

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

### Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *We are back to ordinary time, O Lord. No fasting or feasting, just common, plain time – days drifting into nights and then dawning new days again. Ordinary time is your time to do extraordinary things, like changing water into wine, into ice and snow; tears into laughter, into hugs and kisses. Let us notice your ways of keeping ordinary time. Help us keep time with you. Amen.*

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

**Facilitator reads focus statement:**

The term Ordinary Time refers to the 34 Sundays of the Liturgical Year that are not part of the Advent/Christmas and Lent/Triduum/Easter seasons. Wrapped around these two major seasons are 34 Sundays.

There are two periods of Ordinary Time in our Liturgical Year.

- The first period begins on the day after the *Baptism of the Lord* and continues until Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. This year there are eight Sundays in the first period of Ordinary Time.
- The second period begins on the Monday after Pentecost Sunday and continues until the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent.

The term *Ordinary Time* refers to *ordinal* or counted time: first, second, third, etc. The term is not intended to mean *unimportant*. Every day and every Sunday in our Liturgical Year are important because *every day* is a day that the Lord has made and *every Sunday* is a celebration of the Lord's Resurrection. Yet in another sense, Ordinary Time is ordinary in that it does not focus primarily on the major events in Christ's life that we celebrate during the two major seasons of our Church year. We might say that Ordinary Time developed not so much for what it is, but for what it is not – it is not Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter Time.

The first and third readings use marital images to describe God's relationship with his people. The second reading speaks about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

*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 62:1-5**

These verses from the third section of Isaiah 56-66 were written during the turbulent years after Israel's return from exile in Babylon. During her exile, Israel felt *'forsaken'* and *'desolate.'* The prophet seeks to reassure the people that God has not forgotten them even though they are disloyal to him. The reading opens with God's refusal to be silent in the face of Israel's misfortune: "*For*

*Zion's sake, I will not be silent.*" Nations that hold Israel in contempt will witness the restoration of her status. God, Israel's husband, is coming to reclaim his disloyal bride. There will be a new beginning, a new marriage symbolized by a new name, *'My Delight.'* A second sign of the new beginning is the promise of reconstruction of the land which will now be called *'Espoused.'* Forgiven and rehabilitated, Israel will be restored to its status as

the “espoused and beloved” of God. The God who called us into being offers us a new beginning whenever we call upon him.

## **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 96**

This psalm calls for praise and thanks on the lips of those who have experienced firsthand the saving deeds of Israel.

## **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11**

For the next eight Sundays, the second reading will be from the last three chapters of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. For the next three Sundays, Paul will speak about the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In this reading, Paul is addressing difficulties that have arisen in the community over the exercise of the charismatic gifts. Arrogance and competition over the gifts are threatening to divide the community. Paul reminds his readers of two important facts concerning these wonderful gifts of the Spirit. First, all these gifts are *graces* from God. They have done nothing to earn or deserve them. Second, the gifts are not given so that individuals may think that they are superior to others, but rather for the blessing of the community.

## **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: John 2:1-11**

*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 2:1-11**

In John’s Gospel, miracles are *signs* intended to manifest the *glory* of God through Jesus and to lead people to *faith*. Toward the end of the Gospel, we read the words: “*Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*” Jesus uses a simple wedding occasion to reveal himself as the

bridegroom Israel has waited for, for hundreds of years. He is sent by God to woo and wed a new bride, a new Israel, joining Jews and Gentiles into one body.

A central theme in John’s Gospel is what scholars call *replacement* theology. John presents Jesus as the one who *replaces* Jewish customs, rituals and feasts with himself. Previously used as a means to holiness, these customs and rituals are now *replaced* by Jesus himself, whose teaching, Death and Resurrection saved us and offer us new life.

“*They have no more wine.*” On a literal level, these words mean that the wine for the wedding has run out. But on a deeper level, it signifies the end of one dispensation and the beginning of another, the end of salvation through the observance of the law and purification rites, and the beginning of salvation with our acceptance of Jesus by doing whatever he tells us.

“*My hour has not yet come,*” is a reference to Jesus’ Death and Resurrection. The “*abundance of wine*” is a reference to the resurgence of new life which Jesus brings, and the wine of the Eucharist which symbolizes the new covenant.

Also in his Gospel, John shows Mary as *involved* at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and again at the *end* when she is present at the foot of the cross. Notice how Mary does not draw attention to herself. Rather, she tells the waiters to “*do whatever Jesus tells you to do.*” The essence of faithful discipleship is doing whatever Jesus tells us to do. When it comes to faithful discipleship, Mary is our model. John’s Gospel never calls Mary by her name. At the beginning and end of the Gospel, Jesus addresses his mother, “*Woman,*” which defines her larger role in salvation history as the ‘New Eve,’ the universal woman.

## **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 speaks about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit blesses us with gifts so that we can bless our community. How has the Holy Spirit gifted you so that you can be a blessing to your parish and/or wider community? Might you have a difficult time naming your gift and finding a way to share it with the community?

3. “*They have no more wine*” could symbolize a time when our lives are on empty, when we have no more to give. What helps you to deal with such times?

4. “Everyone serves good wine first... but you have kept the good wine until now.” What does this say about the nature of humanity in contrast to the ways of God?

5. The Gospel is a powerful example of Mary’s intercessory role before the throne of God. How real is this Marian role in your spirituality?

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

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

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: “*Holy Spirit help me to see a gift that you may have given me that I am not using to be a blessing to others.*” “*Mary, help me to be like you and see when others are in need.*”

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestion: Spend time meditating on the belief that “God is my spouse and I am his beloved.” Share the good wine of your companionship with someone who is lonely. Often ask God to bless and make fruitful the gifts he has given you.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?* Suggestion: Pray for all marriages, but especially newlyweds, that they may find the new wine of Christ in each other.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

Lord, Jesus, you remain the bridegroom come to reveal your Father’s extravagant love. In union with many of the saints, we dare to call you the spouse of our souls. May we revel in your passionate love shown on the cross, and reveal that love to those most in need of it.

### **Prayer of Spouses for Each Other**

Lord Jesus, grant that I and my spouse may have a true and understanding love for each other.

Grant that we may both be filled with faith and trust.

Give us the grace to live with each other in peace and harmony.

May we always bear with one another’s weaknesses and grow from each other’s strengths.

Help us to forgive one another’s failings and grant us patience, kindness, cheerfulness, and the spirit of placing the well-being of one another ahead of self.

May the love that brought us together

grow and mature with each passing year. Amen.

From Treasury of Prayers by  
Father Eamon Tobin

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

### Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *“Gracious God, you have revealed your word to us. Your word is always near to us. Open our minds to hear your word, our mouths to speak your word and our hearts to cherish your word. Amen.”*

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

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** In the first reading, the people listen intently as Ezra proclaims the law of God. In the Gospel, the people listen as Jesus proclaims himself to be the fulfillment of God’s law or word. Paul calls for unity in a community blessed with many diverse gifts.

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

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

#### **FIRST READING: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10**

When the Israelites return from exile, not only have the cities to be rebuilt and the land restored, but the people have to be rededicated to God and his Word. Ezra, the priest/scribe, is entrusted with the spiritual renewal and rededication of his people. In today’s reading, Ezra is leading the people in a “covenant renewal” ceremony, at the center of which is a long proclamation of God’s Word (from sunrise to mid-day). The people are very moved as they listen to God’s Word. Everyone is weeping. They realize how they have been unfaithful to God and how much they have missed hearing his Word. The rededication ceremony concludes with a feast.

#### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 19**

The psalm celebrates the goodness and beauty of God’s law, which to the Israelites is the same as God’s Word.

#### **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30**

The Corinthian community is plagued by factions of varying kinds. In today’s reading, Paul is preaching unity without diminishing the value of diversity. Just as each of our physical body parts must work together to ensure the proper

functioning of our whole body, so must all the members of the Church – the Body of Christ – work together. Mutual respect, cooperation and support should characterize the interaction among the members of the community. *Each* gift is valuable and should be used to build up the community.

#### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

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

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

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

#### **GOSPEL: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21**

This gospel joins together the prologue or opening verses of Luke’s Gospel and a visit of Jesus to a synagogue in his home town of Nazareth.

In the opening verses, Luke addresses Theophilus (“friend or lover of God”), who may have been a wealthy patron of Luke. Luke tells us that his gospel is *not* an eyewitness account but one drawn from a tradition that is authoritative and can be relied on.

Then Luke tells us that Jesus’ preaching in Galilee has been anointed and well received in all of the synagogues.

In the final part of today’s gospel (4:14-21), Jesus reads in his home synagogue a passage from Isaiah 61. The verses are often called Jesus’ “Inaugural Address” or “Mission Statement”. When he finishes reading, he makes a bold proclamation. He says:

*Today this scripture  
is fulfilled in your hearing.*

Jesus is saying that *he* is the one filled with the Spirit as spoken by the prophet. He is the one who will inaugurate a new era of deliverance especially for the poor and oppressed. Clearly, Jesus was not going to be a political or military Messiah as the people expected.

### **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 scene described in the first reading is very emotional. All the people are weeping as they listen to the Word of God being proclaimed. When did the Scriptures start to become alive for you?
3. “*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit . . .*” Can you name one time when you felt the power of the Spirit at work in you?
4. In the Gospel, Jesus says that he has come to “bring glad tidings to the poor.” How does your parish seek to continue this mission of Jesus today? How can you participate in this central part of Jesus’ mission?
5. Each week we listen to scripture to hear and share what God is speaking to us. Share a time that you

too have experienced. “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

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

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

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD:**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: “*Dear Jesus, please open my heart to more clearly hear your word spoken to me and the grace to respond more fervently.*” “*Holy Spirit, please help me to recognize my own gifts and appreciate the gifts of all others you send into my life.*”

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Choose a phrase or verse from Jesus’ Inaugural Address and keep it in your heart all week. Be more aware of how the Spirit expects you to bless those around you and your parish with the gift(s) he has given you.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?* Suggestion: Pray for all those who are struggling to let God’s spirit and will be done in them

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Lord God, you have given us your revealed word as spiritual food to nourish your people, and to strengthen your church as the Body of your Son Jesus Christ. May we recognize and partake of this food when we gather at the table of the Word.*

**The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord falls on February 2 and infrequently on a Sunday. When it does it takes precedence over the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Both are presented here for your future use.**

## **PRESENTATION OF THE LORD**

**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-powerful Father, Christ your Son became man for us and was presented in the temple. May he free our hearts from sin and bring us into your presence. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen*

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

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** When solemnities like the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple fall on a Sunday during Ordinary Time, they take precedence over that Sunday. The significance of this feast is brought out in the first reading which speaks of the Lord coming to occupy his temple. In the Gospel, God comes to his Temple in the form of the infant Jesus. In the second reading, Jesus is presented as the high priest who removes the sins of his people.

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

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

### **FIRST READING: Malachi 3:1-4**

Like many of his colleagues, the prophet Malachi has the difficult task of speaking an unwelcome message to the leaders and people of his time. In this post-exilic community, the liturgical and communal life of the people has deteriorated to such an extent that the prophet has to call to task the laxity of the clergy. In today's reading, the prophet speaks about a "messenger" who will come to prepare a way for the Lord who will in turn cleanse his Temple of sinful practices so that worthy worship can once again be offered. Christians, in retrospect, saw the messenger as John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus and who in time would cleanse the Temple of beggars and sellers.

### **PSALM 24**

This is a psalm of praise to the King of Glory.

### **SECOND READING: Hebrews 2:14-18**

As a result of the "Fall," all human beings came under the power of Satan, especially when they sinned. They also lived in the shadow of "fear of death." When Jesus comes, he totally shares our human condition even to the point of death. When God raises Jesus up, he breaks the power of death and the hold that Satan has on humanity. Through his saving work, Jesus becomes a *merciful* and *faithful* high priest before God. Jesus' faithfulness should be a model to all who may be tempted to despair in a time of persecution.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL:  
LUKE 2: 22-40**

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

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

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

**GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40**

Because Mary and Joseph are devout Jews, they are obedient to the laws of their religious tradition. So this holy family makes the journey to the Temple to fulfill three different religious rites all related to the birth of Jesus: *purification, redemption and presentation.*

*Purification.* In biblical religions, contact with blood made a person unclean and ineligible to enter the Temple for worship. Bringing to the Temple a “sin offering,” a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons (the offering for a poor couple) cleanses Mary and restores her to the worshipping community.

*Redemption.* According to Ex 13:1-2, every male child belonged to God and must be “brought back” (redeemed); a male child was redeemed at the end of one month for five sanctuary shekels (Nm 18:16). Luke mentions no payment for Jesus for he already belongs to God. Luke downplays the redemption ritual by saying that the purpose of the visit to Jerusalem is to present Jesus to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord (2:22-23).

*Presentation.* Technically, there is neither any biblical law nor any known custom pertaining to the presentation of a child in the Temple. Luke is using this language to allude to the story of Hannah presenting her child Samuel to Eli for service at the Sanctuary (1Sam 1:22-24). Luke’s purpose is to show that the Holy Family is obedient to the law of

the Lord. This obedience to God in all things will characterize Jesus’ life and bring his mission to completion on the cross.

This story also signals Jesus’ single-minded devotion to his Father and how that must transcend even his devotion to his earthly parents.

Finally, the story features two very devout Jews, who have waited all their lives for this moment. *Simeon* means “God has heard.” He speaks an ominous word to Mary about “*a sword that will pierce her heart*” – an obvious reference to the sufferings Mary will endure because she is the mother of Jesus. A prophetess, *Anna*, whose name means “grace or favor,” is presented as the ideal Jewess. Being widowed, childless and old, she is totally dependent on God’s mercy and perfectly equipped to recognize it when it appears. She heralds the Child as the one who will redeem Jerusalem.

**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. “*Lo! I am sending you as a messenger to prepare the way before you.*” How are you or how can you be a messenger of the Lord?
3. How important are the rules and customs of our Catholic tradition to you? What role do they play in your life?
4. Who are the Anna’s and Simeon’s in your life and/or parish? What role do they play?
5. If you are the parent of a child who has reached or passed through teenage years, share what it was like for you when your teenager made his/her “break for freedom and independence.” If not a parent, share how it was for you to break loose from your parents’ protective care.

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

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

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Lord, help me to have the courage to accept the persecutions and to witness to you.*

### **RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestion: Write a note of thanks to one of the Anna's and Simeon's in your life, thanking them for their ministry of care.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray?* Suggestion: Pray for all children being presented to the community for baptism. Pray for their parents and godparents that they may be graced with the wisdom to guide the child in the ways of Christ by word and deed.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (Together)**

### **Prayer for Family Unity**

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

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

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

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

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

From *Treasury of Prayers* by  
Father Eamon Tobin



## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

### Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Loving God, thank you for gathering us together. You formed each of us in our mother's womb and appointed us to be your ambassador in our families and communities. May your Holy Spirit breathe upon us so that we will understand and act on the word you speak to us during our time together. 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:** Both Jeremiah and Jesus are sent by God to be God's spokesmen to the nations. Both experience strong resistance from the people. The second reading is Paul's famous hymn on the nature of love.

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

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

#### FIRST READING: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

In calling Jeremiah to be God's prophet or mouthpiece, God makes three assertions: 1) "*I formed you*"—a reference to how God is our potter and we his clay; 2) "*I knew you*"—a reference to the intimate relationship between God and Jeremiah; and 3) "*I dedicated you*"—a reference to how God has consecrated Jeremiah to do God's work.

God prepares Jeremiah for the resistance he will receive from the people. "*Kings and priests will oppose you, but they will not prevail*" for God will strengthen Jeremiah to withstand all rejection. During his lifetime, Jeremiah, like Jesus, is a total failure, but in time he is recognized as one of Israel's greatest prophets. Jeremiah is a wonderful example of "the triumph of failure."

#### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 71

This psalm expresses the feelings of one who encounters opposition but trusts deeply in God's protection. We can envision both Jeremiah and Jesus praying this psalm.

#### SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 12:31–13:13

In his commentary on *First Corinthians*, Richard Hays states that the purpose of 1Cor. 13 is to portray love as the *sine qua non* ("without which there is nothing") of the Christian life, and to insist that love must:

- Govern the exercise of all the gifts of the Spirit (12:4-11, 27-31).
- Inform and inspire the mutual respect and relatedness of all members of the community (12:12-26).
- Be the motivation that draws the praying community together for the liturgy of the Lord's Supper (11:17-33).
- Guide both the weak and the strong members of the community in making decisions so that they may not offend the consciences of others, e.g., eating meat offered to idols (8:1-13).
- Prompt the caring correction of brothers or sisters who have sinned (5:1-13).
- Assist in overcoming whatever divisions threaten the unity of the Church (1:10-17).
- Inspire generosity in the hearts of those from whom Paul requests a collection for the poor (16:1-4).

Perhaps Paul's intent is best summed up in his own words: "*Your every act should be done with love*" (16:14).

Having established love as an ethical principle and a way of life without which the manifestation of spiritual gifts has no meaning or value (1-3), Paul proceeds to describe what love (now personified) does and does not do. After stating that love is patient and kind, Paul lists eight things that love is *not*, namely, jealous, pompous, rude, etc.

Paul's reference to his childhood may be a subtle challenge to readers to "grow up," to look at love and learn from love, and thereby grow to maturity in Christ who is the love of God incarnate. In the concluding verses, Paul speaks about the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. These will remain, insists Paul. However, when believers pass through death to eternal life, *faith* will yield to seeing God "face to face," *hope* will be fulfilled, and *love* will endure forever.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 4:21-30**

*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: Luke 4:21-30**

In this continuation of last Sunday's Gospel, the people react to Jesus' "Inaugural Address." Initially, they were very enthusiastic and were "amazed at his gracious words." But then things suddenly go sour. They question Jesus and his identity: "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" Jesus responds: "No prophet is accepted in his native place." Then Jesus makes reference to the *Gentiles* (people like the widow of Zarephath and Namaan) who were more open to the prophets than the Jewish people. This reference to the *Gentiles* (the

archenemies of the Jews) and Jesus' desire to include the *Gentiles* in his plan of salvation infuriate the people. They try to kill Jesus but he escapes for his "*hour has not yet come.*" This event foreshadows the opposition and rejection that Jesus will experience in future years.

### **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. God truly wants to use each one of us to be his representative in our families, places of work and recreation. What can block and help us from living this vocation?
3. Gandhi, a Hindu, reached out to Muslims. Yitzak Rabin, a Jew, reached out to the Palestinians. Archbishop Romero of El Salvador reached out to the poor. All were killed. Why do we kill our prophets? Why are prophets hard to take?
4. See paragraph 3 of the second reading which says: "love is patient...is not rude, etc." Which of the eight negatives (jealousy, conceit, etc.) do you find most challenging to keep out of your life?
5. In the Gospel, a mob mentality takes over. Do you ever have to deal with a mob mentality as you seek to practice your faith? Can you name examples of mob mentalities prevalent in our society 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**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: *“Dear Lord, you called me into being for your purpose, please help me to love enough to fulfill your plan.” “Please open my eyes to see how I reject others and open my heart to truly love them.”*

## **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Forgive someone who has rejected you. Meditate on the second reading and replace the word “Love” with your name, e.g., “Joe is patient...Joe is kind” ...and see how you do.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?* Suggestion: Pray for all those who are met with rejection even violence.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Source of love and life, you have called us to be your instruments from the moment of our existence. Give us a prophet’s courage and a disciple’s ability to love, even when living the words and ways of Jesus is difficult. Help us remember that you are always with us so that we can do unto others as you do unto us – love without end. Amen*

## **What is love? Children know.**

*Children, ages 4 to 8, were asked, “What does love mean?” Here are some of their answers:*

1. “When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That’s love.” (Rebecca, age 8)

2. “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.” (Billy, age 4)

3. “Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.” (Karl, age 5)

4. “Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.” (Danny, age 7)

5. “Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.” (Bobby, age 7)

6. “If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend whom you hate.” (Nikka, age 6)

7. “Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.” (Noelle, age 7)

8. “I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones.” (Lauren, age 4)

9. “Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your french fries without making them give you any of theirs.” (Chrissy, age 6)

10. “Love is what makes you smile when you’re tired.” (Terri, age 4)

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together to share our lives and your holy Word. Anoint us with your Holy Spirit so that each of us may hear the word you want us to hear. Unworthy though we are, may we, like Isaiah, Paul and Peter, say 'Yes' to your call and never be afraid to launch out into the deep. 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 clear theme of vocation in all three readings. Notice how Isaiah, Paul and Peter all feel unworthy to be chosen by God to be his agents in the world. In the second reading, Paul, like Isaiah states his unworthiness to preach 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: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8**

Isaiah shares with us how God calls him to the prophetic ministry during a liturgical celebration in the Temple. We notice three movements: 1) the *theophany* (God's appearance to Isaiah); 2) Isaiah's *purification*; and 3) his 'Yes' to God's call. In the theophany, God discloses himself as Most Holy ("Holy, Holy, Holy!"). Isaiah catches a glimpse of the awesome majesty and mystery of God. Thereupon, Isaiah becomes aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness before God, and concedes that he is as a "man of unclean lips, living among an unclean people." Then God uses one of his angels to cleanse Isaiah. Purified of sin, Isaiah is now very ready to go and be God's spokesman. During his ministry, he will frequently speak of God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness.

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 138**

This psalm is a very appropriate response for Isaiah and us after we have experienced the awesome presence of God.

### **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Paul reassures his readers that the Good News he shares with them is not his own creation but rather a message received from Christ himself who died and has risen. His Resurrection was testified by many. Just like Isaiah in the first reading and Peter in the Gospel, Paul testifies to his own unworthiness to preach the Gospel. Yet, unworthy though he is, God calls him. Paul especially challenges the Corinthians to accept Jesus' Resurrection, not as someone's nice idea, but as a historical fact.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11**

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

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

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

## **GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11**

Isaiah experiences God in the Temple; Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus; and Peter encounters him at his place of work. Jesus' presence in the boat symbolizes his presence in and with the Church. Peter's lack of success at catching fish symbolizes the "futility" of pastoral ministry without the presence and power of God. Discouragement is part and parcel of life, but we must not let it get us down. We must keep throwing out the net. In this Gospel, Jesus is calling to himself disciples who will in turn "catch" others for Christ by the "bait" of God's Word.

### **FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Isaiah, Paul and Peter felt unworthy to do God's work. Have you ever felt like that before God? What helps you to deal with any sense of unworthiness that you may feel?
3. It has been said (and our first reading seems to bear this out) that "the closer we get to God, the more we will be aware of our sinfulness." Comment.
4. Most Catholics have a deep resistance to "catching others" for Christ. How can we help each other to overcome this resistance? If you have a story to tell in this area, share it.
5. What is one thing you must walk away from to more closely follow Jesus?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

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

## **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: *"Dear Jesus, in each and every moment, in every encounter with others, you call me to be who you created me to be. Please help me to hear and respond more fully – Yes!" "Please remove my fears of unworthiness and inadequacy that prevent or impede my complete consent."*

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Think of one person you may be able to invite back to church or to get closer to Christ. Begin to pray for this person. When the time seems right, invite the person to church or to join your small group.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?*  
Suggestion: Pray for all those who feel unworthy of acceptance and love.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*O Holy God,  
we pray that we may be open  
to recognizing your holy presence  
wherever and however you show yourself to us.  
Do not let fear of our unworthiness prevent us  
from responding to your invitation to serve you in  
whatever way you ask.*

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Lord, in your Word today, you say to us, "Blessed are those who meditate upon your Word and place their trust in you." Bless us now, Lord, as we gather together to meditate upon your word and help us to always place our trust in you and not in the things of this world. Amen.*

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

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The first reading *contrasts* the wicked who place their trust in people, with the righteous who place their trust in God. The gospel is Luke's Sermon on the Plain which also speaks about trust in God. The second reading emphasizes the centrality of the resurrection in the Christian life.

*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 17:5-8**

Jeremiah conducts his ministry during a time when Israel's leaders shift their trust in God and place it in the leaders of pagan nations. Today's verses from Jeremiah are directed toward Israel's leaders and all who place their trust not in God but in people. Those who place their whole trust in people are compared to a "barren bush in the desert." The wise or righteous who place their trust in God are compared to a tree planted by the waterside. Such people are secure and productive because they are rooted in God.

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 1**

This psalm is a clear echo of the first reading. There is a contrast between the good and wicked, between human and divine counsel. What matters, most of all, is a God-centered life which ultimately will not disappoint.

### **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20**

It seems that some of the Christians in Corinth raise some questions about the resurrection. In response, Paul reasserts the central importance of the resurrection to the Christian life. Without it, all else

crumbles. If there is no resurrection, there is no victory over sin and death, and our faith is in vain.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 6:17, 20-26**

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

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

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

### **GOSPEL: Luke 6:17, 20-26**

This weekend and next weekend, we will listen to excerpts from what may be the most challenging verses in Luke's gospel, his "Sermon on the Plain."

Jesus takes the accepted beliefs of his day and stands them on their heads. He names four groups of people who would have been regarded as very blest, and states that they are anything but blest. And he takes four groups who would have been regarded as cursed and pronounced them blest.

Jesus is speaking to a situation in which the economically poor are reduced to begging—they are marginalized. The rich and better-off members of the community fail in their covenant with God by not coming to the rescue of the poor. When this happens, God sides with the poor and speaks on their behalf. Let's now look briefly at each of the four sets of blessings and woes.

*Blessed are the poor... and woe to the rich.*

The poor are not blest because they are materially destitute; rather, they are blest because they are able to place their trust in God in the midst of poverty. They are blest because God is on their side. The rich are not cursed simply because they are materially well off, but because of their failure to come to the rescue of the poor by generously sharing their blessings with them. They are having their reward *now* but they will lose out big time in the reign of God.

*Blessed are the hungry... woe to the full.*

Jesus is not saying it's a blessing to be starving and a curse to have a good meal. He is saying we are blessed if we can keep trusting in God in empty/hungry times. It is also a blessing if we are hungry for God. It is a curse if our "plenty" times lead us to ignore God. It is a curse to be spiritually self-satisfied.

*Blessed are you if weeping... woe if laughing.*

It is a blessing if we mourn for our sins and for the injustices in our world and for the losses we experience in life. It is not a curse to be happy, but it is a curse if our laughter is a cover-up for our sadness or if it is at the expense of others. Some become rich at the expense of others.

*Blessed are you if people hate you... woe if people speak well of you.*

We are blessed if people reject us because of our love for Jesus. On the other hand, it is a curse to be spoken well of in a world that rejects Jesus.

Poverty, hunger, tears and rejection are *not* to be sought after. But if they come to us as a result of our following Jesus, then they are blessings. God can turn poverty, hunger, tears and rejection into blessings. We see this when people in bad times turn to God and convert to his ways. On the other

hand, a good financial portfolio could lead to our spiritual demise. In Jesus' sermon on the plain, he is saying that a key part of living in his kingdom invokes standing with the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the persecuted and the marginalized. Finally, the beatitudes only make sense to one who has fully embraced the ways of Jesus. To the rest, they are nonsense.

## 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 verse in today's readings makes you feel most uncomfortable? What verse challenges you the most?
3. What would you name as blessings and curses in your life?
4. What are the things you hunger for the most? What is the deepest desire of your heart?
5. The sin of Pride is glaringly evident in today's gospel. How are you challenged to be more humble?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

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

## PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "Dear Lord, I trust in you, yet I am still disappointed or dumbfounded when I fail others or others fail me – please give me a heart to love like you in betrayal." "Please help me to

*change my perception of 'blessed' for both myself and others to Jesus 'perception.'*

## **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: Spend some time meditating on where you tend to place your security. While we would all like to say, "My trust is in God alone," how true is that in your life?

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?*  
Suggestion: Pray for all who feel "less than" that they may know their stature as a child of God.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Ever-loving God,  
you promise to be with us at  
all times and in all places.*

*In times of blessing, help us give thanks  
by sharing that blessing with others.*

*In times of woe, help us remember to turn to you,  
refresh the waters of Baptism in which we are  
planted, and live with Resurrection hope.*

*Amen*



## SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Merciful God, thank you for gathering us together to share life and your Word. In your Word today you challenge us to forgive all who have hurt us. Bless us with your saving mercy so that we may show mercy to all who have offended and hurt us. 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 gospel, Jesus calls us to love our enemies. In the first reading, we have a concrete example of David forgiving his enemy Saul. In the second reading, Paul contrasts the first and second Adam, the natural and spiritual man.

*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: 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23**

This story is filled with human intrigue and divine mystery. It contrasts the respect David had for God's anointed with the murderous intent of Saul. Although David was the one being hunted, Saul was the one caught. Saul had an army of 3,000 men, while David had one companion. Clearly, God delivered Saul into David's hand. David refused to take advantage of his enemy's vulnerability because he was God's anointed. By removing Saul's spear and water jug, David was rendering the King defenseless and without provisions needed to survive.

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 103**

This psalm reminds us that it is the Lord's prior forgiveness toward us that is the origin of our own capacity to forgive others.

### **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49**

Paul continues his catechesis or teaching on the resurrection. In these verses he contrasts the ordinary human body with the resurrected body that believers will receive. He begins by making a clear distinction between the first man, Adam and the last

man, Christ. Adam's body was made from the earth; Christ's body was created in heaven. Then Paul says that just as humankind shares in the limitations of the first Adam, limitations that eventually lead to death, believers in Christ will share in Christ's victory over death, a victory that includes the promise of the resurrected life of the "spiritual body". The reading ends with Paul saying that just as we were born with the image of the first Adam, so shall we end up with the image of the last man, Christ, possessing a spiritual and transformed body.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 6:27-38**

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

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

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

## **GOSPEL: Luke 6:27-38**

In this gospel, we continue to listen to Jesus' *Sermon on the Plain*. Today's focus is love of enemies. Jesus challenges us not only to *not* retaliate against one's enemies, but also to do them well: *love* them, *do good* to them, *bless* and *pray* for them. Then Jesus gives practical examples of how we are to show our love for the enemy: turn the other cheek when he strikes you, give your tunic to the one who takes your cloak, lend your money without expecting it back. Jesus tells us: "*If we only love those who love us, we are no better than the pagans.*" The real test of our Christianity is our ability to love those who dislike, despise, or hurt us. Obviously, such love is impossible without a full-hearted cooperation with the grace of God.

Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that we must stop judging and condemning, and we are to give generously to others. In all of this, Jesus is our model. While dying on the cross, he forgave Pilate, the soldiers, the crowd who yelled, "Crucify him!", and his disciples for abandoning him. Also, David models forgiveness for us in the first reading; and Paul, we assume, forgave all those who stoned him, beat him up, and spread nasty rumors about him. Modern day disciples like Saint Pope John Paul II, Nelson Mandela, and those who forgive the people who murdered their families all show us that with the grace of God we can forgive what seems unforgivable. The more we work at forgiving all who have hurt us, the more we will become like Jesus. We will become a living image of the compassionate and forgiving Christ in the world.

### **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. Jesus tells us first to stop judging, then condemning and finally forgive. It is as if he is pointing out our sins so we can be more merciful. Do you judge and/or condemn?

3. Why are some people able to forgive huge hurts (e.g., murder of a loved one) while many of us are unable or unwilling to forgive much lesser hurts?

4. What are blocks and helps to forgiving life's hurts?

5. Have you ever had to forgive God or church? If so, what helped you to do this?

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

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

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "*Dear Lord, please open our eyes to see forgiveness not as defeat but as a restoration of dignity – as David over Saul and Jesus over all who crucify him. Please help us to be as compassionate and forgiving of our own sins as we are of others.*"

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: If there is someone you need to forgive, begin to pray for that grace. If there is no one you need to forgive, pray for people struggling with resentment, grudges or with a spirit of revenge and unforgiveness.

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?*  
Suggestion: Pray for all those who are judged, condemned and/or unable to forgive.

**CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Merciful God,  
how many times have you forgiven me  
when I have sinned or taken me back  
when I have turned away from you?  
Thank you for the many ways in  
which you love me.  
Help me learn how to love others  
the way that you love me:  
unconditionally, compassionately, kindly,  
and with great mercy.  
Help me learn how to do unto others  
as you do unto me each day.*

See Fr. Tobin's book *How to Forgive Yourself & Others*, Liguori Publications.

## EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME Cycle C

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

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** Good and gracious God, thank you for gathering us together to share faith and fellowship. Mold us in the likeness of Christ as witnesses of the Gospel. Strengthen us in the service of others in a world hungering for peace and justice. We ask this through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in union with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The first reading and the Gospel state that our words and deeds are a window to our soul and character. In the second reading, Paul concludes his discourse on the resurrection.

*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: Sirach 27:4-7**

This reading has four proverbs. In different ways, each of the proverbs states that speech is a sure key to character. By using the image of a "sieve" and the "potter's furnace," the writer suggests that the words a person speaks help the listener to sift through the chaff of outward appearances and first impressions and to arrive at the speaker's true self. Just as an orchard is judged by the quality of its fruit, so a person's words show us what kind of person he or she is.

### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 92**

This psalm encourages the use of speech to give praise to God.

### **SECOND READING: 1Cor 15:54-58**

Paul concludes his teaching on the resurrection. In and through Jesus' Resurrection, death, sin and the law have been overcome. Death, like a preying viper, has its sting which is sin. It is this venom of sin which destroys life and leads to final death. But Christ has defeated the power of sin and so has

taken the sting out of death. This should spur us on to persevere in doing the Lord's work.

### **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 6:39-45**

*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: Luke 6:39-45**

Today's Gospel is a continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. The passage has four short parables. A key to understanding all four parables lies in the message behind the parable about the plank in one's eye. The disciple who admits no personal faults is no better than a blind guide; his influence is useless

to others. But if the disciple makes an effort to be like his teacher Jesus, his actions will be beneficial for himself and others. The disciple whose eyes are focused on Jesus is like a healthy fig tree producing good fruit. His words and deeds have integrity which can influence others to be faithful followers of Jesus. Today's first and third readings call us to examine our speech and deeds for they usually reflect what is in our heart.

### **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, our speech is the test of our true nature. What steps do you need take to make your speech more kind/more gracious?
3. Most, if not all of us are blind to our own faults. What can help us to prevent this from happening?
4. Psychologists often say that the attitudes and behaviors we dislike most in others are often present in our own lives, e.g., a very controlling person often criticizes others who are bossy and overbearing. What do you think of this? What are other examples of behaviors that we (or others), may have that we may criticize in others?
5. Name one area of your life that you would like to bear more fruit e.g., you may like to be better at sharing your faith with others. What action do you need to take to help you to be more fruit bearing in the area you named?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

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

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestions: "Dear Lord, we profoundly know that you are the potter and we are the clay, help us to reveal your goodness in all we say and do." "Please help us to see our own beams and others' splinters with the compassionate eyes of our hearts."

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: This week, pay particular attention to those attitudes and behaviors you criticize in others and see if those same traits may be present in your life. Observe the way you talk to others. What might your manner of speech tell others about you?

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

**FACILITATOR:** *What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?*  
Suggestion: Pray for those who are mute or have a speech impediment and for those with seeing and hearing handicaps.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Holy God,  
you have spoken your Word to us in the life,  
death and resurrection of your Son,  
Jesus Christ.  
Help me learn from his use of words  
to remove whatever blinds me or keeps me  
self-centered and to see as you see in order to  
produce the fruit of healing and life-giving love  
that Jesus speaks to us.*