until that Day, God will be patient and merciful and so should the Church. The Church’s job is to preach repentance, show leniency, and leave the judging to God.

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 second reading on the role of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life is quite interesting. How is this reading special to you?

3. Do we think that the Church would be better off without some types of people?

4. How hard or easy is it for you to live alongside or converse with people whose beliefs are very different from yours politically and spiritually, and to refrain from judging them?

5. Fr. Tom Green, S.J., says that God can use our sins (weeds) as well as our virtues to draw us closer to him. What do you think about that?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, help me to always remember that all of us, including myself, are a mixed bag, and to remember that my job is to love people, and God's job is to judge them.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Refrain from judging 'the weeds' in your environment and become more aware of the weeds within yourself

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for the grace to accept others (and yourself) despite their (and your) shortcomings.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord of the harvest,
help me to recognize and nurture
what is good in my life.
May I often remember
that one day may be my last day.
Amen.*

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME A

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

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *All wise and loving God, you bless us with a share of your divine wisdom and life. May we always have the wisdom to choose you above all things. Grace us now with the wisdom and heart to hear and respond to the Word you place before us today. 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 Sunday's scriptures are like a chest filled with buried treasures for those willing to hunt them down. The first reading shows Solomon asking God for wisdom, a treasure beyond price and truly rare. The psalmist treasures the law of the Lord far above silver or gold. Paul extols the treasure of God's grace. Finally, Matthew speaks of the greatest treasure: the Kingdom of Heaven. All these treasures are more than worth risking everything to seek them and make them our own.

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: 1Kings 3:5, 7-12

As this chapter in the Book of Kings opens, Solomon consolidates the power he inherits from his father, David. God asks Solomon what gift (what pearl of great price) he desires most of all? He answers: "Wisdom and understanding heart." God gives Solomon wisdom and a discerning heart. In Israelite tradition, wisdom has to do with having the ability to attain success in any field of endeavor. Solomon illustrates this very well as he flourishes in governance, in construction, in foreign trade and diplomacy, and in writing proverbs. Solomon is an example of the 'wise scribe' spoken about in the Gospel. Unfortunately, Solomon's reign as king does not conclude as well as it began,

which shows that God's gifts are not bestowed automatically and permanently, but require continual tending and cooperation on the part of the one to whom they are given.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 119

This psalm glorifies the wonder, beauty and wisdom of God's law.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:28-30

God has a plan for our lives and he is in control of everything. It is his desire that we be refashioned in the image of Christ in a progressive process which he himself directs.

When Paul speaks about those whom God has predestined, he does not mean that God whimsically chooses some to be saved and others to be lost. God's plan is for *all* to be saved. This means it is God's *active* will that *all* be saved, but God's *passive* will permits each individual to accept or reject God's salvation.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt 13:44-52

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:44-52

This Gospel offers three more parables which are intended to give the listener some insight into the *Kingdom of God*. Jesus does not give us a definition of the reign of God. Instead, he offers *some* images of what the Kingdom of God is like.

In the first two parables, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a *buried treasure* or a *set of fine pearls*. When one finds a treasure of pearls and realizes it is the 'real thing,' he/she thinks: "*This is what I have been looking for all my life.*" Stumbling upon the buried treasure of pearls brings great joy. Discovering a "pearl of great price" calls for great *commitment* symbolized by a willingness to sell all of one's possessions to

purchase the treasure. In the story, both men are willing to joyfully sacrifice all to purchase their new found treasure. No one is pushing them to do this. They want to do it. Message: we must be willing to risk everything in order to join the fellowship of Jesus' disciples.

The *third parable* about the dragnet hauling all kinds of things, good and bad, is similar to the *wheat and weeds* parable. Judgment will happen at the end. Only then will the good be separated from the bad. Like the allegory on the *wheat and weeds*, this parable is a warning against premature judgment, but also a warning that judgment will take place. Matthew finishes this section of his Gospel by saying: "*Every scribe who is learned in the Kingdom of God is like the head of a household who can bring from his store both the new and the old.*" Jesus has been speaking in parables to the Pharisees and his disciples. Those who grasp their meaning are like a wise scribe who appreciates not only the old revelation in Moses, but also the new revelation in Jesus. Both shed light on each other, but the new is definite and the fulfillment of the old.

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. If God said to you what he said to Solomon, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you," what gift would you ask for? What is the deepest desire of your heart?

3. In the second reading, Paul says, “All things work for the good for those who love the Lord.” Is this your experience? Can you recall a bad experience out of which God brought some good?

4. What are the priorities in your life? What do you value the most? What is most important to you? Does the way you spend your time, treasure and talent reflect these priorities?

5. What is the “pearl of great price” in your life?

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

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

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you are our ‘pearl of great price.’ Help us to always remember that and push back against all that seeks to replace you as the top priority in our lives.*

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: If your “pearl of great price” is someone or something other than God, do something to make God your pearl of great price. St. Augustine says: *“Christ is not valued at all if he is not valued above all.”*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for the gift of wisdom so that you can choose wisely and have “the smarts” to follow the ways of God.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Holy Spirit, fill us with heavenly wisdom.

Help us to see what really matters.

*Give us the strength to follow
where you are.*

Amen.