

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

April—2010

The following series is **free, downloadable small-group materials** based on each week's Mass readings and taking into account the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minute format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.**
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see this passage tying into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Gospel Reading, and the Second Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear the Scripture is read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.**

Sincerely in Christ,

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

EASTER SUNDAY—April 4, 2010

Introduction: Easter, when delight was turned to disappointment and disappointment was turned to delight. Surely Satan and the forces of evil must have thought they had won the great battle. If the forces of evil could have danced, surely they must have been dancing in the streets. They thought they had killed the Son of God.

Darkness seemed to have been reigning supreme from the time when Judas and an armed crowd, came to arrest Jesus under the cloak of darkness. Darkness provided the cover for the evil intentions of those persecuting Jesus but also for the shameful abandonment of Jesus by his disciples. Even Peter had to slink away into the darkness to hide his shame.

How the forces of evil must have rejoiced as “from noon onward there was darkness over the whole land,” until at last Jesus “gave up his spirit.” How they must have believed that this darkness was just a foretaste of the spiritual darkness which would envelope the earth unabated by the Light of the World. But God had another plan and turned their delight to disappointment.

While darkness still seemed to reign, Mary Magdalene and her companions, and later Peter and John, came “while it was still dark” only to find an empty tomb. Disappointment upon disappointment, or so it seemed at first. But when they realized that the face cloth was separate from the other burial wrappings, a ray of hope and light pierced the darkness, never to be extinguished again. Rather, it was a ray of hope and light which was to grow in brilliance as Christ’s resurrection became known and its meaning understood. Praise God, disappointment is now turned to delight!

“The New Testament writers speak as if Christ’s achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the ‘first fruits’, the ‘pioneer of life’. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.” (C.S. Lewis, from *Miracles*)

Christ’s arrest, suffering, death, burial and resurrection introduced a new creation, a new life that has not only escaped the bonds of death but also the chains of enslavement to our natural passions and their subsequent evil behavior. With Jesus’ resurrection comes power to live differently. Jesus introduces a whole new perspective and purpose to life—life lived in union and communion with the Trinity. This new-creation life is described in Ephesians 5 as walking in the Light because through the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence we are able to see life with new insight. In addition, walking in the Light implies a life of holiness is possible, free from the shadows of darkness.

Wherever or whenever you are experiencing darkness of the soul, Jesus is there, a Light shining in darkness just as John said in the beginning of his Gospel. We should no longer shrink into our fears believing the lie that evil will triumph, but follow the disciples’ example and seek out the resurrected Christ. He is risen, he is triumphant, we are in him, full recipients of his victory. In Christ, we are a new creation, and can experience living as a new creation in the peace and power of Jesus. Contrary to the disciple in today’s Gospel reading, we need not see and believe, but instead we have the opportunity to believe and see.

First Reading — Acts 10:34, 37-43

34 Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. ... 37 what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and (in) Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. 40 This man God raised (on) the third day and granted that he be visible, 41 not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commissioned us to preach to

the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

1. To what do you attribute this great change in Peter from being one who cowardly denied Christ to one who boldly proclaimed him?

2. How do you feel about being a witness? What makes it difficult? What makes it easy?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

1 Give thanks to the LORD, who is good, whose love endures forever.

2 Let the house of Israel say: God's love endures forever. ...

16 the LORD'S right hand is raised; the LORD'S right hand strikes with power."

17 I shall not die but live and declare the deeds of the LORD. ...

22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.

Second Reading — Colossians 3:1-4

1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

2 Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

3. What does "your life hidden with Christ in God" mean to you?

4. What have you found helpful to enable you to "set your mind on things above"?

Gospel Reading — John 20:1-9

1 On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." 3 So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. 4 They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; 5 he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. 6 When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, 7 and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. 8 Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. 9 For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

5. What is the significance of such detail in reporting the resurrection?

6. Through this incident, what value do you see of living your faith in companionship with other believers?

7. The events at the tomb provide an analogy of the conversion process. In what ways are we to be evidence of Jesus' resurrection?

The New American Bible, (Nashville, Tennessee: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) 1997.
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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY—April 11, 2010

Introduction: Easter has come, the stone has been rolled away, the work of salvation finished! Now it is time to receive marching orders, now is the time for us to assume the mission. In all of this week's readings we have some aspect of empowerment for mission; the Holy Spirit is given, the Word is sent, the disciples have been imbued with miraculous power. Why? So that they might go forth into the world with the message of salvation even as Jesus went forth into the world; "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

The story is told of an imaginary conversation that took place between St. Michael and Jesus after his ascension into heaven. St. Michael asked, "Jesus, now that you have returned to heaven what are your plans for reaching the world with the Good News?" Jesus replied, "I've given the task to my disciples." St. Michael, knowing that the disciples were "unlearned and ignorant" people, asked, "What is your back-up plan if they fail?" Jesus replied, "I have no back-up plan!"

And so it is, Jesus fully entrusted the task of world evangelization to us, his Church. When Jesus appeared to the Church he gave them peace, he gave them purpose, and he gave them power—and he gave them a mission. We believe and have just recently celebrated that we too were there at the cross, fully included in the saving work of Christ. It is essential that we understand that we were also there, fully included in the commission which Christ gave to his followers. If we profess our inclusion in the first truth and deny our inclusion in the second truth, we deceive ourselves. Full experience of the saving work of Christ propels believers to willingly participate in the mission of Christ. It (salvation) is the cause that brings about the effect; desire to share the Good News. If there is no urgency or willingness to participate in the mission we must question whether we have fully experienced and understood the gift of salvation. In Pope Paul VI's words, "It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 24)

Thomas gives us some great insight into the chemistry of believing. He did not say, "I cannot believe," but rather, "I will not believe." He had more evidence than we do but he willed to not believe. Consequently, Jesus sought Thomas, offered evidence of his resurrection, and invited him to conversion: "Do not be faithless but believe." And Thomas did believe. In like manner Jesus commissions us to go forth into our world to offer non-believers the opportunity to believe and experience conversion.

"Adult faith is clearly and explicitly rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus lived in the Christian community. 'The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps.' Our understanding of the person and the way of Jesus continues to grow by our meditation on the word of God, by prayer and sacrament, by our efforts to follow Jesus' example, and by the sure guidance of the Church's teachings." (*Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, 55)

The responsibility is ours, we cannot and should not attempt to shirk it. "To the question, 'why mission?' we reply with the Church's faith and experience that true liberation consist in opening oneself to the love of Christ. In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. ... *Mission is an issue of faith*, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us.

"Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God." (*Mission of the Redeemer*, 11)

First Reading — Acts 5:12-16

12 Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. 13 None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. 14 Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. 15 Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. 16 A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured

1. How do you see Christ's power manifested today in the lives of people?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

2 Let the house of Israel say: God's love endures forever. 3 Let the house of Aaron say, God's love endures forever. 4 Let those who fear the LORD say, God's love endures forever. ...

13 I was hard pressed and falling, but the LORD came to my help. 14 The LORD, my strength and might, came to me as savior. 15 The joyful shout of deliverance is heard in the tents of the victors: "The LORD'S right hand strikes with power; ... 22 The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. 24 This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad.

Second Reading — Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19

9 I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. 10 I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, 11 which said, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands 13 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest.

17 When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, 18 the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. 19 Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards.

2. How does John's experience with the risen Christ affect your experience with the risen Christ?

Gospel Reading — John 20:19-31

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. 23 Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

24 Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe."

28 Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of (his) disciples that are not written in this book. 31 But these are written that you may (come to) believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

3. To whom is the commission, in verse 21, given?

4. Explain what you believe about your having been sent forth by Jesus.

5. To what extent are you able to identify with Thomas?

6. Verse 31 speaks of the need and hope of believing. What synonyms define and amplify what Jesus meant when he spoke of believing?

Scripture text is from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, (New York: The National Council of Churches) 1997, c1994. *Reflecting On Sunday's Readings*, Copyright 2002-2010, Richard A. Cleveland.

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER—April 18, 2010

Introduction: This week's Gospel Reading tells of Jesus' third appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. The first and second appearances were recorded in the passage we reflected on in last week's Gospel Reading. In the first post resurrection appearance Jesus breathes on his disciples the Holy Spirit and gives them the Great Commission. In the second post resurrection appearance he dispels Thomas' doubts and welcomes him into a full faith. This third appearance which we read about this week re-emphasizes Jesus' power and authority, it re-institutes the basis of communion, and reaffirms the command to "follow me."

Seven disciples, Peter, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee, Thomas and two others, return from an unsuccessful night of fishing just as the sun is rising. As they near shore they encounter a man who calls to them and tells them to cast the net on the right side of the fishing boat, which they do. Surely, there must have been something unusual and commanding about Jesus for these tired fishermen to pay any attention to him. Having been raised in Maine near the harbor, I can assure you that if you or I stood on the shore and similarly instructed tired professional fisherman, who had spent the early hours in fishing failure, how to fish, we would quickly discover how little attention would be given to us. But Peter and the disciples did as they were instructed and surprisingly hauled in a potentially net-breaking catch of 153 large fish. The significance of this event was immediately obvious. John instantly recognized that it was Jesus, and Peter knowing who had orchestrated this miracle dove into the water and swam to shore, abandoning everything to once again experience Jesus' presence. Jesus was recognized by the power and authority that resides in him.

Previously, the last meal they ate with Jesus was the Passover meal which he hosted for them on the night in which he was betrayed. We must keep in mind that Jesus' subsequent betrayal was not only Judas' notorious act, but also the notorious abandonment of Jesus by all his disciples, though John later stood with him at the cross. It was there in that upper room, that Jesus prepared a meal within the meal, for he took the common bread and wine of the Passover meal and offered it as the meal of his body and blood, the body and blood of a new and everlasting covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Surely, experiencing a little bit of residual guilt, the disciples must have rejoiced to see that their Lord had prepared another meal for them, provided the substance of the meal, and invited them to partake. As he broke the bread and distributed it to them how they must have rejoiced remembering that previous meal and the assurance of forgiveness. In spite of past sins and failures communion with Jesus was possible on the basis of his provision and grace.

Then the focus uncomfortably shifts to Peter. We wonder if Jesus did not detect in Peter doubts regarding the full extent of Jesus' forgiveness toward him. Luke's Gospel tells us Jesus warned Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Did Peter and the others recall both Jesus' words of warning and the words of hope, or did Peter simply recall in his heart his three-fold denial of Jesus?

In any case, Jesus three times asks Peter the same question, "Do you love me?" With each assurance by Peter Jesus affirmingly replies, "Feed my sheep." Jesus further assures Peter of the significance of his future contribution by indicating how Peter would die in service to God's glory. Lastly, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me," once again offering to Peter a lifetime of companionship as he fulfills Jesus' call to follow him. Communion was now complete for Peter, forgiveness fully experienced, and purpose fully restored.

No doubt we can see ourselves in the lives of these ordinary men who became Apostles of the Church. Were they so very much unlike us? No. Rather we find that we have much in common with them. We too have tasted the joy of Jesus' fellowship. We too have denied him, all too frequently. He also offers us forgiveness and a lifetime of companionship. He too calls to us, "Follow me." Consequently, these events in their lives were written for our example that we might learn from them and follow their Lord, and ours, with our whole heart.

First Reading — Acts 5:27-32, 40-41

27 When they had brought them in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them,
28 "We gave you strict orders (did we not?) to stop teaching in that name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us."
29 But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men."
30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree.

31 God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, as is the holy Spirit that God has given to those who obey him." ...

40 After recalling the apostles, they had them flogged, ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. 41 So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name..

1. How do Peter and the disciples' behavior in this passage compare to their behavior in the Gospel Reading?
2. At what point should we be willing to suffer and if necessary even oppose authority in order to be witnesses?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 30:2-3, 5-7

1 A psalm. A song for the dedication of the temple. Of David. 2 I praise you, LORD, for you raised me up and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. 3 O LORD, my God, I cried out to you and you healed me. ...

5 Sing praise to the LORD, you faithful; give thanks to God's holy name. 6 For divine anger lasts but a moment; divine favor lasts a lifetime. At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing. 7 Complacent, I once said, "I shall never be shaken."

Second Reading — Revelation 5:11-14

11 I looked again and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, 12 and they cried out in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing." 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." 14 The four living creatures answered, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

3. If you could do one thing in your life, or with your life to show that you believe, "Worthy is the Lamb," what would it be?

Gospel Reading — John 21:1-14 (Short Form)

1 After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. 2 Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

5 Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." 6 So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. 7 So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. 8 The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish.

9 When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

4. How has Jesus proven his power and authority to you?
5. What lessons does this passage teach about dealing with people's failures?
6. What do you think was the motive that led Peter to a lifetime of service to Christ?

The New American Bible, (Nashville, Tennessee: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) 1997.
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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—April 25, 2010

Introduction: In a world noted for divisions between people, Jesus' statement that, "I and the Father are one," stands out in stark contrast. Whereas "oneness" is the hallmark of the Divine relationship, disunity is the hallmark of humankind's relationships. Wherever we look in the world, division and its accompanying hostility is rampant; nation against nation, culture against culture, race against race, party against party, individual against individual, husband against wife, sibling against sibling, child against parent, and unfortunately even Christian against Christian. Everywhere we look people are attempting to establish their value by devaluing others, and to establish their prosperity at the cost of others. In the midst of all this hatred and conflict Jesus stands in stark contrast declaring that unity and oneness define his eternal relationship with the Father.

From the beginning Christ offered the world a chance to unite as one, bringing individuals from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" into one united body of love. Though Christianity was born from within Judaism, Christ had forever intended to be a "light for the Gentiles" as well. Finally, people who previously would have had little or nothing to do with one another are made "one" in Christ. Jesus did not do this by making the Gentile, Jewish, nor by requiring the Jew to become like the Gentile. Rather, as it points out in Ephesians 2, he brought about this unity by making of the two, one new being. When either Jew or Gentile puts their faith in Christ and accepts salvation through him they become citizens in spirit of a New Kingdom whose benefits and demands require a higher allegiance than any they may have previously held. The Trinity's distinguishing characteristic of unity offers hope of peace to a world of fractured relationships—however the world can only learn the reality of this oneness by observing the unity that exists within his body.

Unfortunately, the way Christians relate to one another is often more of a scandal than a testimony of hope, and often functions as a detour sign rather than a sign post pointing clearly to Christ. The roots of this disunity are planted in the soil of fear, and nourished by the manure of pride and self-righteousness. In disunity our gaze is focused primarily on the differences of others, and upon the supposed perfection of our own position. However, the roots of unity are planted in the Holy Spirit, and nourished by the light of the Father's love and the reality of Christ's passion. Consequently, in everlasting gratitude our gaze should be shifted both from the differences of others and from our supposed perfection. Instead we should focus on Christ's dwelling within the other believer, and on the reality that Jesus values the other members of his body so much that he willingly died for them. To speak and act hatefully toward a believer of a different theological persuasion than our own is to speak and act hatefully towards the temple of the Holy Spirit and is more representative of the Pharisees treatment of Christ than of Christ treatment of us.

We collectively are his sheep. We may have wool coats of various colors and textures but his Spirit dwells within each of us, and that is what makes us sheep. Let's determine to hear his voice and follow him, and to not focus on our non-essential differences. In so doing we will both experience and manifest that perfect unity which the Son has with the Father and we will not only provide a living message of hope for the world but also find ourselves more unified in our beliefs. "In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion. The faithful are one because, in the Spirit, they are in communion with the Son and, in him, share in his communion with the Father. 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3)." (from *Ut Unum Sint* by John Paul II).

First Reading — Acts 13:14, 43-52

14 They continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered (into) the synagogue and took their seats. ...

43 After the congregation had dispersed, many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.

44 On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. 46 Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the

Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

48 The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, 49 and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. 50 The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 The disciples were filled with joy and the holy Spirit

1. What do you think Paul and Barnabas meant by urging them "to continue in the grace of God"?
2. What role did the Word of God play in this conversion process?
3. What would it take for the Word of God to spread throughout all of *your* region?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 100:1-3, 5

1 A psalm of thanksgiving. Shout joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; 2 worship the LORD with cries of gladness; come before him with joyful song. 3 Know that the LORD is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are, God's well-tended flock. ...

5 good indeed is the LORD, Whose love endures forever, whose faithfulness lasts through every age.

Second Reading — Revelation 7:9, 14-17

9 After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. ...

14 I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 "For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. 17 For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

4. What principles or conditions for unity do you discover in this passage?

Gospel Reading — John 10:27-30

27 My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

5. Why do you think Jesus uses the analogy of sheep to describe us, his followers? How sheep-like are you?
6. What have you learned about listening to his voice, and following him?
7. What is the relationship between following Christ and dwelling in unity with others?

The New American Bible, (Nashville, Tennessee: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) 1997.
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