

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 6, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Loving and caring God, we gather in your name. We thank you for the grace that moves us to say ‘yes’ to your call to come together to break open your holy Word. Open our minds and hearts to hear the message you want us to hear this week. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

Facilitator: Our first and third readings speak of faith. In the second reading, Paul reminds Timothy not to be timid but strong in his witness to God.

Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

This reading is part of a dialogue between God and the prophet Habakkuk who is feeling very burdened by the prevalence of turmoil and violence. He cries out to God: *“How long, O Lord, must this violence go on? Why do you not intervene?”*

Habakkuk’s cry for help should not be interpreted as a sign of despair but as the lament of one who has known the love of God and yearns to heighten the experience of that love in the midst of desperate circumstances. In the second part of the reading, God responds to Habakkuk, telling him that, in time, the forces of destruction will be defeated and that those who keep faith in God will be vindicated.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 95

This song is a vivid reminder that faith is what helps people endure hardships experienced in the journey of life.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Paul offers a strong word of encouragement and exhortation to his spiritual son, Timothy, whom he earlier ordained for ministry. It seems that the zeal Timothy previously showed may have waned and so Paul challenges him to *“stir into a flame the gift God gave him when hands were imposed on him.”* Paul counsels Timothy not to give in to a spirit of cowardice but to be strong and filled with love, always ready to witness to the Gospel he has received. Paul also reminds Timothy that enduring his share of hardships will make him strong. He tells Timothy that he must carefully guard the authentic teaching he has received and, at the same time, learn how to articulate it in new and fresh ways for the various situations he finds himself in.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 17:5-10

Luke 17:1-10 contains miscellaneous sayings on scandal, forgiveness, faith, and dutiful servanthood to God, which are directed to would-be disciples of Jesus. The latter two sayings on *faith* and *dutiful servanthood* are the focus of today’s Gospel.

Having heard the challenges that Jesus has issued to them about avoiding scandal and forgiving over and over, the disciples look for help: *“Increase our faith.”* Jesus responds by saying that even a small amount of *genuine* faith (i.e., unwavering and steadfast trust in God) can accomplish the impossible. Then Jesus illustrates through a parable that such genuine and powerful faith is not something we can take credit for or seek a reward for. Rather, it is simply us responding to a God who gives us all good things. The mention of the uprooting of a tree is an Easter way of saying: *“With faith, what looks impossible can become possible.”*

The parable of the unprofitable servant would have shocked Jesus’ hearers. In his time, Judaism strongly believes in the notion of merit: God “owes” salvation to the people for keeping the law. Jesus rejects this belief and emphasizes God’s sheer goodness. When disciples respond to the call of faith, they are only “doing their job,” which involves, among other things, avoiding scandal, forgiving again and again, and sharing one’s possessions. As disciples, we must never try to place God in our debt. God owes us nothing—we owe him everything; we are the work of his hands.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Have you, like Habakkuk, ever questioned God and asked “why”? If so, what were the circumstances behind your misgiving? What helped you to work your way through that difficult time?

3. In the second reading, Paul says the Spirit of God is no cowardly spirit. Has the Spirit ever led you to act more bravely than you thought possible? How easy or hard is it for you to witness to your faith?

4. How would you describe the gift of faith? Can you recall a time when faith helped you to deal with tough circumstances in your life?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Witness to your faith. If you tend to be timid, ask for courage.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Faithful God,
with faith the size of a mustard seed,
we can move mountains.
Stir into flame the faith made visible
by the imposition of hands
when we were baptized and confirmed.
Help us to hear your voice,
not with hardened hearts,
but with hearts open and pliable
to the touch of your Spirit.
Amen.*

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 13, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Loving God, as we gather today, we give you thanks for the many blessings you have bestowed on us. Help us to develop an attitude of gratitude and to never take your blessings for granted. Open our minds and hearts to the message you want us to hear in your Word this day. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Facilitator: In the first and third readings, lepers experience healing after they act in obedience to God's Word. Paul says that even though enemies of the Gospel can chain him up, they cannot chain up God's Word.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 2Kings 5:12-17

To fully appreciate this story, one needs to read all of Chapter 5 of 2Kings. It is a story about humility, healing, gratitude, conversion and worship. The primary character in the story is Naaman, a foreigner, who is cured of leprosy and converted to the God of Israel. In order to receive all that God is offering him, Syrian General Naaman needs to overcome some serious obstacles. He must believe that his servant can be an instrument of God in his life. He must be humble enough to listen to the exhortations of his servant, humble enough to accept the gift of healing in a way he has not expected and from a source he does not know. In the end, *obedience* to the word of the prophet brings healing.

As a man of means, Naaman desires to offer gifts to Elisha. But Elisha refuses because he wants to make it clear to Naaman that it is God, not he, who is the source of his healing. Since in those days, it is believed that one can only worship a god in the land of that god, Naaman asks permission to take some earth back with him so he can worship the God of Israel, even outside of the land. This story is intended to show God's concern for non-Jewish persons, which is also a central theme in today's Gospel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 98

This psalm has a universalist theme: God's care and concern are for all people. It also expresses the gratitude that Naaman and the leper in the Gospel must have felt.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2Timothy 2:8-13

Paul expresses his willingness to suffer for the Gospel and though he may be in chains (in prison), God's Word

cannot be imprisoned. The reading ends with an excerpt from a baptismal hymn about dying and rising with Christ and about God's faithfulness to us despite our infidelity.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 17:11-19

Luke's Gospel is sometimes called "the Gospel of the Outsiders." Jesus is born like an outsider in Bethlehem. His first visitors—shepherds and the Magi—are considered outsiders in their time. Lepers also are outsiders in Jesus' time. They are cast out of the community because of their contagious skin disease. Worse still, they are told that their disease is a result of sin in their lives. So the ten lepers who meet Jesus suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Upon seeing or hearing Jesus approaching, the lepers cry out from a distance: "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us.*" They do not ask for healing but simply for compassion.

Jesus does not seem to show much compassion. Instead, he instructs them to go and show themselves to the priests, who have the authority to determine who *is* or *is not* clean. Lepers need a clean bill of health to be readmitted to the community.

In ordering the lepers to go to the priests *prior* to being healed, Jesus is testing them. Will they trust him and obey his command? They do and are healed *as* they travel in obedience to God's word. In the first reading today, Naaman is healed *after* he obeys the prophet's command to go wash in the river. We see in both readings that *obedience* leads to healing.

Gratitude. In the second part of today's Gospel, we notice that only one of the ten healed lepers returns to give thanks to Jesus. He is a Samaritan, a non-Jew and

also an outsider. This man gives a full-throated thanks, prostrating himself before Jesus.

Why did the other nine not return to give thanks? We are not told. Perhaps they were too busy celebrating their good fortune. Perhaps they didn't think Jesus was the cause of their healing. Perhaps, like us, they became too busy with other stuff. An attitude of spiritual gratitude leads us to *see* and *believe* that all good things come from the loving hands of God. A lack of this spiritual quality makes us see blessings merely as 'good fortune.'

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Our first and third readings are examples of obedience to God's word that leads to healing. What makes it hard or easy for you to be obedient to God's word, especially when it goes against our natural way of looking at things?

3. The one leper recognized God's touch upon his life. The other nine did not. What can help us to be more *aware* of God's presence in our daily lives? What can hinder us from recognizing it?

4. To what extent have you developed the attitude of gratitude? Why do many people tend to see a cup as *half empty* rather than *half full*?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Work hard on developing an attitude of gratitude. Reach out to someone who feels like an outsider.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. You have no need of our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Mass Preface, Weekday IV)

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 20, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Lord, thank you for gathering us together. In your Word today, you speak to us about the importance of persevering in our prayers of petitions and intercession. Teach each of us how to be prayer warriors before your holy throne. Grant us your Spirit so that we may hear the message you have for us today. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Facilitator: The first and third readings speak about the importance of persevering in the prayers of petition and intercession. In the second reading, Paul stresses the vital importance of Sacred Scripture in the life of the Christian.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Exodus 17:8–13

This is a beautiful example of God partnering with us to achieve a victory. Moses sends Joshua and his men down to the valley to engage Amalek and his army, while he, Aaron and Hur remain on the hill and enter into intercessory prayers for the men in the valley. As long as Moses and his men persevere in prayer, they are victorious in battle, but when they let up, Amalek and his men start to regain strength. The story beautifully illustrates that in the battles of our lives, we are partners with God. As the old adage goes: *"We must act as if all depended on us and pray as if all depended on God."* Without God, we falter but God expects us to also do our part.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 121

The psalmist expresses great confidence in God. Trust is a key ingredient of effective prayer.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2 Timothy 3:14–4:2

The aging and imprisoned Paul is writing to the young Pastor Timothy whom he has ordained. He instructs him in his responsibilities as pastor and exhorts him to do three things: *first*, to hold fast to the traditions he has received; *second*, to use Scripture for his own ongoing formation and for the formation of his people; and *third*, to persevere in his ministry of preaching God's Word "in season and out of season," since God's Word is good for correcting, exhorting and reproving.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 18:1-8

This Gospel story, which may involve an inheritance issue, features three characters: a widow, her unnamed opponents, and an uncaring and unjust judge. The widow symbolizes the powerless one with no rights, who is seeking justice from an unscrupulous judge. It seems her cause is impossible, but her *persistence* wins the day. She succeeds without the help of a "dream team." Point: If an *uncaring judge* would answer our plea for justice, how much more will a *caring God* respond to our prayers?

The story is also a powerful example of a woman's *perseverance* in her fight for *justice*. On this level, the story tells us that justice is achievable even in the most unlikely of situations. The message is intended for the disciples who are faced with suffering and persecution.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Aaron and Hur offered support to Moses in his efforts to persevere in prayer. Who are your prayer partners? How do they offer you support? Who do you find yourself praying for constantly?

3. In the second reading, Paul exhorts his readers to be persistent in proclaiming the Word even if it is not convenient for them. When is it inconvenient to

proclaim the Gospel? What might help you to face this challenge?

4. When did Scripture become a “living word” for you?
5. Name some of the glaring injustices in our society today. Do you find yourself drawn to be involved in any form of injustice in your neck of the woods?
6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Invite someone to be your prayer partner as you deal with the issues in your journey. Support in any way you can those who are battling the causes of the powerless in our society.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*I am neither a man of letters nor of science,
but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer.
It is prayer that has saved my life.
Prayer is the key to each morning,
and the lock to each evening.
It is a sacred alliance between God and us.
Let everyone try this experience,
and they will find that daily prayer
will add something new to their lives,
something which cannot be found elsewhere.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 27, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Thank you, good and caring God, for gathering us together once more to share life and your Word. May our prayer and sharing help us to grow in sensitivity and responsiveness to those in need of our compassion. Amen.*

Facilitator: The first and third readings tell us that the Lord hears the cry of the poor and the humble person. In the second reading, Paul reflects on how the Lord has been his defender in tough times.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

While “*God has no favorites,*” he does have a special place in his heart for the prayer of the poor and the oppressed. “*The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds.*” The “*lowly*” is one who knows his need for God (e.g., the tax collector in today's Gospel) in contrast to one who is arrogant and egotistical (the Pharisee in today's Gospel). In a male-dominated society such as Israel, widows and orphans are especially vulnerable, and God is keenly responsive to them.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 34

This is a psalm of thanksgiving highlighting God's presence to the poor in their affliction.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Paul is aware that his days on earth are numbered. He does not resent it, but neither does he run toward it eagerly. He faces it with calm resignation that springs from deep faith. He uses athletic imagery to speak of his fidelity to God. He has “*fought the good fight,*” he has “*finished the race,*” he has “*kept the faith.*” Like Jesus, in his time of need, all his friends abandon him. But God does not fail him. God stands by his side offering him strength.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 18:9-14

Today's parable (only found in Luke) features two men in prayer. The Pharisee belongs to a group within Judaism who pride themselves on their fidelity to the Law. This particular Pharisee has several good qualities: he prays, fasts twice a week, tithes, and is honest. (What Pastor wouldn't like him?) In contrast, the tax collector is a “*bad egg.*” He is a participant in a very corrupt

system that cheats his own people. Politically, he is a traitor and, religiously, he is unclean. Plain and simple, the guy is detestable on all counts. He is the kind of unsavory character that respectable people will not have in their company. There is no doubt as to which of these men live a righteous life.

So the Pharisee and the tax collector go off to pray in the Temple. When they finish praying, Jesus says that God is pleased with the tax collector's prayer but frowns on the Pharisee's prayer. How come?

First, the Pharisee's thanking God that he is not like everyone else is not a genuine prayer but rather a commendation of his own goodness. He replaces praise of God with self-congratulation.

Second, he elevates himself by putting down the other person, an absolute no-no for Jesus' disciples. And for that, he gets a D-. In judging and condemning the other, the Pharisee has judged and condemned himself.

Third, he has no sense of his own sinfulness or need before God. He pretty much gives himself all the credit for his own goodness. Even though he may be living a righteous life, he is misguided in his approach to God and in his way of praying.

Fourth, in thanking God that he is not like the rest, he *separates* himself from sinful humanity. True prayer brings us closer not only to God but also to wounded humanity.

What is good about the tax collector's prayer? Why does he get an A+ for his approach to God?

First, his humility, as expressed in his prayer, makes him pleasing to God. “*He who humbles himself will be exalted.*” Sirach says: “*The prayer of the lowly (humble) person pierces the clouds.*”

Second, he is deeply aware of his sinfulness before God. “*Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.*” He goes home

justified because of his humble approach to God and his sense of his need for God.

If we want to go home justified, we should *live* like the Pharisee (is honest and faithful, fasts, and tithes generously), and *pray* like the tax collector (who is deeply aware of his need for God's mercy).

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. "Humbition" is a term used in the business world to describe people who work at balancing humility with ambition. How can we as disciples of Jesus balance "competing well" (like Paul), striving to be the best we can be and, at the same time, remaining humble about our accomplishments?

3. Why do we sometimes try to make ourselves look good by casting another in a poor light? What drives this tendency in us? What can help us to overcome it?

4. How do we keep a true balance between having a healthy sense of self and, at the same time, being ever aware that before God, we are sinners?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Practice 'humbition,' that is, be the best you can be while remaining humble.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Just and faithful God,
open my eyes to see you present
in the cries of all my sisters and brothers,
but especially those of the widow,
the orphan, the oppressed, and the poor.
Make me more aware of how you respond to my needs
so that I might respond in kind to the needs of all.
Amen.*

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 3, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Loving and merciful God, thank you for gathering us together to share life in the context of your Eternal Word. Today, your Word speaks to us about your wondrous mercy. Help each of us to internalize this message in the deepest core of our being, and to share it with all who have offended us. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Facilitator: The first reading speaks of God's mercy toward the sinner, of which the Gospel offers a practical example. In the second reading, Paul urges the Thessalonians to be worthy of God's calling by cooperating with his saving grace.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Wisdom 11:22-12:2

The Book of Wisdom is the last book of the Old Testament to be written. Today's reading is a beautiful reflection on how our divine Creator is intimately involved with every aspect of his creation, even though it is only a tiny grain in contrast to his immensity. The Creator loves all that he has created and is rich in mercy to all who have sinned. God's whole desire is not to condemn the sinner but to gradually draw him/her to repentance. *"God rebukes offenders little by little ... reminding them of the sins they are committing that they may abandon their wickedness and return to the Lord."* This reading prepares us to listen to a practical illustration of God's mercy at work in the story of Zacchaeus.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 145

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

The Lord's anger is far outweighed by his patient forbearance and covenant fidelity.

SECOND READING: 2Thessalonians 1:11, 2:2

Our second reading for the next three Sundays will be from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians. In this letter, Paul is writing to a community which is having some erroneous views on the Second Coming of Jesus. Paul urges them not to be preoccupied with the Day of the Lord's Coming, but to strive by cooperating with God's grace to be "worthy of their calling," which would be the best way to prepare themselves for that Day. In other words, *"The call of God, received in and by grace, must be accepted and assimilated, professed in faith and translated into a living witness to Christ and loving service of others"* (Patricia Sanchez). Zacchaeus,

in today's Gospel, is a good example of someone responding to God's grace.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 19:1-10

This section of Luke's Gospel is sometimes called *"the Gospel of the outcast"* because it has several accounts of Jesus reaching out to the outcast: lepers, blind, beggars, and the tax collector in the Temple. And in today's Gospel, he connects with Zacchaeus. This story is also one of Jesus reaching out to a *rich* man because *"nothing is impossible with God."* Zacchaeus, as the *chief* tax collector for the Romans, is likely despised by his fellow Jews for being part of a very corrupt system which hurts his own people. Yet Jesus offers salvation to this man. How come? Because Zacchaeus opens his heart to Jesus and responds to him. By climbing up the tree to get a glimpse of Jesus, he is running the risk of becoming the laughing stock of the town. But he wants very much to see this man Jesus who, he has heard, *"ate with sinners and tax collectors."* When Jesus sees him, he reaches out to him. Jesus does not ask for a confession but instead tells Zacchaeus of his plan to come to his house today. Zacchaeus is elated. His conversion is authenticated by his willingness to reach out to the poor by sharing his wealth with them. This is faith-bearing fruit in action.

The Scripture scholar, Fr. Joseph Fitzmeyer, has another interpretation of this story. He does not think that Zacchaeus said, *"I shall start giving..."* but rather, *"I give..."*—denoting that this is presently his practice. Zacchaeus is thus defending himself before Jesus. *"He stood his ground."* In this interpretation, the story is not about Zacchaeus' conversion but about Jesus reaching out to a religious and just man who nevertheless is an outcast and shunned by society.

Against the above interpretation, the following can be said. Nothing in the text says anything about Zacchaeus' private life (he may or may not have been giving money to the poor) and we do know that he is a prominent official in a very corrupt system. Fred Craddock writes: *"No one can be privately righteous while participating in and profiting from a program that robs and crushes other persons."*

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In the second reading, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to try, with the grace of God, to be "worthy of God's calling in their lives." In your opinion, what does this involve?

3. In climbing up a tree to see Jesus, Zacchaeus was stretching himself. Lots of people may have laughed at him. What would be a spiritually stretching exercise for you to grow in your relationship with Jesus?

4. Do you think that we often tend to harshly judge individuals simply because they happen to belong to a certain group or race, or work in a particular profession?

What are examples of such groups and professions today?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: If burdened with sin, meditate on Jesus' outreach to one who may have been a very corrupt public official. Reread the second reading, then with the grace of God, seek to be worthy of your awesome calling as a child of God and a disciple of Jesus.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Give us pure spirit so we can see you,
A humble spirit so we can hear you,
A loving spirit so we can serve you,
A believing spirit so we can live with you.
Amen.*

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 10, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *All good and gracious God, your Son Jesus Christ triumphed over the powers of death and prepared a place for us in heaven. Bless us who gather this day to give you thanks for his Resurrection, and bestow on us the gift that someday we may praise you with all the angels and saints in that glorious state called Heaven, where Jesus lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.*

Facilitator: The first and third readings speak about belief in a life after death. In the second reading, Paul speaks of the Word of God as active and dynamic, capable of producing continued growth in virtue if cultivated and nurtured.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 2Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

The Books of the Maccabees tell us about the politics of Palestine in the second century B.C., focusing on the attempt by foreign powers to suppress Judaism. Today's reading tells about the heroism of a family of seven brothers and their mother as they deal with threats to their life because of their faith. Most significant is the testimony of the last brother who professes faith in the resurrection from the dead. Belief in a personal resurrection or an afterlife did not appear in Judaism until about 200 B.C. The unsinkable faith of the Jewish martyrs demonstrates their confidence in divine justice in the afterlife where the wrongs of human society would be set right. The lives of the mother and her seven sons are not irretrievably lost. Their steadfast faith would inspire all who might waiver in their faith during persecution.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 17

In this lament, the psalmist is sorely tried, probably as a result of an unjust accusation. He protests his innocence and calls out to God for vindication.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

This letter is addressed to a community experiencing external persecution and internal dissension. Paul asks God and Jesus to console and strengthen the community in their time of trial. Paul also asks for prayers for himself and for his ministry so that the Word of God may spread and flourish. Finally, he prays to be delivered from evil people.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 20:27-38

Some Sadducees who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead seek to ridicule Jesus with a question about the next life. They raise a question based on the "levirate law" (see Deut 25:5-10) which states that if a man's brother dies before he has a child, it is his duty to marry his brother's widow and raise their first child as the child of the deceased brother. The Sadducees ask: What if the woman marries seven brothers and all die before any child is born of the union, whose wife will she be in the next life?

Jesus does not give a direct answer. Instead, he makes a distinction between "this age" and the "coming age." In this age, people need to marry and procreate to keep the human race going. In the age to come in which there will be no death, there will be no need for marriage and procreation. Therefore, the Sadducees' question as to whose wife the woman will be, is a mute one. Jesus' remark seems to indicate that in heaven, there will not be husbands and wives, but only people who love each other in Christ, which might be the best way, considering that some men and women have had more than one spouse here on earth.

Then Jesus refers to an incident in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) which the Sadducees believe in and which they say make no mention of resurrection. But Jesus says that when God appeared to Moses, he revealed himself as a God of the living and not of the dead. The implication is that their great ancestors Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living and not dead.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Name examples of heroic faith in our time. In your life, is there a person that stands out who kept the faith despite enormous suffering?

3. In the second reading, Paul prays to be delivered from false teachers. Who are false teachers today?

4. What difference does belief in the afterlife make to the way we live our lives here on earth?

5. What questions do you have about the next life?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Pray this week for the dying and for all who work with the dying. If you do not have a Last Will & Testament, draw one up.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*God of the Living,
we thank you for the promise you have given us
in the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus.
We thank you for the faith that tells us
that those who die in him will rise in him.
May this promise, rooted in our Baptism,
continue to give us hope in our difficulties.
Amen.*

For more on the Church's teaching on *What Will Happen to us after Death - The Last Things*, see our website, Catechism Topics, Article #11.

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 17, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *God, all-powerful and ever-living source of all that is good, from the beginning of time, you promised your people salvation through the future coming of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to drink of his truth and expand our hearts with the joy of his promises, so that we may serve you in faith and in love and know forever the joy of your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Facilitator: As the liturgical year ends, the focus of all three readings is the End Times and the Second Coming of Jesus.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: MALACHI 3:19-20

Malachi is writing in the fifth century before Christ to a community with very lax morals. In this reading, Malachi speaks in frightening terms of the imminent "Day of the Lord." On that day, the proud and evildoers will become stubble to be burned, and the faithful will be vindicated.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 98

This psalm reaffirms the first reading's emphasis on God's justice.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: 2Thessalonians 3:7-12

Because of the belief that the Second Coming is imminent, some people quit their jobs and become busybodies. Paul urges them to quietly get back to work. Then he presents himself as a model of hard work.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 21:5-19

People admiring the beauty of the Temple give Jesus an opportunity to speak about tough times ahead for believers.

Jesus forewarns about the destruction of the Temple by the Romans which is to occur around 80AD, just when Luke is putting his finishing touches to his Gospel. Someone asks, "When will these terrible things happen and what will be the sign that these things are about to happen?" In response, Jesus tells them to be on the watch for false prophets who will present themselves as true teachers: "Do not follow them."

Then Jesus speaks of the time when his disciples will be persecuted and dragged into court because of their belief in him. When this happens, not to worry, he will be with them, empowering them to testify on his behalf. In the end, their faith in Jesus and their perseverance will secure their lives.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. The readings are a bit scary. Should homilists today preach more 'hell, fire and damnation' homilies? What helps you deal with scary times?

3. In the second reading, Paul says that those who are unwilling to work should not eat. What do you think? How should food pantries deal with this issue?

4. If you knew you had six months to live, how would you spend it?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Pray for persecuted Christians and those who are seeking honest employment.

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING,
PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*God who comes,
we ask that you give us the grace to persevere
through whatever trials and upheavals*

*come into our lives.
Help us to live in the awareness
that your Son is with us
and continues to draw us more deeply
into communion with you
through the working of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING

November 24, 2019 C

Opening prayer: *Father, all-powerful God of love, you have raised our Lord Jesus Christ from death to life, resplendent in glory as King of Creation. Open our hearts, free all the world to rejoice in his peace, to glory in his justice, to live in his love. Bring all mankind together in Jesus Christ your Son, whose kingdom is with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Facilitator: On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King. Instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to combat the growing secularism and atheism of his time, it is one of the so-called ‘idea feasts’ that do not celebrate an event in the life of Jesus but rather some aspect of his identity. (Trinity Sunday is another example of an ‘idea feast.’) In it we recognize and honor Christ as ruler of all. The original feast of Christ the King is the Ascension, in which the Church celebrates the exalted Christ, crowned with glory at the right hand of God. Today’s celebration should remind us of that more important feast as the liturgical year comes to a close. The readings will not allow us to take a shallow view of Christ’s reign, confusing earthly power and prestige with the Savior’s divine majesty and goodness. Instead, the feast fixes Christ’s messianic kingship squarely in the mystery of the Cross, stretching us uncomfortably on the crossbeam of a paradox. Our salvation is won by having our King die a horrible, ignominious death, betrayed by his friends and the people he came to save.

Let us listen to God’s Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: 2Samuel 5:1-3

In this short reading, we have one of three different accounts of the anointing of David as King of Israel. David is portrayed not as one grasping for power or as full of ambition. It is the people who beg him to accept the honor. David becomes Israel’s shepherd-king, whose role is to be the unifier of the tribes of Israel and a type or prefigurement of Jesus, the Shepherd-King of the New Israel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 122

In this hymn of pilgrimage, the pilgrim sees Jerusalem as the center of both worship and royal administration. It is the seat of God and the seat of David and his descendants.

Read the second reading, then read the commentary.

SECOND READING: Colossians 1:12-20

In this beautiful hymn, Paul celebrates the kingship of the cosmic Christ. It begins with an exhortation to give thanks to God for the way he has rescued us in Christ. Paul speaks of Christ as the *visible image* of the invisible God. He is the center of the cosmos. All things are created in him and through him. In him, all things continue to exist and have their being. Christ is also the Head of the Church. The hymn speaks of the saving

work of Christ. He comes to reconcile all things to himself. He accomplishes this, not by shedding other people’s blood (as many earthly kings have done) but by shedding his own blood. Jesus is the Incarnate Love of God in our midst. He is God’s first and last Word to us.

Read the Gospel, then read the commentary.

GOSPEL: Luke 23:35-43

This Gospel is one of *contrast* and *irony*. The *contrast* is manifested in the reaction of the two men crucified with Jesus. One jeers and mocks Jesus and the other reaches out for salvation. The *irony* is that the words, which the detractors of Jesus actually speak, are very accurate about who Jesus is and why he came. “*He is the Messiah of God, the Chosen One.*” Jesus is the “*Savior of his people.*” These three taunts of Jesus form a parallel with Satan’s three temptations in Luke 4:1-13. Also, there is irony in the inscription mockingly hung over the Cross: “*This is the King of the Jews.*” The passage concludes with the beautiful promise of salvation to the repentant thief.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. In the first reading today, David is imaged as a shepherd-king. In your lifetime, who has been your favorite and most inspiring religious or political leader?

3. One commentator called the people sneering at Jesus in today's Gospel "vinegar people." In what ways might we prevent "vinegar or toxic people" from infecting us? How might we free ourselves from any toxic tendencies we may have?

4. Today's Gospel features a criminal who "steals" heaven with one act of sincere repentance. How do you feel about that?

5. As we draw to the end of another liturgical year, can you name a spiritual blessing received this past year that you are most grateful for?

6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Pray for all who feel alienated from God, that they may experience his loving touch like the repentant thief.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Lord Jesus, remember us.

*Give us a share in the spirit of forgiveness
that you so generously expressed from the Cross,
the spirit of generosity that enabled you
to turn from your own sufferings to comfort another,
and the spirit of trust in your Father,
expressed in your last words.*

Amen.