

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

March—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 THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT—March 7, 2010

Introduction: In this week's Gospel Reading through the parable Jesus tells he puts a premium on fruitfulness. He does this first by stressing the vineyard owner's severe judgment of the fig tree that has continued to bear no figs. The vineyard owner is ready to remove the fig tree because it is totally unproductive. Secondly, he focuses on the importance of being fruitful by underscoring the vinedresser's unusual concern and attention to try and insure the fig tree's future productivity. Both in the vineyard owner's judgment and the vinedresser's care, one message comes through loud and clear; fruitfulness is essential.

This focus on bearing fruit takes on added importance when we recall Jesus' last conversation with his disciples in John's Gospel. In John 15:16 Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." Earlier in verse 8, he stated that this is the way his Father is glorified, "that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." Clearly, as Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples and begin the ordeal of his crucifixion he did not merely discuss trivial things with them, but shared his very heart and soul. And at the heart of what he said was his expectations for their fruitfulness.

When the subject of fruitfulness comes up it is not unusual to see opinions vary regarding what is meant by fruit. Some would suggest that fruitfulness is simply Christian character, others that it is Christian deeds, and still others that it is Christian converts. I would suggest that to some degree it is inclusive of all of these because the three types of fruit mentioned are interdependent and interconnected.

However, it is interesting that when we study the nature of fruit we discover that fruit always contains the seed of new life. So it is with both Christian character and Christian deeds, they are never intended to dwell alone, but are the seeds of new life, converts; "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Our Christian lives and deeds should result in non-believers' desiring to also become believers. If we as a community of believers are not seeing conversions take place through us, we need to be concerned.

How does all of this fit into Lent? Lent should be both a time of pruning and of cultivation. It is the time of year when we pay special attention to Christ and our relationship with him. As we focus on Christ, and add to our lives disciplines that enhance our spiritual consciousness and receptivity to him, it allows the Holy Spirit to begin tilling up the hardness of our hearts. Lenten missions, more frequent attendance at Mass and other celebrations, Lenten discussion group studies, and personal prayer and reflection are all means which the Holy Spirit can use to rework the dry, hard ground of our hearts. As these stony portions are broken up, and turned over, our hearts become more receptive to the nourishing nutrients that bring about growth and fruitfulness; sacred Scripture, Christ's Presence, and prayer to seek God's will.

We are faced with the same decision as the disciples, will we, or will we not go and bear fruit so that the Father is glorified? Pope Paul VI in *On Evangelization in the Modern World* clearly calls us to this realization. "The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve. She is the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity..." And he earlier states, "Those who have received the Good News and who have been gathered by it into the community of salvation can and must communicate and spread it." May this Lent be a time of preparation for just such fruitfulness, and may Easter be a time when we invite those who don't know Christ to "Come see!"

First Reading — Exodus 3:1-8,13-15

¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry

because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ...

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

1. What areas of enslavement do you see among God's people today?
2. In what ways can Lent become a process of turning aside to see and hear from God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 103:1-4,6-8,11

¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³ who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ...

⁶ The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. ⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ...

¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12

¹ I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same supernatural food ⁴ and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. ¹⁰ ...nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

3. For what behavior did God express displeasure with Israel? How would you restate in positive terms the lesson this passage teaches?

Gospel Reading — Luke 13:1-9

¹ There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? ³ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

⁶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. ⁹ And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

4. Why do people feel that another's, misfortune is the result of personal sinfulness?
5. What are the conditions that bring a person to repentance?
6. What needs to take place in your life, or the life of your community to enhance fruitfulness?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT—March 14, 2010

Introduction: Here it is, the great accusation, the compelling indictment against Jesus—“*This man receives sinners and eats with them.*” This indictment is also the unknowing restatement of the Good News by his ungrateful, self-righteous critics—“*This man receives sinners and eats with them.*” Perhaps this is a sign we should hang around the necks of our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to remind us that this is what takes place at every Eucharist meal—“*This man [Jesus] receives sinners and eats with them.*”

Luke is often called the Gospel of meals, for in Luke's Gospel he records ten meals in which Jesus participated and two major parables which Jesus positioned around meals. In our own lives meals play a major role. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, weddings, graduations, promotions, all are examples of when we gather with our loved ones around a meal or a banquet to remember, to honor, and to rejoice over the high points of our lives. And though it is less so in today's hectic society the daily meal is a place of belonging and nurture where the family can unite. Ultimately, as in each of the Gospels, Jesus becomes the life saving meal of our redemption.

The parable of the Prodigal Son which we read in this week's Gospel Reading, reflects elements of both celebration and of belonging. The wayward son returns, having rejected both his family and his family's values. In desperation he finally comes to his senses and returns home. Occasions of such repentance are not the time for recriminations but for celebration! One who was *as dead* is alive again. The father of the Prodigal Son who is illustrative of our heavenly Father was watching for his wayward son's return and runs to welcome the Prodigal home. He immediately sets about to have a banquet in his son's honor. Like Jesus—“*This man receives sinners and eats with them.*”

Similar to the religious hypocrites, who challenged Jesus, so the elder son murmured against his father and challenged his merciful behavior. The Prodigal came home in guilty remorse saying, “I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants,” and the elder son's attitude shouted, “That's right, he's not worthy!” implying that he, the elder son, *is* worthy. These are the flies in the ointment of their understanding that Jesus came to destroy. The lie of the Prodigal son's guilty conscience and the deceit of the elder son's self-righteousness both seek to convince us that though we are children of God we are unworthy of his love. Unfortunately, neither the Pharisees and scribes, nor the two sons understood that the Father does not receive us based on our worthiness. Rather, having been made worthy through the merits of Christ we can be assured of the Father's mercy and grace because—“*This man receives sinners and eats with them.*”

During Lent we must stop listening to the voices of condemnation and hear the voice of invitation to “Come, eat and commune with me.” We must repent of viewing the Eucharist as a fast food meal and recognize that Jesus wants to daily feed us with himself through communion with him around his Word. As Jesus told Mary and Martha at another meal in Luke's Gospel, sitting at his feet and feasting on his words is choosing the “better part” and the necessary thing. And so we should, for—“*This man receives sinners and eats with them.*”

“I now realize that there are two things especially necessary to me ... You have therefore given me in my weakness Your sacred Body to be the refreshment of my soul and body, and have set Your Word as a lamp to my feet. Without these two, I cannot rightly live; for the Word of God is the light of my soul, and Your sacrament is the bread of my life.” (Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*) Lent is the ideal time to reject spiritual anorexia. With the Scriptures and the Eucharist the table is set. Now is the time to reject self-imposed spiritual starvation and to avail ourselves of the spiritual nourishment Jesus provides. Accept Jesus' invitation to dine with him, and on him, daily.

First Reading — Joshua 5:9-12

⁹ And the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰ While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And on the morrow after the passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year

1. What does this passage teach about celebrating reconciliation?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 34:1-6 (2-7 NAB)

¹ I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and be glad.

³ O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

¹⁷ Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2. What are the key components to the message of reconciliation?

Gospel Reading — Luke 15:1-3,11-32

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ...

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; ¹² and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them.

¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.

¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; ²³ and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry.

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’

³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

3. Which son best illustrates your journey?

4. How do we, who are Catholic Christians, avoid embracing and communicating an attitude similar to that of the elder brother?

5. What does this passage teach us about our Heavenly Father? About reconciliation?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT—March 21, 2010

Introduction: “One afternoon my four year old niece and my six year old daughter started an argument, which grew louder and louder. I was about to intervene when my daughter stomped down the stairs, ‘Mom,’ she yelled, ‘Jesus wants us to be salt of the earth and Paige is being the pepper!’” (Cherish Ann Marie Eile, in the *Christian Reader*) Though comical, this incident aptly introduces the subject of this week’s Gospel Reading, which is the difference between righteous judgment and unrighteous judgmentalism.

“What do you say about her (the adulteress)?” is the question with which the Pharisees and scribes confronted Jesus. It was not a legitimate question for they had already determined their views about her. In their minds condemnation and the consequential stoning of this woman was the conclusion to which they had already jumped. Now having caught and condemned her, they used this occasion and this question to endeavor to catch and condemn Jesus. But Jesus, “knowing what was in the heart of all men,” authorized the ones without sin to begin the stoning process. These men, so accustomed to condemning others, now could not escape self-condemnation, so in guilt they slunk away one by one.

Did Jesus by his actions condone this woman’s behavior? Of course not! What he did was to judge righteous judgment, but simultaneously avoided judgmentalism. Righteous judgment recognizes the difference between right and wrong, but it also with mercy and grace properly assesses the situation. This woman, like many of us, was experiencing a desert and wilderness experience in her life similar to that which is spoken of in this week’s First Reading. Also, like many of us who turn to the empty things of the world in hope of finding our way and finding something to satisfy, this woman turned to adultery, which failed to satisfy her as it always does. Righteous judgment not only recognizes the problem but it also recognizes the solution. In this case the solution was mercy and forgiveness, forces which compel us to stop living for ourselves and to begin living for him who is the source of this love. (2 Corinthians 5:14) Righteous judgment accompanied with mercy and forgiveness offers a way in the wilderness and water in the desert, it offers life.

The judgmentalism of the Pharisees and scribes also recognizes right and wrong behavior, but it is not based on the nature and character of God, but on one’s own supposed self-righteousness. And because self-righteousness can only be maintained by making others less righteous, judgmentalism always roots out sin in others and condemns it ruthlessly while ignoring one’s own sin and failure. Unlike the First Reading, judgmentalism does not offer “a way in the wilderness,” or life giving water “in the desert,” but instead speeds the dying process. Ultimately that is what this incident is all about, judgmentalism. In their self-righteousness the Pharisees and scribes wanted to be able to condemn Jesus. If he let her go without punishment they could accuse him of ignoring the Law. If he also condemned her they would accuse him of hypocrisy. In their minds they had already condemned Jesus, now all they needed to do was to find an acceptable accusation against him. In the end their spirit of condemnation ensnared them, as the pointed finger of accusation turned to focus on their own unrighteous histories and reckoned them, “Guilty!”

Hopefully, as we near the end of our lenten journey, we have been able to assess our relationship with Christ and our commitment to follow him in obedience. But we must ask ourselves whether our view of ourselves, and others, is being controlled by aspects of righteous judgment or by judgmentalism? If it is the latter we will find our spirit dragged down by a sense of guilt and condemnation. If it is the former we will find our long faces turning to joyous smiles as we recognize Jesus’ saying also to us, “*Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.*” We will understand the truth Monsignor Romano Guardini proclaims in his book, *The Lord*, that, “God is moved by the suffering human heart; the pain of it clouds his face, and we understand who he is and what St. Paul means when he speaks of the goodness and kindness of God.”

First Reading — Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷ who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸ “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The wild beasts will honor me, the

jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹ the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.

1. What is meant by a “desert” or “wilderness” experience?
2. How has God used desert or wilderness experiences to “make a way” which you ultimately recognized as his new and good direction for you?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 126:1-6

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

³The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb! ⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! ⁶He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Second Reading — Philippians 3:8-14

⁸Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Explain what it means to have “a righteousness of my own.”
4. Restate in your own words Paul’s desires, found in verses 9 and 10. Which part of Paul’s statement is most meaningful to you?

Gospel Reading — John 8:1-11

¹...But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?” ⁶This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus looked up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.

5. In what aspect of life do you find yourself being most judgmental?
6. How can we develop and maintain righteous judgment about things, yet insure that we don’t become condemning in the way we relate to people?
7. Regarding Jesus’ statement, “Neither do I condemn you,” would you say that you quickly mirror this response towards others or are you usually slow in applying this attitude?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION—March 28, 2010

Introduction: This Sunday, Passion Sunday, completes the Season of Lent and introduces the beginning of Holy Week, the most memorable week of the liturgical year. For one week of the year we are encouraged to focus all of our faculties on recalling and reliving Jesus' Passion, culminating in an explosion of joy at Jesus' resurrection. We must all confess that in some years Holy Week has been much more meaningful than in others, usually depending on the degree to which we have been able to grasp the significance of his death and resurrection for us.

Jesus' Passion is introduced with the joyous acclamation of the people of Jerusalem proclaiming, "Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord," as Jesus entered Jerusalem. Jesus' Passion nears its end with many of the same people tumultuously yelling "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Jesus comes humbly riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, and exits by being taken outside of Jerusalem to be crucified and carried in burial garments to a tomb beyond the city's gate. One thing holds true in this week of contrasts, that is the disciples' inability to grasp what is taking place or the significance of this Passover. Praise be to the Holy Spirit who later made all things clear to them and caused these things to be recorded for our edification for all eternity.

In this recounting of Jesus' Passion there appear many characters in whom, with just a little bit of reflection, we can discover ourselves. With dismay we may find ourselves among those who contributed to his death. For as Fr. Richard John Neuhaus points out, "For whom does he pray forgiveness? For the leaders of his own people, a fragile, frightened establishment that could not abide the threat of the presence of a love so long delayed. For pitiable Pilate, forever wringing his hands, forever soiled. For the soldiers who did the deed, who wielded the whip, who drove the nails, who thrust the spear, it all being but a day's work on foreign assignment, far from home. **And for us he asks forgiveness, for we were there.**" (From *Death on A Friday Afternoon*) If it is with dismay that we discover our complicity in Jesus' death, it is with relief and joyous exaltation that we also discover that we are included among those for whom Jesus prays, asking the Father to forgive.

Fr. Neuhaus rightly draws attention to our inclusion both among the guilty standing at the foot of the cross and among those forgiven by Christ from the cross. Sin and its accompanying guilt has been with humankind since the beginning. Someone has jokingly said, "Guilt is the gift that keeps on giving." Unfortunately, never ending guilt is no joke when it remains unrecognized, unclaimed, and unforgiving. Rather, guilt hangs over us like an ever-abiding cloud blotting out the Son's warmth.

If there is no recognized guilt, then there can be no recognized forgiveness. So it is important as we enter Holy Week that we come face to face with both our guilt, and Christ's forgiveness. We must, looking through the eyes of Christ, see ourselves standing in the crowd, unwittingly participating in his crucifixion. However, it is also imperative, lest we not be able to bear it, to hear ourselves included in Jesus' request to the Father for forgiveness. If Christ died to secure our forgiveness and relieve both the penalty and guilt of our sin, we do him and ourselves a great disservice by not acknowledging his completed work of forgiveness, and claiming it as our rightful inheritance as his followers. As the reality of forgiveness grips our soul we too will experience an explosion of joy.

First Reading — Isaiah 50:4-7

⁴The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. ⁶I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. ⁷For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame...

1. What does this prophesy indicate about the Messiah?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24

⁸“He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

⁹Yet thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother’s breasts. . . . ¹⁷I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; ¹⁸they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.

¹⁹But thou, O LORD, be not far off! O thou my help, hasten to my aid! ²⁰Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! . . .

²³You who fear the LORD, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel! ²⁴For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

Second Reading — Philippians 2:6-11

. . . ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2. What aspect of Jesus’ humility is most significant to you?

3. What ramifications should verses 9-11 have on the way in which we live in the future?

Gospel Reading — Luke 23:1-56

¹Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king.” ³And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” ⁴And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, “I find no crime in this man.” ⁵But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹²And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

¹³Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; ¹⁵neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; ¹⁶I will therefore chastise him and release him.” [¹⁷Now he was obliged to release someone for them at the festival.] ¹⁸But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— ¹⁹a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder.

²⁰Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; ²¹but they shouted out, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²²A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him.” ²³But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. ²⁵He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

²⁶And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

²⁷And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him.

²⁸But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs

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