

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY
April 12, 2015 B

Note to community leader: For the Easter Season, consider creating an Easter Season environment. On a table covered with white cloth, place a white candle and perhaps some flowers.

Before you say the opening prayer, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *Risen Christ, we gather in your name to celebrate your victory over sin and death. As you breathed your spirit on those gathered in the Upper Room, breathe your spirit on us so that we may recognize your presence in our midst and come to know you in the breaking open of your Word. Amen.*

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence and activity this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The readings during the Easter Season speak to us about the impact of the Resurrection on the lives of believers and unbelievers. In this week's readings, we hear how *new life in Christ* brings about unity and sharing (first reading), love of each other (second reading), and freedom from fear, guilt and disbelief (Gospel). The second Sunday of Easter is also *Divine Mercy Sunday* when we celebrate the wonderful mercy of God—popularized in recent times by St. Faustina Kolwaska, a Polish nun who had apparitions of Jesus manifesting his mercy for humanity.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 4:32-52

During the Easter season, the first reading is always from the *Acts of the Apostles*, sometimes called the *Gospel of the Holy Spirit* or the first *History of the Church*. The first readings from Acts during this season illuminate for us the mystery of the Church as it developed from its beginnings after Pentecost Sunday. On the second Sunday of Easter each year, the lectionary places before us one of three very similar summary statements of the life of the early Christian community. The statements are most likely an idealized portrayal of the first community of believers.

This week's reading speaks about the *unity* and *spirit of sharing* which characterized the early believers: "*They were of one mind and one heart... they shared all things in common.... and not one was needy amongst them.*"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This psalm expresses thanksgiving for deliverance. In this Sunday's liturgy, this thanksgiving is applied to Christ who was delivered from death.

SECOND READING: 1John 5:1-6

The second readings during the B cycle are always taken from the *First Letter of John*, an epistle written towards the end of the first century to a church undergoing traumatic internal struggle around the questions of right faith and right behavior. At issue was a proper understanding of the person of Jesus and his role in salvation, as well as a commitment to communal living according to the demands of Christian fellowship. The author insists that true faith recognizes Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and that right behavior is reflected in the mutual love among community members. When we are "begotten by God," we hold fast to this faith and "testify" to the truth by a life in which "we love the children of God."

GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

During the Easter season in all three cycles, the Gospel readings are from John with a few exceptions. This week's Gospel is a story of *mission, forgiveness, peace* and *faith*. It is also sometimes called "John's Pentecost" because in it, Jesus imparts his Holy Spirit to those present. In the first scene, Jesus comes to a group of *fear-filled, guilt-ridden* and *depressed* disciples. He stands in their midst and offers them *four* gifts: *peace, joy, the Holy Spirit* and *the power to forgive sins*.

Because they have abandoned Jesus in his hour of need, the Apostles most likely feel a great need for “*shalom*,” i.e., God’s peace and reconciliation. The joy at seeing Jesus replaces the depression caused by his absence. The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers the Apostles to go forth and preach the Good News, casting aside all fear. The power to forgive sins enables them to impart to others the saving power of Jesus. In time, this text would be looked upon as the Church’s basis for the sacrament of reconciliation. Sins would be “retained” or not forgiven if people were not truly sorry for them or were unwilling to embrace Jesus’ teachings.

By sharing with the disciples his wounds (“*He showed them his hand and side*”), Jesus is showing them that it is really he and not some ghost. He is also teaching them that there is no Easter glory without Good Friday pain. Jesus may be imparting to us that *community is built when the participants learn to share their wounds*.

In the second appearance, Thomas, who expressed disbelief in Jesus’ Resurrection, is present when Jesus tells him to place his hands in his wounds. He is accepting Thomas where he is at and inviting him to faith. Thomas makes a wonderful profession of faith in Jesus: “*My Lord and my God.*” Jesus says, “*Good, Thomas, you believe because you have seen. A time is coming when people will be called to believe without seeing.*” The “doubting Thomas” story is also important for all those in future generations who would struggle with faith questions. Thomas represents all those called to believe without seeing. Thomas would be their “patron saint.”

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you most from the readings and why?
2. “The community of believers were of one heart and one mind.” What facilitates this oneness in families and parishes, and what hurts it?
3. Every saint and good and faithful Christians have been plagued with doubts about their Christian beliefs. Have you ever experienced doubt about your faith? If so, in what way and what helped you deal with your doubts?

4. Can you recall a time when you have been impacted by the power of someone’s witness to their faith?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestions: Be aware this week of what you can do to build community in your home, workplace, neighborhood, parish and place of recreation. If you live with other people, call a family meeting. Make a list of what works well in your family. Ask each member to name one way he/she can contribute to a greater family harmony.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for parishes and families who experience division. Pray for people who often are plagued with religious doubts.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 19, 2015 B

Before you pray together, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *Holy Spirit, we thank you for gathering us together to share your Word. Fill us with the same fervor that empowered Peter to proclaim Jesus and his message. Just as you opened the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, open our eyes to recognize your holy presence in our midst. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the first reading, Peter shows great courage in confronting the leaders and people for their role in the death of Jesus. In the second reading, John says that authentic love is shown by obedience to the commandments. In the Gospel, Luke shows that while the risen Christ is different (he comes through locked doors), he is also like the Christ whom the Apostles knew prior to the Resurrection. He has physical wounds and he eats food. All three readings show that belief in the Resurrection should lead to a repentance of sin.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

The Acts of the Apostles contains five speeches by Peter. Today's verses—an excerpt from his second speech—follow the healing of a crippled man which gives Peter a unique opportunity to preach about Jesus.

Peter begins by placing blame on his hearers and their leaders for the death of Jesus whom the God of their ancestors has now raised from the dead. But then, Peter tells his audience that they have acted out of ignorance, implying that had they known better, they would have acted accordingly. Now, through the witness of the disciples, they do know better and ought to reform their lives through repentance of sin and to come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 4

This psalm of lament expresses confidence in God's favor in time of trial, the kind of confidence Jesus must have had when faced with his sufferings.

SECOND READING: 1John 2:1-5

Ideally, as Christians, we should not sin but if we do, we should be comforted by the fact that we have an advocate in Jesus who died for our sins. John states emphatically that true knowledge of Christ will lead one to keep the commandments. In stating this, John is responding to a widely held belief that

a superior type of knowledge is sufficient for salvation and that such knowledge excuses one from adherence to moral norms.

GOSPEL: Luke 24:35-48

This Gospel follows on the heels of the famous Emmaus story during which the two disciples experience Jesus in the breaking of the bread. As the two disciples describe their fascinating encounter with Jesus, he suddenly reappears to them. But they are scared and have no idea who he is. They think he is a ghost. Jesus tries to bring them to faith by appealing to their "sense of touch": "*Look at my hands and feet,*" and to their reason: "*Ghosts have no flesh.*" Jesus opens their minds to their own writings in the law, the prophets and psalms, and how all of these point to his coming. Then the disciples are commissioned to go forth and be his witnesses: "*Penance and remission of sins must be preached to all nations.*"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you most in the readings and why?

2. When a beggar asks you for help, what is your usual response? What is the Christ-like response we should give?

3. In the Gospel, Jesus offers the Apostles the gift of peace. How can you be an instrument of peace in your environment?

4. When are you most at peace? How can you bring peace to others?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's Scriptures. Suggestion: Be alert to opportunities for sharing your faith with others.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for families who have children receiving First Communion during the Easter Season. Pray that this important event in the life of their child will move those who are lax about Church to return to the Eucharist on a regular basis.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

April 26, 2015 B

Before you pray together, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, though your people walk in the valley of darkness, no evil should they fear, for they follow in faith the call of the Shepherd whom you have sent for their hope and strength. Attune our minds to the sound of his voice and lead our steps in the path he has shown, that we may know the strength of his outstretched arm and enjoy the light of your presence forever. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen*

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence and activity this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The Gospel presents Jesus as the model Shepherd in his spirit of dedication and willingness to surrender his life for his sheep. The letter of John speaks of the graced outcome of the Shepherd's death: our becoming children of God. This Jesus, moreover, is the only way to the Father, as Peter tells his listeners in Acts. In him alone is salvation, which is now extended to all humanity.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 4:8-12

Today's first reading is Peter's response to the leaders who are disturbed by his healing of the crippled man at the gate of the Temple. He tells the leaders that the crippled man is healed through the power of the risen Christ working through him. Peter proclaims that all salvation comes through Jesus. The image of the rejected cornerstone is a popular proverb. Although it first appears in Psalm 118 in celebration of Israel's triumph in battle, early Christianity adopted it as a metaphor for the Crucifixion. Jesus, rejected by his own people, is revealed as the Savior of the world.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a thanksgiving psalm and, in the context of today's liturgy, a hymn of thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of salvation gained for us by Christ.

SECOND READING: 1 John 3:1-2

John conveys to his readers the awesome privilege of the children of God. In and through Baptism, we live in God's household. But one of the consequences of this reality is that the world which rejected Jesus will also reject us. John refers to what is called in theology the "already" and the "not yet." Through Baptism, we are "already" children of the light, but our complete transformation in Christ has "not yet" been completed.

GOSPEL: John 10:11-18

Jesus uses the popular and well-loved image of a *shepherd* to describe himself. Chapter 10 of this Gospel follows the healing of the man born blind whom the Pharisees are treating shamefully. They are also rejecting Jesus' claim that he is from God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is defending his authority and rejecting that of the Pharisees. Like the *hired hand*, they have no true concern for their people.

There are two qualities that make Jesus a *good* Shepherd. First, he lays down his life for his sheep, and second, he and his sheep know one another. The former quality is the central point of this passage.

Jesus' reference to other sheep and to one flock underscores *universality* and *unity*, which are to characterize this new community of believers. In Jesus' day, the *other sheep* may have referred to the poor, the tax collectors and sinners generally ostracized by society. For the Early Church, the other sheep may have been the Gentiles and others who had yet to hear the Good News. For us, the other sheep might be people of non-Christian religions and non-believers.

Jesus' way of shepherding the flock is not one of domination, but one of care and concern. On the other hand, true sheep are the ones who hear the Shepherd's voice. In a world of a million lies, we sheep find our anchor and truth in Christ and his Word.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you most and why?
2. Who are some modern examples of “rejected cornerstones”—people whose cause or work is not accepted by the general masses? Have you had a personal experience of being rejected for what you believe or for a cause you feel strongly about?
3. How might the belief that you are an unconditionally loved child of God impact your prayer and the way you relate to Jesus and others?
4. Why is the image of the Good Shepherd one of the most loved images of Jesus? Name one other image of Jesus that you find very comforting.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today’s readings.
Suggestion: Look out for some ‘lost soul’ who may need some good shepherding this week.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for priests, deacons and all Church leaders.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 3, 2015 B

Opening prayer: *Christ our Vine, we gather in your name so that we may grow in our understanding of and love for your Word, and bear fruit in your name. Prune and remove all sin, doubt, and clutter from our lives. Help us, like St. Paul, to boldly proclaim our faith in you. Amen.*

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence and activity this past week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The Easter message of new life in the risen Christ continues in today's Gospel of the Vine and the Branches. Apart from Jesus the Vine, there can be no Spirit-life for his disciples. The letter to John reminds us to recognize Jesus as God's Son and to keep his commandments. The Spirit at work in Acts moves the recently converted Paul to present his message in Jerusalem regardless of the personal danger involved. Thus, the vine and branches constitute a living reality within the human soul and within a growing Church.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 9:26-31

This reading, among other things, shows the marvelous transforming power of God's grace. It follows Paul's conversion story. Paul, the former *persecutor*, becomes a *proclaimer* and disciple of Jesus. He returns to introduce himself to the Apostles. They are naturally fearful and suspicious of him. But Barnabas, Paul's "sponsor," encourages the Apostles to accept Paul. Then Paul immediately starts to preach about Jesus and his message. The Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) reject Paul and try to kill him.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 22

These verses celebrate a sufferer's deliverance.

SECOND READING: 1John 3:18-24

This reading combines in a significant way three important theological themes: *Christian love*, *confident belief* and *faithful obedience*. The first exhortation is to active love. It is not enough to proclaim love for God, but we must also love one another. And if in our efforts to love we fail and "our hearts condemn us," we ought not to worry because God's love and mercy "is greater than our hearts." In prayer, believers should go to God with utter confidence knowing that he will always bless us with what is best for us. Finally, the writer speaks about faithful obedience which involves two things: belief in the name of God's Son and love for one another.

GOSPEL: John 15:1-8

Last week, Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. This week he refers to himself as the *Vine* which gives divine life to all who believe in him and live according to his Word. Non-fruit-bearing branches will be cut away. This could be a reference to the Jews who reject Jesus or to people who do accept him but do not follow his ways. But even fruit-bearing believers will be pruned or purified by Jesus so that they can bear even more fruit. This daily pruning often involves dealing positively with our daily crosses and losses.

In the vine and branch imagery, Jesus explains the wonderful intimacy that exists between him and his followers and the responsibility that goes with it. Believers who nurture their relationship with Jesus by lives of faith and love will bear much fruit. But then follows a severe warning: those who neglect their relationship with Christ will be cut away and thrown out. It is similar to what happens in close personal relationships: unless they are nurtured, they die.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you most and why?
2. Who has been a Barnabas in your life—in other words, who has been your primary inspiration and supporter in your efforts to become more Christ-like?

3. Have you ever made a decision to prune your life free of stuff, events or people that were obstacles to your becoming more like Jesus? Have you ever been pruned involuntarily? What were the results?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestion: This week try hard to live with a more conscious sense of the “divine indwelling.”

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for government and church leaders, especially in their decision making.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 10, 2015 B

Before you pray together, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *God, in today's first reading, you pour out your Spirit on the Gentiles and remind believers of the command to give and receive your love. Open our hearts as we gather in your name and pour out on us your Holy Spirit and fill us with your love. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What is your most memorable travel experience?

Facilitator reads focus statement: All three readings today highlight God's *initiative* in the world. In the first reading, it is God who launches the Gentile mission in conferring the Spirit upon Cornelius' household. In the familiar Johannine refrain on the primacy of love, the second reading reminds us that it is God who first loves us, and the Gospel says the same in referring to our election as disciples. We do not have to search God out. He comes looking for us.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

This reading is sometimes called the "Gentile Pentecost" because in it is described a powerful act of 'Spirit outpouring' on the Gentiles—previously thought to be excluded from God's plan. When Peter sees God at work in Cornelius, he becomes aware that *"in truth, God shows no partiality."* If God has accepted the Gentiles into his household, so must the Christian Church. Also in this reading, Baptism is seen not so much a cause of God's love as a celebration of it.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 98

This psalm takes up the theme of God's universal love that emphatically declares: *"All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of God."*

SECOND READING: 1John 4:7-10

"In these four verses, the Church's mission to carry the Good News to all people is shown to be rooted in the very identity of God ('Love is from God'). The word love is mentioned nine times. Just as God's love impelled him to send his Son to us as Savior ('God's love was revealed among us in this way. God sent his only Son into the world...to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins'), so the Christian is bound to live according to that same pattern ('Beloved...we also ought to love one another'). The author of 1John was concerned about members of his community who had dismissed the importance of

fraternal love. Here, the author grounds the ethical imperative of Jesus ('love one another') in the mission of Jesus himself, indeed, in the very being of God!" [Foundations in Faith]

GOSPEL: John 14:15-16

These verses are recognized as one of the finest discourses on love. The word love (agape) is used *nine* times, weaving together the love God has for Jesus, the love Jesus has for his friends, and the love friends have for one another. The source of all this love is, of course, God's divine love. The disciples are invited to live and abide in this love. The love Jesus speaks of is sacrificial love. It moved Jesus to sacrifice all for the world and it calls us to do the same. It also calls us to obey God's commandments. So by living out Jesus' command to love, the disciples become totally involved in Jesus' mission to embrace all. By living in his love, the disciples will bear much fruit.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you and how does it relate to your life?
2. In Jesus' time, the Gentiles were considered as "them" and the Jews as "us." In our time, name some of the groups considered as "them." If we really see the "them people" as part of God's household, to what extent would we continue to view them as "them"?

3. God loves us just as much as he loves Jesus. To what extent do you believe this? What might make it hard for you or others to believe this wonderful Good News?

4. What helps you to love people that you find not very lovable?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestions: Take action on the “us” and “them” issue. Pray for “them.” Defend “them” when they are spoken about in an uncharitable way.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

May 17, 2015 B

Before you pray together, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *God our Father, make us joyful in the Ascension of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we follow him into the new creation, for his Ascension is our glory and our hope. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Sharing life: What do you love most about your parish? Name one way it could be a better parish.

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading describes the Ascension of Jesus and his promise of the Holy Spirit. In the second reading, Paul describes the meaning of the Ascension—how God raised Jesus above all earthly powers and made him Head of the Church and Lord of creation. The Gospel is the Great Commission—Jesus sending his apostles to preach the Good News to the whole world.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 1:1-11

In Kings 2:4-15, the prophet Elijah told his disciple Elisha that he would receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit if he saw Elijah being taken up into heaven. It came to pass; Elisha witnessed the flaming chariot take up Elijah into heaven in a whirlwind. Thus Elisha received the spirit of Elijah and proceeded on to Jericho to continue his mission.

In Acts 1:9, the disciples see Jesus being taken up into the clouds only to return to them in the Spirit in chapter 2. They are to carry on the mission of Jesus just as Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah.

This reading shows us that the Ascension of Jesus marks the end of his journey on earth and signals the beginning of a new era. The mission of the Church begins under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 47

This is a prayer of praise and creation of a liturgical celebration of the enthronement of God.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:17-23

This is an excerpt from a prayer of thanksgiving. Paul begins by praying that all believers in Jesus will be blessed by wisdom and revelation of his ways. Then he prays that believers may be enlightened on three things: 1) hope which is rooted in the possession of the Holy Spirit; 2) the inheritance of God's life ("glory") as definitely

assured; and 3) the tremendous power of God's abiding in believers. Just as God marvelously raised Jesus from death to life in the Resurrection, so too will Christians experience radical change in their own lives. What happened to Jesus will happen to those who believe in him.

GOSPEL: Mark 16:15-20

In this Gospel, the disciples are given the necessary means of salvation: belief in Jesus and baptism into the Christian community. They are commissioned "to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world" so that all will have a chance to be saved. While many will hear the message, not all will open their hearts to it. Mark names signs that will accompany believers that they will be blessed with empowerment to continue the healing ministry of Jesus. Their *teaching ministry* will be accompanied by a *healing ministry*. While we do not need to literally trust that believers will have the power to 'handle venomous snakes' and 'drink deadly poison,' we do need to accept that believers possess a power beyond their own to cope with the hardships of life. For example, many people have been healed by the power of prayer; others have been delivered from the power of Satan; and still others have received the power of God to help them to stop drinking and be freed from the painful memories of a difficult childhood. If Ascension means being lifted up, then we need to believe in the healing power of God to lift us up when we are wounded and possessed by demons of one kind or another. Jesus' Ascension marks the end of his life on earth and the beginning of the mission of the Church,

which all of us participate in by means of our Baptism.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you and why?
2. After the Ascension, the disciples return to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. What new or fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit do you desire at this time for your parish and for yourself?
3. Jesus' last message to his disciples is a commission to evangelize every creature. To what extent is your parish faithful to this Great Commission? How faithful are you? How can both you and your parish carry out more faithfully this commission of Jesus?
4. Jesus' Ascension is a time of transition for the Apostles. Share a time of transition in your life that turned out to be a blessing.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestion: Pray for all graduates and people who are beginning a new chapter in their lives.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all who are graduating from school at this time. Pray for openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

In preparation for the Feast of Pentecost, consider making a Novena to the Holy Spirit beginning this Friday. A suggested novena is offered at the end of this week's commentary.

NOVENA TO THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

Before Jesus ascends into Heaven, he tells his disciples to return to Jerusalem and to wait in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4-5). For the next nine days, the disciples, along with Mary and some other women, “devoted themselves to constant prayer” (Acts 1:14). This time of prayer is often called the first *Novena* (meaning nine). A *Novena* is a nine-day period of prayer for a particular intention.

Beginning next Friday, you are invited to pray the following Novena to the Holy Spirit for whatever intention you may have. You are encouraged to also pray for our Church family, that we will have a greater sense of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is God’s greatest gift to us. For the next nine days, make a particular effort to be attentive to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in your daily life and to respond to his promptings.

NOVENA OUTLINE

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit
and we shall be recreated
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Meditate on Scripture assigned for each day.

Pray one decade of the Rosary asking Mary to help you to become more attentive and responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father of Light,
from whom every good gift comes,
send your Spirit into our lives.
With the power of a mighty wind....
and by the flame of your wisdom,
open the horizons of our minds.
Loosen our tongues to sing your praise
in words beyond the power of speech,
for without your Spirit
we could never raise our voices
in words of peace
or announce the truth
that Jesus is Lord! Amen.

Opening Prayer (Pentecost Sunday)

Scripture Readings for the Nine Days

DAY 1

Luke 1:35: Mary conceives Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:21-22: Jesus is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

“Jesus, baptize me anew with your Holy Spirit.”

DAY 2

John 7:37-39: Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, possess my whole being.”

DAY 3

Acts 2:1-12: The promised Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples.

“Holy Spirit, awaken in me the fire of your love.”

DAY 4

Acts 2:42-47: Led by the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Christ join together in a small Christian community to share life and God's deeds in their midst.

“Holy Spirit, may our Small Christian Community grow in love for you.”

DAY 5

Acts 10:44-48: The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles.

“Holy Spirit, help me to be open to your workings in the most surprising places and ways.”

DAY 6

Acts 13:1-12: Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas are discerned to go on their first missionary journey.

“Holy Spirit, help me to hear your voice when you call out to me.”

DAY 7

Rom 8:26-27: The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer.

“Holy Spirit, teach me to pray.”

DAY 8

1Cor 3:10-16: The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the deep things of God.

“Holy Spirit, show me God's path for my life.”

DAY 9

Gal 5:16-26: Paul names some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We are holy and Spirit-filled to the extent that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are operative in our lives.

“Holy Spirit, help me to grow in love, peace, joy.”

PENTECOST SUNDAY

May 24, 2015 B

Before you pray together, take a minute or two to be quiet and ask to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Opening prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful gathered in your name. Enkindle in us the fire of your divine love. Allow your dormant gifts within us to manifest themselves in our lives so that all will know your presence and activity in our lives. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings speak of the Holy Spirit's coming. The second reading tells us that the Holy Spirit grants the Church a *diversity* of gifts.

Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so before your meeting.

FIRST READING: Acts 2:1-11

Luke situates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit comes on Easter Sunday evening. In Scripture, it is the *theological* meaning of events that matter and not their *historical chronology*.

In Jewish tradition, *Pentecost* is a harvest feast celebrating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. It commemorates Israel's covenant with God, the birth of Israel. *Pentecost* (meaning fifty) takes place 50 days after Passover.

Luke has the Holy Spirit come on Pentecost to announce the beginning of a new Israel. The Church will be *universal* in scope. People of *every* nation will be invited to join this new People of God.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit is described in both visual and auditory terms reminiscent of the Old Testament theophanies, (i.e., appearances of God). God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and God spoke to Job from a whirlwind (Job 38:1). The first gift the Spirit imparts is the gift of *tongues*. Perhaps the most miraculous thing about this whole event is the *inner change* it works in the disciples. A group of fear-filled disciples now become bold proclaimers of the Gospel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 104

This is a hymn of praise to the Creator—God, the One who gives us new life in the Spirit.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Paul makes two important points. First, all the gifts come from the *same* Spirit. This *One* Spirit is the

unifying factor in a community in which the *many* gifts threaten to create chaos. Second, the gifts are given for the common good and not for anyone's self-aggrandizement.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

"On the evening of that first day of the week...Jesus came." This appearance happens on Easter Sunday evening, the evening of the Resurrection. Jesus comes to a group of frightened disciples (*"The doors were locked for fear of the Jews"*). The fact that Jesus can come through locked doors shows that the "resurrected life" is totally different—not confined by physical obstacles. Yet, by showing them his hands and his side, Jesus is saying that there is a *connection* and *continuity* between the crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ. Also, by showing them his pierced hands and side, Jesus is communicating the *cost* of glory.

Jesus imparts three gifts: *peace*, *joy* and the *Spirit*. The "*peace*" or *shalom* which Jesus brings replaces the feelings of guilt the disciples must have had for abandoning Jesus in his hour of greatest need. The gift of *peace* or *shalom* restores harmony to a broken or wounded relationship. The disciples experience *joy* on seeing Jesus. This joy at the presence of Jesus replaces the depression they must have felt during Jesus' absence. Then Jesus imparts his Spirit: *"He breathed on them."* This gesture is reminiscent of God breathing life into Adam (Gen 2:7). Pentecost is the beginning of a new creation. By his gesture of breathing, Jesus brings to birth his Church. He then commissions those gathered to go forth and forgive sins. *"Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained."* Originally, these words were probably seen as the Church's prerogative to confer or

withhold baptism from those seeking entry into the Church. People who were judged as not truly repentant of their sin or who do not embrace the message of Jesus were refused baptism which, among other things, cleansed the recipient of sin. Later, our Church saw in these words of Jesus the foundation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you and why?
2. Who is the Holy Spirit to you? If you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit, how did it begin and develop?
3. What gift of the Holy Spirit do you most desire or need at this time in your life?
4. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's *presence* and *activity* in your life?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on today's readings. Suggestions: This week spend some time reflecting on how God has empowered you to do some work in our Church or world. If you do not experience the Holy Spirit's *presence* and *activity* in your life, consider speaking with a priest or spiritual guide about this important matter.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

This week consider praying briefly over each member of your group for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Gather around each person and lay hands on them. You can pray in silence or vocalize a prayer. Ask each person what gift or fruit (peace, joy, love, etc.) of the Holy Spirit they would like to receive or grow in.

Meditation

The Spirit comes gently and makes himself known by his fragrance. He is not felt as a burden, for he is light.... Rays of light and knowledge stream before him as he approaches. The Spirit comes with a tenderness of a true friend and protector to save, to heal, to teach, to counsel, to strengthen, to console. The Spirit comes to enlighten [our] mind...and through [us], the minds of others....

As light strikes the eyes of [one] who comes out of darkness into the sunshine and enables him to see clearly things he could not discern before, so light [of the Spirit] floods [our souls] and enables [us] to see clearly things...beyond the range of human vision, things hitherto undreamed of.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem
(Quoted in *Essentials of the Faith*, p.79, Fr. Alfred McBride)