

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: *Good and gracious God, thank you for gathering us together to share life and listen to your holy Word. Today you show us how you call out to us in the events and encounters of daily life. May we discern your call to us and respond with generosity and obedience. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: The First Reading is the call of Samuel. In the Second Reading, Paul speaks about the sacredness of the body, calling it a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel, John the Baptist introduces two of his disciples to 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: 1Samuel 3:3b-10, 19

In this beautiful call-response story, Patricia Sanchez notes *six* dimensions of the call-response dynamic. *First*, Samuel does not recognize God's call, which illustrates the fact that calls from God are not always immediately discernible. *Second*, the repetitiveness of God's calling assures us that God does not easily quit on us. He keeps calling. *Third*, the setting of God's call to Samuel (at night while he sleeps in the temple sacristy) reminds us that God's call to us can come at any time or place or during any human activity. *Fourth*, the fact that Samuel resorts to his mentor Eli for help suggests that we often may need help from other experienced pilgrims to discern God's call. *Fifth*, the description of Samuel's growing to maturity in the presence of God underscores the power of grace to sustain whoever responds to God's call. *Sixth*, the effectiveness of Samuel's ministry (whereby the Lord does not allow any word of his to be without effect [v.19]) reassures those called that active cooperation with God can yield astounding results.

(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.)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 40

The response of the true disciple is an unqualified acceptance of God's will: "*Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will.*"

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20

During the first five Sundays of Ordinary Time, the Second Reading is from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In his letter, Paul addresses the question of how to live as faithful disciples in a pagan world. Sexual promiscuity is one of the problems Paul encounters in the port town of Corinth. Some Corinthian Christians believe that their bodies, like all mortal things, will pass away and they can therefore do anything they want, e.g., engaging in unrestrained eating, drinking, sexual activity, etc. Paul thinks otherwise. He uses a striking parallel, reminding them that in baptism, our body (and spirit) is given to Christ; hence, it belongs to Christ. Because our body belongs to Christ, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. For that reason, it is wrong and sinful for anyone bound by Christian marriage to give his/her body to another outside that sacred bond – which mirrors Christ's love for his Church.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

John 1:35-42

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: John 1:35-42

Just as Eli introduced Samuel to the Lord, John the Baptist, in this Gospel, introduces two of his disciples to Jesus (which underlines John's subordinate role). John's ministry is (as is ours) to introduce others to Christ. When the two disciples begin to follow Jesus, he asks them: "What are you looking for?"—or, simply put, "What does your heart seek?" They answer with a question of their own: "Rabbi, where do you live?" Jesus replies: "Come and see." So they go off to have a long chat (a mini-retreat) with Jesus. During their "stay" with him, the eyes of the two disciples are opened to his true identity. "Seeing" and "staying" are key terms in John's Gospel. The one whose eyes are opened to who Jesus truly is, is invited to come and *stay* with Jesus, to come and share Jesus' relationship with his Father. It is an introduction into a life of discipleship, which leads one into "staying" with the Blessed Trinity.

Having had their eyes opened, one of the two disciples, Andrew, seeks out his brother, Simon, and introduces him to Jesus. Jesus immediately changes Simon's name to *Cephas*, meaning "rock." Henceforth, Peter will have a key and central role in the new community of believers.

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. Eli helped Samuel to recognize the call of God. Who in your life has helped you hear or listen to God?

3. When did following Jesus become important in your life? Can you recall an event or series of events that led to a deeper following of Jesus?

4. What would you answer if Jesus turned to you and asked: *What are you looking for?*

5. Paul speaks of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. What are ways that the human body is desecrated today? What can help us to have a proper respect for the body—neither desecrating it or idolizing it?

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: *God, you can come to me anytime and anywhere. Help me to grow in my ability to hear your voice, your Word.*

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 God's daily call in the events of daily life and try to respond generously to his call.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

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

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

Inviting God,

*You have called us to follow your son,
Jesus Christ, and to live as temples of your*

Holy Spirit.

Help us to hear the voice of Jesus today,

reflect upon it,

and then give us the courage

to act upon what we hear.

Amen.

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, our loving Father, we gather in your name to share your holy Word. May your Spirit break open for us the true meaning of the Word we share. May your Spirit bind us together so that we may become a praying and loving small Church family. Above all, help us to become doers of your Word. We make our prayer through your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

Response to last week is 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, the preaching of Jonah meets with immediate response in the pagan city of Nineveh. The Gospel is also a call to repentance. Convinced that the Second Coming of Jesus is imminent, Paul calls his readers to live in a spirit of detachment from the world.

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

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

FIRST READING: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The purpose of the book of Jonah, written after the Israelites have returned from exile, is to teach the people that God loves all people, even Israel's greatest enemies.

A reluctant Jonah travels to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which devastated the Kingdom of Judah and Israel, destroying the latter completely in 722 B.C. To Jonah's great surprise, the Ninevites—from the King down to the lowest person—respond immediately to Jonah's call to repentance. Such reaction from an evil people to Jonah's preaching is an example of the *transformative* power of the Word of God.

The final verse of today's reading which says, "*God repented of the evil he had threatened to carry out,*" is an example of anthropomorphic language. The author speaks of God as if he were a human being.

For this Sunday's Mass, the Jonah reading is used to teach the kind of repentance that Jesus is calling people to as he begins his public ministry.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25

This psalm stresses the rightness of God's way, which, if followed, leads us to life.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 7:29-31

There is a sense of urgency in this reading as there is in the First and Third Readings. Paul believes Jesus' Second Coming is imminent so he sets out to show his readers how to live in a world that is transitory. In light of the fact that the world will soon be coming to an end, it is foolish to treat as permanent that which is transitory. Paul is not suggesting that people sit around and do nothing but that their primary focus should be on "higher things" – that they should use their time to conform their lives to Christ.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:

Mark 1:1-8

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: Mark 1:14-20

In the Gospel, the mention of John the Baptist's arrest signals that the reign of God would not be established without sacrifice and that following Jesus could be dangerous. Jesus begins his preaching with a call to repentance. The call to repentance connects his preaching with that of John the Baptist's. If the Ninevites responded so fully to the preaching of Jonah, how much more should we respond to Jesus?

The Gospel goes on to relate the call of four apostles: two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John. We notice their immediate response to Jesus just like the Ninevites' immediate response to Jonah.

Discipleship leads to mission: "*Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.*" These men are called to *become disciples and make disciples*. So it is with us: we are called to radical conversion to Christ and called to lead others to Christ.

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 and Gospel, there is a call to repentance. What does the word 'repentance' mean to you?
3. Our Church tells us that conversion is an *ongoing* and *daily* challenge. At this time, can you name an area of your life where conversion may be needed?
4. Can you recall the first time you had an experiential sense of God's call? If so, what was that experience like for you?
5. In the Gospels, Peter, Andrew, James and John were not only called to follow Jesus, they were also called to be *missionary disciples* of Jesus. To what extent do you have a missionary sense in even small ways, like telling others about a good religious book you are reading. To what extent do you have "fire in your belly" for leading others to Christ?

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 call me to be one of your missionary disciples, but often I am a bit fearful of reaching out to others. Bless me with the gift of courage.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Let us be aware of the small conversions Jesus may be calling us to this week. Pray for the grace to *notice* God's call.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

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

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Merciful God,
You call us to daily conversion
to your ways of seeing and doing things.
Help us to notice your call.
Help us to overcome any resistance
we may have to your call.
Help us also to overcome any fear
we may have of sharing
our faith with others.
This we pray through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*

FOURTH 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 caring God, you send messengers like Moses, Paul and Jesus to speak your divine Word to us. Give us ears to hear your Word and strength to act on it. 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 First Reading, Moses tells his people that God will raise up a prophet like him whom the people will listen to. In the Second Reading, Paul, believing that the Second Coming is near, says that this is not a good time to enter into marriage. In the Gospel, we witness the two main components of Jesus' Ministry: teaching and healing.

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 1-2, 8-19

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses's farewell speech to his people before they enter the Promised Land. He will not go with them. He consoles his people by telling them that God will raise a prophet like Moses and he will speak through him: *"I will put my words into his mouth"* (Dt. 18:18). The promise of a future prophet has led the Israelites down through the centuries to wonder whether or not a particular individual might in fact be this promised prophet. The early Christians saw Jesus and his ministry as the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. Jesus' teaching is given with authority and confirmed by miracles (as we see in today's Gospel), the sign that God is with him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: 95

The people's response to the prophetic word must be one of total acceptance.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 7:32-35

One unenlightened in the context of today's reading may conclude that Paul, a celibate and unmarried man, believes that married life is inferior to celibate life. But Paul is *not* saying that. When writing his letter to the Corinthians, he tells them that as Jesus'

Second Coming is imminent, planning a lifelong marriage is not a good idea. One would be better served to focus on spiritual things, on being ready to receive the Lord when he comes. Paul knows from personal experience that his single state allows him to be more focused on the things of God, but by no means is he saying that the married state is inferior to a life of celibacy. Paul is more concerned with the quality of one's commitment to God than with a particular state in life.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

Having called a handful of disciples, Jesus begins his teaching and healing ministry. Mark notes how impressed the people are with Jesus. They are spellbound by him. He teaches with authority unlike their own religious leaders. What is this authority? It is the authority of God. Like the prophets of old, Jesus is anointed with God's Spirit, which enables him to touch people's hearts. His teaching is accompanied by signs and wonders. When Jesus teaches, things happen: the sick are healed, the crippled walk, and the oppressed are liberated. All of this leaves the people in awe.

Also in today's Gospel, Jesus begins his battle with the "powers of darkness"—which will be a central part of his mission. Here Jesus defeats Satan. He bids him to leave the man. In so doing, Jesus not only shows compassion for the troubled person, but he also announces the beginning of the messianic era and the Reign of God. The Gospel builds on the First Reading: Jesus is seen as the prophet whom Moses spoke about. He is a prophet in word and in deed. He is the living oracle of God. Mark uses this story to teach and encourage his community 30 or 40 years later. They are experiencing "hostile forces" in their persecution by Jewish leaders and the Romans. If their lives are firmly rooted in Christ, they will be able to withstand the evil forces attacking them.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. What can cause you or others to harden your hearts against God and his word?
3. Who 'speaks with authority' in your life? Whose witness to the Gospel inspires you?
4. Who or what are some inner demons or voices that can inhabit our lives? What helps you to deal with them?
5. Have you experienced Jesus' healing, love and mercy in your life? If so, in what ways?

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: *Help me to hear your Word, to discern and to decide how I need to respond to it 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: Seek to be aware of evil forces that may seek to distract you from being focused on following the ways of Jesus.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

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

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Father, you have given us Jesus
to show us your face in our daily lives.
Open our eyes to the familiar and surprising ways
that he heals us and empowers us each day.
May your Holy Spirit help us to expel
all that is evil and impure in our lives,
all that is opposed to you and your ways.
This we pray through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*

FIFTH 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: *Good and gracious God, thank you for drawing us together for fellowship and the sharing of your holy Word. Open our minds and hearts to hear the message you want to convey to us. May your Word grow strong in our hearts so that others may come to know and love you through the witness of our lives. Amen.*

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

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the First Reading, Job wrestles with the problem of suffering. The Gospel also deals with the issue of suffering and evil. In the Second Reading, Paul shares with us his great passion for preaching God's Word.

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: Job 7:1-4, 6-7

The book of Job is a theological statement on the issue of innocent human suffering. The book begins with the question: Are God's people only faithful to him because of the blessings they receive? Would they remain faithful if God withdrew his blessings? Satan raises the question and God uses Job as a test case. When Job is suddenly afflicted by the death of his family, loss of wealth, and personal illness, a series of "friends" argue that Job's misfortunes must be a punishment for some of his sins. Job refuses to accept this traditional explanation of why "bad things happen to good people."

Today's reading represents Job's response to one of his so-called "comforters." He rejects their shallow explanation of his misery. Job reflects not only on his own pain but also on the suffering of all innocent people. He gives voice to the sentiments that many people feel at a time of suffering: *Life is futile. It has no meaning. Is not man's life on earth drudgery? The sooner death comes along, the better. Why doesn't God speak to me?* God's silence and seeming absence is also a part of our suffering. (God does speak in Chapter 40.) Job's lament is a "complaint of the righteous." We need to know that it is okay for us to complain to God about the circumstances of our lives.

[If interested in studying the Book of Job, visit our website and click on Commentaries on the Books of the Old Testament > Commentary on Job, Level 3.]

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 147

This psalm praises God for his concern for the brokenhearted.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Paul tells us how he has no choice but to preach the Gospel. He seeks no pay for his ministry. He is totally dedicated to it, seeking to be all things to all people so that he can win all for Christ.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:29-39

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

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

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

GOSPEL: Mark 1:29-39

The Gospel, like the First Reading, deals with the issue of evil and sickness. It recounts “*days* in the life of Jesus.” These verses weave together *four events*.

In the *first* event, Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law. After being healed, she immediately gets up and begins to *serve*. Jesus’ action involves healing, leading to service and discipleship. “*The greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves.*”

The *second* event could be titled *Healing and Deliverance Service in the Streets*. In this event, Jesus directly confronts his enemies, namely, evil and sickness, and *he demonstrates* his power over both. Notice that Jesus forbids the demons to reveal his identity. This is known as the “*messianic secret.*” The popular understanding of the Messiah’s role is political and military—one who will lead the people in rebellion against the Romans and restore the glory of Israel. Jesus knows that it is not God’s will for him to fulfill this understanding of Messiahship. He is going to be a *suffering* Messiah who will triumph through suffering—something the people will not fully comprehend until after the Resurrection.

In the *third* event, Jesus teaches the importance of balancing a busy schedule with time for quiet and solitude. He shows us his need to “get away from it all” and to spend time “recharging spiritual and emotional batteries.” However, the disciples chase after him saying, “*Everyone is looking for you.*”

In the *fourth* event, Jesus heads back to the ministry of teaching and preaching, casting out demons along the way.

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, Job is in a very bad place. What is one of the worst or darkest experiences you have had to deal with? What helped you move through that time?

3. What do you hear Paul saying to us in the Second Reading?

4. What are forces of evil that you or others have to deal with? What helped you during those times?

5. In the Gospel, Jesus finds time for prayer in the midst of a very busy schedule. Do you have a challenge in this area? If so, how do you make space for prayer as you do all the other things in your daily 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, as I ponder the words of Job, I think of all the people who feel their lives are a drudgery. Please allow your love and mercy to fall upon them.*

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: If possible, reach out to someone who is feeling a lot like Job.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

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

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*Merciful God,
there are some times when we feel like Job,
when we wonder what is the meaning
and purpose of our lives here on earth.
Help us and others to know
that you are always close to us
even when we do not feel your presence.
Help us to be a healing presence for others.
This we pray through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*

SIXTH 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: *Good and gracious God, thank you for enabling us to gather together to listen to your holy Word and to share life and fellowship. May your Holy Spirit show each of us the message you want us to hear today. Cleanse our hearts of all that would prevent us from hearing your Word and acting on it. 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: There is a strong contrast between the First Reading in which lepers must declare themselves "unclean" and the Gospel in which Jesus declares a leper "clean." In the Second Reading, Paul encourages the Corinthians to do all for the glory of God and to protect their unity.

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: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

In Old Testament times, leprosy is a term used to describe a variety of chronic skin diseases. When the priest determines that one has a contagious disease, the person is declared "unclean" and banished from the community. If someone unknowingly approaches the leper, he/she must shout "Unclean! Unclean!" for such *contact* renders the "clean" person "unclean." If a leper is cured, he must go to the priest to undergo purification before he can be readmitted to the community. Because there is widespread belief that leprosy is brought on by sin, lepers are not only physically loathsome and socially dangerous, but are also viewed as morally reprehensible.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 32

This is one of the seven "penitential psalms" in the Psalter. It is a prayer of thanksgiving for the removal of sins.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 10:31-11:1

This reading concludes Paul's teaching on whether it is lawful for Christians to eat food of the meat of animals that had been offered to idols in pagan sacrifices.

Paul sees no problem in eating such food since Christians do not believe in idols. Therefore, the food is not unclean. However, Paul is exhorting the stronger members of this community to be sensitive to the weaker members (or less formed members) to abstain from such food if it might cause a scandal to new members who may still believe that eating such food is a form of idolatry. Paul is encouraging the more formed members of the community to sacrifice some of their freedom for the glory of God. *"Whatever you do ... do for the glory of God."*

When Paul says he seeks *"to please everyone in every way,"* he does not mean that he is giving up his principles in order to be a 'crowd pleaser,' but rather sacrificing his freedom in order to make the Gospel attractive to those he is seeking to evangelize.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:40-45

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

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

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

the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 1:40-45

Although excluded from the community, lepers are allowed to attend synagogue, but they sit behind a protected screen, never daring to come into the main part of the synagogue. While we do not know the exact location of today's event, perhaps it occurs during a synagogue service. Recognizing Jesus to be a holy man, the leper may have done the unthinkable: he rushes from behind the screen and approaches Jesus. He believes Jesus *can* heal him, but he was not sure if Jesus will *want* to heal him. *"If you wish, make me clean."* Then Jesus does the unthinkable, he stretches out his hand and *touches* the *untouchable*, thereby incurring ritual uncleanness. Jesus tells the rejected man: *"Of course I want to heal you. Be made clean."* Jesus' touch heals the man not only on a *physical* level but also on a *social* and *spiritual* level. He no longer feels rejected by the community or by God.

We notice again a reference to the *messianic secret* (explained in last week's commentary). The leper is told not to tell anyone about his healing – but how does one contain wonderful good news? So he runs off and tells everyone. The man is told to go to the priest so he can get a certificate declaring himself clean, enabling him to once again mix with the community and worship with them.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

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

2. I assume all of us have seen the connection between leprosy and Covid-19, which are both very contagious diseases. People are fearful of them. These diseases force people to isolate from the community. For you, what has been the worst part of this Covid-19 pandemic? What helped you or continues to help you during this distressing time?

3. Is there a "leper" inside of you, e.g., a past experience that is untouchable? You don't have to share if you don't want to, but you can ask the group for prayers. What might be examples of "inner lepers" that we might carry within us?

4. Who are the marginalized and 'untouchables' in our society? What can help us deal with these brothers and sisters as Jesus would?

5. Who might be people who may feel unwanted in our parish today? Why? What can be done to overcome this barrier?

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, despite my many faults and failings, you are always ready to welcome me. May I show the same hospitality to those I may tend to exclude.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Think of someone who feels isolated or somewhat excluded. See what you can do to heal that person's sense of isolation.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Especially pray for all who suffer from skin diseases. Pray for those researching a cure. Pray for all who feel excommunicated from society and Church today, e.g., pedophiles.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*God of all people,
remind us that your love knows
no boundaries.*

*You love the outcasts and the oppressed
with a love that is fierce
in its protection and grace.*

*When our lives get too comfortable,
nudge us into going beyond
our own boundaries,
bringing outsiders into the warmth
of our communities.*

*This we pray through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*