

# 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**

<sup>34</sup> And Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, . . . <sup>37</sup> the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses to 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; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And he

commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives 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**

<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.”...

<sup>16</sup> the right hand of the LORD is exalted, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”

<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. ...

<sup>22</sup> The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. <sup>23</sup> This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

**Second Reading — Colossians 3:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is our life appears, then you also 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**

<sup>1</sup> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup> Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; <sup>5</sup> and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, <sup>7</sup> and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must 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?

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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

<sup>12</sup>Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup>None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor.

<sup>14</sup>And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, <sup>15</sup>so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup>The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

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**

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.” <sup>3</sup> Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.” <sup>4</sup> Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.”...

<sup>13</sup> I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. <sup>14</sup> The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. <sup>15</sup> Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly. ...

<sup>22</sup> The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. <sup>23</sup> This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup> This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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

<sup>9</sup> I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup> saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

<sup>12</sup> Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast. ...

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. <sup>19</sup> Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.

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

### **Gospel Reading — John 20:19-31**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing 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?

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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

<sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his

right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”...

<sup>40</sup> So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for 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 30:1-2, 4-6 (30:2, 4-6, 11-13 NAB)**

<sup>1</sup> I will extol thee, O LORD, for thou hast drawn me up, and hast not let my foes rejoice over me. <sup>2</sup> O LORD my God, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast healed me

<sup>4</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. <sup>5</sup> For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. <sup>6</sup> As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.”

#### **Second Reading — Revelation 5:11-14**

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!” <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, “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)**

<sup>1</sup> After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he revealed himself in this way.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any fish?” They answered him, “No.” <sup>6</sup> He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was 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?

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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

<sup>14</sup> ... but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ...

<sup>43</sup> And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

<sup>44</sup> The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him.

<sup>46</sup> And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the

Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’”

<sup>48</sup> And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with 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**

<sup>1</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands! <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! <sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ... <sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

### **Second Reading — Revelation 7:9, 14-17**

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ...

<sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. <sup>16</sup> They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living 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**

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; <sup>28</sup> and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father 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?

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