

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER  
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY  
April 8, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

**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: 1 John 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.”

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday’s Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading pause . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let’s be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

## 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 hands 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 accepts Thomas where he is at and invites 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."

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

### FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. What helps you to believe in the resurrection of Jesus? What are some of the implications of this belief for your life?
3. Jesus brought shalom, peace and mercy to the disciples. How does your relationship with Jesus bring peace to your life?
4. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples (his church) the power to forgive sins. Over the years has the sacrament of reconciliation played a role in your spiritual life? If so, how?

5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

### JOURNALING ON THE WORD

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

### **THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**April 15, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

#### **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: 1 John 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.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading pause . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

### 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.*"

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

## FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. Sin and repentance, and mercy are mentioned in today's readings. What helps you to keep a balance between all three - awareness of our sinfulness our need to repent and the gift of God's mercy?
3. Even though the two disciples had just seen Jesus in the Emmaus event, they had no idea who he was when he appeared to them very shortly after that. What are we to make of that?
4. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

## JOURNALING ON THE WORD

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**April 22, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

### **FIRST READING: Acts 4:8-12**

Peter responds 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 rejects 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.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday’s Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading pause . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let’s be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

### GOSPEL: John 10:11-18

Jesus uses the popular and well-loved image of a *shepherd* to describe himself. The chapter follows the healing of the man born blind. Not only do the Pharisees treat the man shamefully, but they also reject Jesus’ claim that he is from God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, defends his authority and rejects 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.

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

## FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. Why is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd so popular with people? What other image of Jesus do you like?
3. What is the difference between a hireling and a good shepherd when it comes to caring for people? When might we act like a hireling, showing no real concern for those in need of good shepherd care?

4. What helps us to grow in our ability to listen to the voice of our good shepherd?

5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

## **JOURNALING ON THE WORD**

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.



**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

## **FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**April 29, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

### **FIRST READING: Acts 9:26-31**

This conversion story 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. When 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**

Three theological themes are combined in a very significant way: *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.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading **pause** . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

### 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.

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

## FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. What *pruning* have you experienced? Who or what has been removed from your life that ended up bringing you closer to Jesus?
3. What fruit have you borne in your life that could not have happened without the presence of Jesus?
4. What helps you to remain in Jesus?
5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

## JOURNALING ON THE WORD

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as

you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

## **SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**May 6, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

### **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, Baptism is seen not so much as a cause of God’s love but 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: 1 John 4:7-10**

This reading uses the word *love* nine times. When it comes to speaking about the central mystery of our faith, speaking about who God is, the most important thing we can say about God is that he *is love*.

Then John says an amazing thing: *“whoever loves is begotten of God and knows God.”* This means, among other things, that the person who lives a loving life knows God – even if he/she is a non-believer. Elsewhere, John says: *“where there is love, there is God”*. The reverse side of the above truth is that *whoever does*

*not love, does not know God.* This refers to believers who do not live lives of love.

The last verse of the reading underlines another important truth, namely that God loved us way before we ever showed our love for God.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading pause . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

### GOSPEL: John 14:15-16

The context for this beautiful teaching on love is the Last Supper. Like the second reading today, this reading uses the word love *nine* times.

Jesus makes an amazing statement which we might easily miss. *"I love you disciples with the same intensity of love as my Father loves me."* Pondering these words could do wonders for us as we struggle to

deepen our sense of God's love for us. Then Jesus says: *Remain in my love.* Even though Jesus will be physically separated from his disciples by his death, they can still experience his love by *remaining in his love and by keeping his commandments.* Jesus summed up *all* the commandments in one word, namely, *love:* love of God, love of neighbor and love of self.

The *sacrificial* dimension of love is also stressed here. Laying down one's life for another is the greatest form of love. This word of Jesus has to be very consoling for all those who day after day care for loved ones, for the sick and for those who live on the margins of society. Finally, the reading underlines God's initiative when it comes to our relationship with him. God is always seeking a relationship with us when we show little or no interest in him.

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

## FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? Why?
2. *"As the Father loves me, so do I love you."* How can these awesome words of Jesus transform our lives?
3. Do you tend to believe that you have to earn God's love? If so, why? How hard is it for you to believe that God loves us just as we are with all our sins and failures?

4. What can help to deepen our sense of God's unconditional love for us?

5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

## **JOURNALING ON THE WORD**

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

## **Suggested Reading**

On the topic of God's unconditional love for us, see my book *13 Powerful Ways to Pray*, page 15, *Developing a Positive Image of God and Self*.

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

## **ASCENSION OF THE LORD**

**May 13, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

### **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 presence 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.

## **PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL**

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading **pause** . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## **GOSPEL COMMENTARY**

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

### **GOSPEL: Mark 16:15-20**

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*. The reference to 'picking up snakes and drinking deadly poison' is not to be taken literally. It is a Middle Eastern form of hyperbole, a way of saying that followers of Jesus will have his power to overcome all forms of evil. They will possess a power beyond their own to enable them 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.

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

## **FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? 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.

5. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

## **JOURNALING ON THE WORD**

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

**For groups using the new format**

*(Facilitator: Follow the instructions shown in italics.)*

**Pentecost Sunday**

**May 20, 2018 B**

*(Before starting, allow a few minutes for the members to exchange greetings, then call the group together to prayer.)*

**Facilitator:** Let us take a minute to consciously place ourselves in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.

*(Pause for a minute.)*

*(Play a religious song if you are able to do so.)*

**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.*

*(Prior to your meeting you are encouraged to read the first and second readings and the commentary on them. After the opening prayer, go to the section titled **Proclamation of the Gospel**, i.e., skip the first and second readings as well as the commentaries.)*

**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: Galatians 5:16-25

Paul contrasts life in the spirit to life in the flesh. Life in the flesh follows earthly passions. Paul names fifteen such passions. When living life in the Spirit, one bears good fruit. Paul lists nine virtues or fruits of the Spirit.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

**Facilitator:** Let us now listen to this Sunday's Gospel.

*(A member of the group reads the gospel.)*

*(After the reading pause . . .)*

**Facilitator:** *As we listen to the second reading of the Gospel, let's be aware of what draws us in and what might be a challenge for us to embrace.*

**Facilitator:** *Let us now take a moment to quietly meditate on the Gospel text.*

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY

**Facilitator:** *Let us now read quietly the gospel commentary.*

## 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. This gift restores harmony to a broken or wounded relationship.

'Joy' is what the disciples experience when they see Jesus. This joy at the presence of Jesus replaces the feelings of depression the disciples 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.

**Facilitator:** Break into small groups. If the group is six or more, break into smaller groups of three.

### FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. As you listened to the gospel, what words caught your attention? 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. In the second reading for this Sunday, Paul names nine fruits of the Spirit, which fruit comes easy enough for you? Which fruit is a challenge for you?
4. What is Jesus saying to you about how a faithful disciple should act?

### JOURNALING ON THE WORD

*(Gather the group back together.)*

**Facilitator:** Take a few minutes to journal on the word/message you are hearing in this Sunday's Gospel. You may also wish to use this time to formulate a prayer response to the word. In other words, as you reflect on the Gospel, what do you wish to say to Jesus about what you are

hearing him say? Perhaps you may also wish to express how you may need him to help you to live the message. Learning to pray about the message we hear in the Gospel is a significant step in our spiritual growth.

Let us take a few moments to share what we discern as Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel.

### — *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)