

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

January—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

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD—January 3, 2010

Introduction: Famous searches, such as the search for the Loch Ness Monster, and the search for Noah's Ark, pale in comparison to the search that Israel had been conducting for the Messiah. For many millennia Israelites watched the heavens for a sign, and probed historical events for a clue to discovering the Messiah's appearing. Epiphany Sunday celebrates the end of that search with the manifestation of Christ to the Magi.

"The young creature in the stall of Bethlehem was a human being with human brain and limbs and heart and soul. And it was God ... Jesus did not 'experience' God; he was God. He never at any moment 'became' God; he was God from the start. His life was only the process by which this innate divinity came into its own. His task was to place divine reality and power squarely in the realm of his human consciousness and will; to reflect holy purity in his relations to all things, and to contain infinite love and divinity's boundless plenitude in his heart of flesh and blood." (Romano Guardini in *The Lord*).

In this week's Gospel reading it is interesting to note that the search was conducted not only by the Magi, but also by Herod. He searched for the child who was the newly born "King of the Jews," but, oh how different was the search! The Magi *personally* searched for the place of his appearing so that they could *personally* worship and serve him. Herod, on the other hand, made an impersonal second-hand search, with the evil intent to thwart and end the reign of this newborn King of the Jews before it began.

This search is unusual inasmuch as the One sought for, is in fact the One who discloses himself to the searchers, and makes the discovery possible. We see this foretold in this week's First Reading where the light of Christ's glory arose out of darkness to be a light to the nations. It was in fact the hand of God manifest in a heavenly star that led the Magi to the place of Jesus' birth. All men, like Israel and the Magi, spend their life searching for God. Some people, like Herod, search with poor methods and wrong motives, following their own devices and inclinations, finding instead of the Messiah, frustration, disappointment, and emptiness. Others, like the Magi, search by following God's illumination with full intention not to thwart his rule but with a personal commitment to worship and serve him.

For those who have found him, or should we say to whom he has disclosed himself, the challenge is to continually pay homage to him and to offer to him the "gold, frankincense and myrrh" of our lives. We can be encouraged by the hope and the sure promise that God will reveal the Son to those who seek him, for "He seeks such to worship him." For those with a desire to discover more and more of Christ, Jesus revealed the secret of knowing him during that last night with his disciples prior to his crucifixion. Jesus promised, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." What a glorious confidence it is to know that in our search we will be found by him.

First Reading — Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD

1. How can we as individuals, and as a community, be Christ's light in a dark world to those who are searching for Christ?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13

¹ Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son! ² May he judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice! ...

⁷In his days may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! ⁸May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!...

¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! ¹¹May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him! ¹²For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. ¹³He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! ...

Second Reading — Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6

²...assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ... ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

2. It bothered many Jews that Christ was being disclosed to the Gentiles who were so ethnically and culturally different. What has God shown you about unity among all followers of Christ?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 2:1-12

¹Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ²“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.’”

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; ⁸and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”

⁹When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; ¹¹and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

3. Who and what are Magi, and what is their importance to the birth of Jesus?
4. What does it mean to be “governed” by Jesus?
5. What are the “gold, frankincense and myrrh” of your life? How can they be offered to the Lord?
6. Having found the babe, the gift of the Father, and knowing the babe willing became the gift of salvation through his death, burial and resurrection, what will you do with him?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD—January 10, 2010

Introduction: For all that we know from Scripture Jesus was reared by Mary and Joseph pretty much in obscurity. We can deduce this from the hometown skeptics' who voiced surprise when Jesus came healing and teaching about the Kingdom; "*Is not this the carpenter's son? ... Where did this man get all this?*" These humble origins increase the complexity and wonder of the Incarnation. Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us, miraculously born, but fully one with us in our humanity. Like other babies he needed changing, he had to learn to walk, to feed himself, to talk and to do all those other things involved in growing up. We can only imagine that his life in most respects was quite normal progressing physically, mentally, and socially through the stages of growth like other children. Yet, on the day of his baptism the Holy Spirit and the Father endorsed him as Son. The Spirit in the form of a dove descended to rest on him, while the Father spoke from heaven, "*You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.*"

As yet, as far as we know, Jesus had not performed any miracles, had not taught any crowds, had not proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom, had told no parables, and had called and led no disciples. Yet, the Eternal God, God the Father, was not simply pleased with him, he was *well pleased* with him.

This incident tells us something both about the Father and the Son. The worth and value of Jesus the Son, was intrinsic, part of his essential nature. He was significant because of who he was, not only because of what he would do. In fact, what he later did was a result of who he was, not the other way around. This incident also indicates that the Father does not assign us worth based on our utilitarian value. We can not impress God, or make him love us more, or esteem us more valuable because we are *useful* to him. Contrariwise, we have value and significance because we are created in his image. In addition, through conversion and transformation we are being recreated into his divine image, "...*through them [his power and promise] you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.*" (2 Peter 1:4)

Each baptism we observe should remind us of two things. First, we should recall the Lord's baptism, where he totally entered into our humanity, the Father and the Spirit esteemed him as the Son, *well pleasing*. Second, we should be reminded of our son-ship, that we too are the Father's child, esteemed as significant and well pleasing through faith in Jesus, and have been made "*heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*"

"The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' ... At his baptism 'the heavens were opened'— the heavens that Adam's sin had closed — and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation. ... The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and 'walk in newness of life.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 536 and 537)

First Reading — Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

¹Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ... ⁶"I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

1. What does this passage tell you about *who Jesus is*?

2. What does this passage tell you about *what He came to do*?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 29:1-4, 9-10

¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy array.

³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, upon many waters. ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful, the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. ...

⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forests bare; and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.

Second Reading — Acts 10:34-38 ³⁴ And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: ³⁸ 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.

3. How do you see all of mankind included with in the Good News, and not just Israel?

Gospel Reading — Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...."

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased."

4. Why do you think that Jesus chose to be baptized?

5. What does this incident reveal about Jesus?

6. What do the baptism of water and the baptism by the Holy Spirit signify? (Note: Some of these more difficult questions should encourage you to use the Catechism for research.)

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 17, 2010

Introduction: Marriage is a human relationship which through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is elevated to a place of supreme importance to depict God's relationship with his people. In the Old Testament Israel is described as "espoused" to the Lord, and in the New Testament we are described as the bride of Christ. So it is not surprising that Jesus chose a marriage ceremony to begin displaying his power and glory. It is also not surprising that the first miracle was the changing of a very ordinary element, water, into an extra-ordinary new substance, fine wine. This event and early miracle from the life of Christ provides signs that foreshadow what Jesus and his ministry intended to accomplish.

He had come to initiate, and secure for mankind, a new more intimate relationship with the Father through our uniting with him in faith. The miracle of changing ordinary, utilitarian water into the finest wine pointed to the transforming aspect of that relationship. When we unite with him by faith, it is not the simple merging of the Holy with the unholy, but rather we are transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit into a holy thing, his holy people, the Bride of Christ. Even as the water was changed in appearance into fine and flavorful wine, so our union with Christ should result in the transformation of who we are into people whose appearance (character, values, behavior) is qualitatively more flavorful (holy) than what we would naturally be.

This miracle was also a sign, or glimpse into Jesus' divinity, enabling the disciples to begin perceiving what Mary already knew—that Jesus is the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us, full of glory and power. And this week's Gospel reading indicates that they did begin to recognize and believe in Christ. Each week as we observe and participate in the consecration and celebration of the Eucharist we should be reminded of the transforming power and glory of Christ, and that Jesus wants to also change us into his likeness. To those around us we may look like just the same old person but by God's grace our character, values and behavior should reflect a miracle; his transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Transformation begins when we respond to the all consuming gift of Christ with the freely given gift of ourselves. "Jesus is God-for-us, God-with-us, God-within-us. Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. Jesus doesn't hold back or cling to his own possessions. He gives all there is to give. 'Eat, drink, this is my body, this is my blood ... this is me for you.' ... God desires communion: a unity that is vital and alive, an intimacy that comes from both sides, a bond that is truly mutual. Nothing forced or 'willed,' but a communion freely offered and received." (from *With Burning Hearts* by H.J.M. Nouwen)

First Reading — Isaiah 62:1-5

¹For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ²The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. ³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

1. In our society where marriage is often demeaned, how do you feel about his marriage analogy?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 96:1-3,7-10

¹O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! ²Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.

⁹Worship the LORD in holy array; tremble before him, all the earth! ¹⁰Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yea, the world is established, it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.”

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

2. How have you experienced the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in your life—or in the life of another?

Gospel Reading — John 2:1-12

¹On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ²Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. ³When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brethren and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days.

3. Where do you see yourself in this wedding story?

4. What do Mary’s remarks indicate about her understanding of Jesus?

5. What do Jesus’ responses to Mary, and to the wedding party’s needs, indicate about Jesus?

6. What affect should Jesus’ miracles have on you and your faith?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 24, 2010

Introduction: Many converts to the Catholic Church are emotionally moved and deeply impressed by the veneration of the Word of God which is first encountered in the processional as the people stand and the Holy Scriptures are carried elevated, and then enthroned on the altar. The elevation of the Word, and our standing and crossing ourselves at the reading of the Gospel are rooted not only in our beliefs but also in the historic tradition of Judaism. We see in this week's First Reading as Ezra read the Scriptures aloud the people venerated God, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood...all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground ..." This veneration of God through the written Word reflects our conviction that Scripture does in fact contain the presence of the Living Word.

This veneration of the Scriptures is explained more fully by Lucien Deiss in his book, *The Mass*: "Vatican II spoke about the 'extreme importance' of God's Word. This extreme importance is the very one of the Eucharist... 'The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred Liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ.' That is why the Magisterium could rightly speak about the 'real presence' of Christ in the Word.

"This is a marvelous teaching that, after centuries of forgetfulness or carelessness, restores the Word to the place that tradition assigned it. Saint Jerome affirmed: 'I think that the Gospel is the body of Christ and that the Holy Scriptures are his doctrine. When the Lord speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood certainly this can mean the mystery (of the Eucharist). However, his true body and blood are (also) the Word of the Scriptures and its doctrine.'"

Unfortunately ritual and tradition often lose their meaning when they become familiar. If for a moment we could have Jesus the Living Word appear again in human form to walk down the aisle of our churches we would see the difference. Our response, if we did not simply faint dead away, would be more like Ezra's people. We would bow down and prostrate ourselves in worship and ready obedience. When the Living Word strode to the pulpit we would not simply listen with half an ear but rather would hang on Jesus' every word, believing and obeying it. This is what our ritual and worship is all about, the external expression of inner beliefs and values.

During these coming months we will be looking at the Gospel according to Luke. It is not simply one man's depiction of Jesus' life but a Holy Spirit inspired communication by God of his love to us, his people. Let us arise to acknowledge his presence in the Word and listen attentively with the inner ear of our heart to his message to us. "It is Christ who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

First Reading — Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10

² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ... ⁸ And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink

sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

1. How can we allow sacred Scripture to have a more prominent role in our lives?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 19:7-9,14 (Psalm 19:8-10,15 NAB)

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether....

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hear-ing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single organ, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, ²⁵that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

2. What do you feel is the most essential truth to remember from this passage about the Body?

Gospel Reading — Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

^{1:1}Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, ²just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. ...

^{4:14}And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; ¹⁷and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

²⁰And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

3. How would you feel if something similar took place in your presence?
4. What authority should sacred Scripture have in our lives?
5. To what extent are we to identify with the mission of Christ as seen in verses 18-19?
6. Explain the connection between Jesus' mission, as stated here, and Jesus' position of authority in our lives.

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 31, 2010

Introduction: Someone has observed that, “there is no better test for a man’s ultimate integrity than his behavior when he is wrong.” All too often we are graciously willing to discuss God’s Word, and listen to God’s truth proclaimed just as long as those doing it don’t talk about things that are personal to us. When they do begin drawing inferences that really touch our lives we often respond either outwardly or inwardly, “Now you’ve stopped preaching and gone to meddling!” Jesus encountered this same response in this week’s Gospel Reading. As he finished reading the Scripture the hearers were all graciously amiable as they expressed their amazement at Jesus’ reading. However, as Jesus looked beyond their outward response to their unresponsive and unbelieving hearts their amazement turns to open rejection and hostility at his apparent “meddling.”

This Gospel account raises a question which warrants our attention: “How do we respond to God’s call for conversion and change when we encounter it?” And perhaps there is even a more basic question we should consider: “Do we desire conversion and change?” The hope of the Gospel, is that Christ brings a holy and powerful force into our lives which will enable us to break the bonds of enslavement to our old nature and its passions and habits. Real inner change is often uncomfortable because it requires us to admit that there is an area of our lives that is *wrong*. Consequently, we also often respond to the agent of change with defensiveness, resistance, and resentment, rather than welcoming the encouragement to change. Someone has aptly said, “If you think your green you’ll grow, if you think you’re ripe, you’ll rot.” The first step in conversion and change is to be dissatisfied with our status quo and to recognize that there is a need for spiritual change.

We have entered into a new year, will it be a year of responsiveness to Christ, and a year of change and growth, or will it be a year of passive resistance and complacency to the Holy Spirit’s working within us? What the new year holds for us reminds me of a story from *Forty Days and Forty Nights* by Brother Ramon, SSF. He tells of two boys endeavoring to play a joke on a holy hermit. They intended to hold a bird in their hands behind their back and ask the hermit if the bird was dead or alive. If the hermit said it was dead the boy planned to open his hand and let the bird fly up to the sky. If the hermit said it was alive, the boy planned to crush the bird in his hand to prove that the wise old man was wrong. “Father,” said one of the lads, “I have a small bird in my hand. Is it alive or dead?” There was a silence. The old man fixed him with his gaze. Eventually he chuckled and said: “Well, boys—it all depends on you!”

Will it be a year of responsiveness to Christ, and a year of change and growth, or will it be a year of passive resistance and complacency to the Holy Spirit working within?— “It all depends on you!”

First Reading — Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”...

¹⁷But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. ¹⁸And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.”

1. What does this passage say about the creative, or re-creative, will of God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17

¹In thee, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame! ²In thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline thy ear to me, and save me! ³Be thou to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for thou art my rock and my fortress.

⁴Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man. ⁵For thou, O Lord, art my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. ⁶Upon thee I have leaned from my birth; thou art he who took me from my mother’s womb. My praise is continually of thee ...

¹⁵ My mouth will tell of thy righteous acts, of thy deeds of salvation all the day, for their number is past my knowledge. ¹⁶ With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will come, I will praise thy righteous-ness, thine alone. ¹⁷ O God, from my youth thou hast taught me, and I still proclaim thy wondrous deeds.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

^{12:31} But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

^{13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; ⁵ it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. ¹³ So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

2. Why does Paul say that love is a more excellent way than just pursuing the higher gifts?
3. What are the “childish ways” to which Paul is referring?

Gospel Reading — Luke 4:21-30

²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country.’” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. ²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. ³⁰ But passing through the midst of them he went away.

4. How do you feel when someone points out an area of deficiency in your life?
5. What are the issues that made these people react so violently?
6. How do you think the people felt when Jesus “passing through the midst of them ... went away”? What are the ramifications of his doing this?
7. Looking ahead to 2010, how would you like your spiritual life to be different? What decision(s) can you make now that will enable these changes to take place?