

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 11, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord, in your Word today you place before us the faith of Abraham and Sarah. They placed their trust in you when it was difficult to do so. Help us to also place our trust in you. May your Holy Spirit breathe on us as we share life and share your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: Alertness and vigilance connect the first reading and the Gospel. In the first reading, the author recalls *Passover night* when the Israelites in Egypt await their liberation from slavery. In the Gospel, Jesus teaches about the importance of an alert spirit. He tells his disciples to be like servants who eagerly await their master's return, ready to welcome him with a spirit of fidelity to duty, which should characterize their lives. In the second reading, the author recalls the faith of Abraham and Sarah and sees it as an unwavering confidence in God's promises.

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 18:6-9

Chapters 11-19 of the Book of Wisdom reflect on the Exodus story and its meaning for the people of Israel. This reading recalls the night the Israelites are liberated and their enemies punished (a reference to the plagues which forced Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free), an event foreseen by the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As the children of Israel celebrate their liberation (a reference to the Passover meal), the adversaries of Israel are being punished (a reference to the tenth plague which killed all first-born sons of the Egyptians).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 33

The just one is exhorted to praise God for his creation. The note of elation and expectation connects the psalm with the first reading.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

This Sunday we listen to the first of four readings from the book of Hebrews. These verses are an excerpt from a larger section which deals with faith, especially perseverance in faith. The author defines faith as the inner guarantee that God's promises regarding the future will come to pass. Also, faith helps us to believe that what is not visible does exist. Only such faith

pleases God. Abraham and Sarah are presented as examples of such faith. Both believed in things not seen.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 12:32-48

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 12:32-48

The first four verses of this reading come on the heels of the *Parable of the Rich Man* in which Jesus attacks not wealth, but greed. After assuring his "little flock" that the kingdom is theirs, he urges them to live like citizens of that realm, with simplicity, generosity and trust in God.

Jesus goes on to give a teaching on watchfulness and dutifulness. Watchful and dutiful servants will have a place at the heavenly banquet.

In the third part of the Gospel, Jesus responds to Peter's query with a parable that addresses different kinds of people charged with responsibility. Jesus shows how managers or elders are expected to carry out their responsibilities while the master is away. In the parable, the first manager is conscientious in the care of others, while the second not only neglects his duties but is also abusive and self-indulgent. A "theology of mitigating circumstances" is thus introduced which suggests that culpability is not the same for all, that the measure of punishment will depend on the individual's awareness of his actions. Ignorance tempers divine judgment. The Gospel ends with the saying: "Much will be expected of those to whom much has been given."

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. How would you define faith? Who is the most faith-filled person you know? Why?

3. The Gospel, among other things, speaks about responsible leadership. What are some essential ingredients of responsible leadership? What one thing could/would make you or any of us a better leader?

4. "Those to whom much has been given, much will be expected." How does this saying speak to us as a nation, as a parish, and personally?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Allow your faith to lead you to reach out to someone in need. Spend some time reflecting on the extent and quality of your stewardship. To what extent do you see all that you have as a gift from God? What might you presently possess that others may need (skill, knowledge, encouragement, material resources, etc.)?

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, please help me to be more vigilant in making every action of my day a preparation for the manifestation of your presence. Please help me to let you lead in all I think, say and do.*

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)

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me,

in the way you ask, for as long as you ask,

because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God,

and see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world;

a Christian called to respect and love

all those lives I touch.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 18, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Jesus, we are gathered in your name to share life and to share our reflections on your Word. May your Holy Spirit purify our minds and hearts of anything that will hinder us from hearing the message you want us to hear. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: The first and third readings speak about the prophet's pain when he and his word are rejected. In the second reading, the author seeks to offer a word of encouragement to people who are tempted to lose faith.

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: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

King Zedekiah is a good example of a leader with no backbone. The opponents of Jeremiah want to kill him because they resent the word he speaks. Even though Zedekiah knows that Jeremiah speaks for God, he, like Pilate, hands him over to the crowd. Later, when an advocate of Jeremiah, Ebed-melech, petitions the king to release Jeremiah, he also agrees. The divisions in Zedekiah's kingdom can be found wherever God's truth is being spoken, as we shall see in today's Gospel.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 40

This psalm celebrates God as deliverer. He will draw us out of the pit we may find ourselves in.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 12:1-3

This is a beautiful reading on encouragement to people who may be despondent and tempted to lose faith. As a source of encouragement to the despondent, the author offers the example of a "cloud of witnesses" (faith-filled people spoken about in Chapter 11) and of Jesus who endured rejection and the Cross. Readers of this letter are encouraged to free themselves from entanglement with sin, bad habits, self-indulgence, fear and doubt.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 12:49-53

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 12:49-53

This Gospel passage contains two sayings about "fire" and "division." The "fire" Jesus refers to is the fire of the Holy Spirit. The "baptism" Jesus refers to is his suffering and death. After his death, the Pentecostal fire will be ignited which, in turn, will force people to make decisions for or against Jesus. This time of decision is a great divider. In Luke 2:34, Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be the cause of the rise and fall of many. Some members of a family will accept Jesus' word and become his disciples. Some will reject Jesus' word and even persecute those who accept him.

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. Ebed-melech is an advocate and rescuer of Jeremiah (first reading). For whom or for what cause have you been or would like to be an advocate? If you are an advocate for some person or cause, what motivates you in this work of advocacy?

3. Who have been some of the “cloud of witnesses” in your faith journey – people whose faith inspired you? How can you be more like them?

4. Have you experienced a time when religion caused division in a family? If so, what helped you to deal with this experience?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Reach out to someone who is in a pit of depression for whatever reason.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, even though you come to bring peace on earth, your message causes division in families, neighborhoods and countries. Open the hearts of all who continue to open to you.*

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)

*Jesus,
you came to enlighten the eyes of our hearts
so that we might see you as our leader,
hear you as the very Word of God,
and follow you along the way you have led.
Do not let us grow weary and lose heart,
but set our spirits afire with your life-giving Spirit.*

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 25, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord, your desire is for all people to be saved. Help us to open our hearts to your saving grace and to the Word you have placed before us today. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: The first reading and the Gospel tell us that *all* people are invited to be a part of God's Kingdom. The door is open to all. But people must commit to living according to the values of God's Kingdom. Casual acquaintance with God will not be enough. The second reading speaks about the discipline of the Lord.

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: Isaiah 66:18-21

The prophet shares with his people a *universalist* image of God, the God who deeply cares not only for his chosen people, but for *all* people. Using the imagery of a triumphal procession, the author foretells a time when the pagan nations will be drawn to the glory of God which radiates from the Temple in Jerusalem. The pagan nations will even participate in the worship of Israel. Still more surprising is the suggestion that some of these pagans will be chosen by God to be priests and Levites. These words of the prophet would have sounded very threatening and revolutionary to the priests who believe that only the chosen people are loved by God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 117

The note of universalism ("all nations") connects this shortest of all the psalms to the first reading.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

It seems the community to whom this letter to the Hebrews is addressed is undergoing some form of suffering and at a loss to explain it. Some see suffering as a punishment for sinful behavior. Others see it as a form of discipline. If patiently worked with, suffering builds character. Quoting the book of Proverbs, it is this latter explanation that is being suggested here. The author compares suffering to the discipline a loving parent imposes on a child or to the discipline an athlete must undergo to win the competition.

Be that as it may, we must not think that God sends us bad things (cancer, loss of various kinds) to "straighten us out." Closer to the truth is that bad things happen because we live in an *evolving* and *imperfect* world. Because medicine is an evolving science, not all sickness can be healed *now*. Because we are imperfect people, we do terrible things to each other. While God does not directly cause these bad things, he does allow them and uses them to build character and to teach us valuable lessons, so as to draw us closer to him. Usually, the finest people in our world are those who have grown through suffering, e.g., St. John Paul II, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 13:22-30

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 13:22-30

This Gospel is an indirect response to the questions: How many will be saved? Rather than offering a direct answer, Jesus says, "First, don't assume the road to salvation is easy. Come through the narrow gate and don't bring a lot of baggage. Second, you may be surprised by those who get in and those who do not." St. Augustine once said, "*Many whom the Church has, God does not have. Many whom God has, the Church does not have.*" Insiders will be kept out, outsiders will be brought in. While *all* are invited to salvation, not all will respond. And our response needs to be more than a casual interest in Jesus. Name-dropping ("I'm the son of Abraham") will not get us in. Neither will membership in a church ("We sat at your table"), nor being from the same town do it ("You preached in our streets"). We may *know* the teachings of Jesus, but not *follow* them.

For example:

- Jesus longs for us to be friends with him, but we may choose to spend very little time fostering a relationship with him.
- Jesus gives us the grace to forgive life's hurts, but we may choose not to forgive.
- Jesus bestows on us many blessings, but we may choose a greedy lifestyle over sharing our time, treasure and talent with others.

Jesus is warning us that saying "Lord, Lord" is not enough to make it into his Kingdom. If we only have a casual acquaintance with Jesus, he may say to us, "I don't know who you are."

Finally, Jesus warns us that the door will not remain open forever. This is a call for us to not keep putting off a decision to follow Jesus.

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 first reading offers us an image of God that is welcoming to all. How well or poorly is this message communicated in our parish? How welcoming are you to all?

3. In the second reading, the author says that when it is happening, all discipline is painful, but later we can rejoice in it (assuming we have grown through it). Can you give an example of this from your life?

4. What things can hinder us from entering through the narrow gate and living according to God's will? What can help us to embrace God's will in tough times?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Pray hard and work hard with the bad things that cross your path, with a view to using such things to learn lessons, build character, and draw you closer to God.

PRAISING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, your word today is very challenging especially when you speak about entering through the narrow gate. Give me the strength to say NO to all that is not of you and to say 'yes' to your way.*

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?

Pray especially for those who are presently experiencing "the discipline of the Lord."

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord, teach us what we need to know to run the race,
to gain entry through the narrow gate,
to reach your kingdom.*

*May we realize that you have called us to work
with you to bring about the kingdom in our world.
Give us the dedication to persevere in this goal.*

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 1, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord God, your creation reveals the magnitude of your love for us. We thank you for our lives and for the gift of your love made known to us through our brothers and sisters. Teach us humility and gratitude as we come before you and help us now to receive the message you wish us to hear in today's readings. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: The first and third readings stress the importance of humility, especially for those in high places. The Gospel challenges us to invite the poor and disenfranchised to our fellowship. The second reading contrasts two covenants, pointing out the joy and blessedness of the new dispensation.

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 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

The author of this book is writing at a time when the wisdom of Israel's pagan neighbors is the envy of the entire world. Most likely, Ben Sira and his students enjoy upper-class status and, as such, are easily impressed by their own self-importance. We should listen to Ben Sira's exhortation on humility against this backdrop. His challenge (*"Humble yourself the more, the greater you are."*) and the promised reward (*"You will be loved by others and find favor with God."*) prepare the way for understanding the great reversal Jesus will announce in the Gospel: *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* The reading ends with a poetic saying about water and almsgiving: *"Just as water quenches fire, so does almsgiving atone for sins."*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 68

Among other things, this psalm speaks of God's love for the poor.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24

This reading, like some other readings from Hebrews, is not easy to comprehend.

The reading contrasts the old covenant made with Moses with the new covenant made with Jesus in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The setting from the old covenant was scary, "a blazing fire and gloomy darkness" and a voice speaking in such a way that frightened the listeners.

The setting for the new covenant is the heavenly Jerusalem. Present are angels, God, and the spirits of the just, and Jesus whose blood did not cry out for punishment as did Abel's (when he was murdered by Cain).

The author of Hebrews makes this comparison as a part of his plea to have his audience *"strive for peace with everyone"* (Heb. 12:4).

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 14:1, 7-14

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 14:1, 7-14

The setting for this Gospel is a Sabbath dinner at the home of a leading Pharisee. Sabbath meals are occasions to invite guests; hence, the presence of Jesus. Jesus uses such occasions to do some “kingdom talk.” On this occasion, Jesus contrasts the social behaviors of his day with conduct that should characterize people who belong to the Kingdom of God. Jesus gives two directives, one pertaining to guests and the other for hosts.

As Jesus notices guests “jockeying” for places of honor, he tells them that in the Kingdom he is inaugurating, status is granted, not sought after. To his host, Jesus says, “When drawing up a ‘guest list,’ don’t invite only people who are ‘well-placed’ or people with ‘good contacts.’ Rather, invite those who are unimportant in the eyes of society, people who cannot repay you in any way.” As people belonging to the Kingdom, we should not just “send over” food to the poor; we should invite the poor to share our table. In God’s Kingdom, the host and guest should sit together as equals. In a Christian community, no one is a ‘project.’

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. What helps us to grow in humility? What are tangible characteristics of a humble person? What is one characteristic you would like to work on?

3. Who are the marginalized people in our Church? Who might not feel welcome in our parish? What needs to change for those so-called outsiders to feel welcome?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us whom we should invite to our dinner parties. While the vast majority of us are not going to go out looking for the homeless to invite them to dinner, how can we in small ways act on the challenge issued in this Gospel?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Invite to lunch or spend time with a marginalized person in our parish or wider community. Sit in the back of the Church next Sunday and see how that experience is for you.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, humility is the foundation of the spiritual life. Teach me how to be meek and humble of heart.*

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)

*Good and gracious God,
in your goodness you have made a home
for the poor and the rich,
and you love us with our gifts and limitations.
Thank you for your love.
Help me to see myself and others as you see us.
Ground me in humility, truth, and love.*

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 8, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Loving and all-wise God, you call us together to listen to your Word and share life. Fill us with your holy wisdom so that we may comprehend your Word, and fill us with love so that we may follow your ways no matter what the cost. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: True wisdom comes from on high and enables a person to be guided by the interests of the soul, rather than those of the body. In the Gospel, wisdom is seen as a total commitment of one's being to God, even if it means turning one's back on family and possessions. In the second reading, Paul, writing from prison, urges his Christian friend, Philemon, to receive back his newly baptized slave as a "brother in the Lord."

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 9:13-18

This reading begins with the question: "Who can know the will or plan of God?" The answer is, of course, no one unless God chooses to reveal it. This is the main point in this reading. The author lists some of the reasons why humans have a most difficult time getting to know the plan of God: weakness and uncertainty. But the principal reason is that the soul, with its intellectual power, is burdened by the body and thus rendered incapable of transcending such limitations. Having said that, God's gift of wisdom can help us to know something of God's mind.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 90

This psalm of lamentation underscores another facet of true wisdom: the recognition of the fragility of life and human mortality.

SECOND READING: Philemon 1:9-10, 12-17

In this reading from the shortest book of the Bible, (25 verses), Paul presents his friend, Philemon, with a moral dilemma. He is writing to Philemon about one of his runaway slaves, Onesimus, who has become a baptized Christian. The returning slave has a new status – he is *spiritually* a free man. In God's eyes, Onesimus is now his master's equal. Paul urges Philemon to treat his slave as a brother in Christ. This presents Philemon with a moral dilemma: if he treats Onesimus as a brother, will not his other slaves run

away and be baptized so that they can be treated like Onesimus? If Philemon does not treat Onesimus as a brother, he is denying Onesimus' Christian status.

We may wonder why Paul does not condemn the evil institution of slavery. Neither does Jesus. But both advocate a type of love that should move any disciple like Philemon to consider slaves as equals and to treat them accordingly.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 14:25-37

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 14:15-37

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he knows he will be rejected and crucified. His disciples are unaware of what is ahead for Jesus (and for those loyal to him). They do not understand yet the *cost of*

discipleship. So Jesus cautions them that if they are going to be his disciples, they must think it through carefully – that the price to be paid is that Jesus and his concerns must come before attachment to family and possessions. Jesus is not asking the enthusiastic crowd, or us, to literally *hate* our family or give away *all* our possessions. (“To hate” is a Semitic expression meaning “to love less.”) But in a world where many things demand our loyalty, the claim of Christ and his Gospel must not only be first and foremost but must also redefine our relationship with family and possessions. This will most likely demand some detaching, some “hating,” understood as “loving less” one’s family and possessions. Jesus is not suggesting that we neglect our parents. Rather, he is saying that our concern for our parents should not distract us from putting Jesus first in our lives. Likewise, we should ‘renounce our possessions’ by not permitting them to possess us and distract us from making Jesus and his Gospel values the first priority in our lives.

The two parables in the Gospel underscore the above point. Jesus is asking: “Are you sure you want to follow me? Are you willing to pay the price? Do not be like the man who proceeds to build a house without having calculated the cost of the materials, or the general who goes into battle without having analyzed whether he has enough men to win it.”

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 your opinion, what is true wisdom? What can help or hinder you from growing in Godly wisdom?

3. There are millions of slaves in our world today. What, if anything, can we do about the issue of human trafficking? Some of the things we purchase today are made by slave labor. What can be done about that? Do you ever purchase *Fair Trade* items in stores or in your parish (if your parish has a *Fair Trade Ministry*)?

4. We have the saying by Mother Teresa: “*Live simply, so that others may simply live.*” What one step can you take to clean out some of the clutter in your life and to live a simpler lifestyle? Do you ever take items to your local Thrift Store?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestions: Clean out some of the clutter in your life. Take some clothes and other items to your local Thrift Store. Make a special effort to live in the now, in the present moment. Do not allow past or future concerns to steal the joy of the now.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you love us with a complete, unconditional love. But you ask a whole-hearted response from us. Help us to daily move towards a full commitment to you.*

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)

*In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
In every age you speak to us, including this age.
Help us to listen actively for your voice
in every way that you make it known.
Once we hear your voice,
give us the courage to live what we hear
and make you known today
as clearly as your Son Jesus did
in his time and place.*

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 15, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Lord, we thank you and praise you for gathering us together to share life and your Word. In today's readings, you reveal yourself to be a God of mercy. Help us always to celebrate your mercy. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: All three readings speak of sin and God's mercy. In the first reading, God shows mercy to the rebellious Israelites in response to Moses' intercession. In the second reading, Paul names three of his sins and also speaks of God's mercy. In the Gospel, Jesus presents us with three parables, all of which speak of God's mercy.

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 32:7-11, 13-14

Our first reading today puts us in touch with the rhythm of *sin and mercy*, which pervades both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The Israelites are like the Prodigal Son in today's Gospel—both turn their backs on God. Today's reading picks up the story after the “dastardly deed” has been done. The molten calf has been built and the rebellious people, led by Moses' brother Aaron, have offered sacrifice to their god. This incident is a metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. They were a people who constantly disobeyed and rebelled against God.

The author of Exodus portrays God as filled with righteous anger for the rebellious Israelites. He even wants to disown them. In his dialogue with Moses, he calls them “your” people. Moses, the “Great Negotiator,” gives God two reasons why he should not destroy the Israelites. First, he reminds God that these are not *his* (Moses') people—they are God's. So why does he want to destroy his own people? Then Moses appeals to God for the promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How could he renege on those promises? God finally listens to Moses and relents on his threat to punish the people.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 51

This is David's famous prayer of mercy after the prophet Nathan awakens David to his sinful acts of murder and adultery.

SECOND READING: 1Timothy 1:1-17

This is the first of seven readings we will hear in the coming Sundays from Paul's two letters to Timothy. This reading fits in perfectly with the theme of mercy found in the first and third readings. Paul tells us that prior to his conversion, he was a *blasphemer* (for rejecting Christ), a *persecutor* of Christians, and an *arrogant man*—three hefty sins. But God had mercy on him. If God had mercy on Paul, the “worst of sinners,” surely he will have mercy on all wrongdoers, some of whom may consider themselves beyond the pale of God's mercy.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 15:1-32

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 15:1-32

The Gospel begins by telling us that *“tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus.”* Jesus not only welcomes them, but sits and eats with them. This behavior of Jesus scandalizes the Pharisees and Scribes. The Pharisees (“the separated ones”) have no dealings with sinners and they assume that God would also want to have nothing to do with sinners. But in and through these three parables, Jesus wants to show his critics another face of God. The parables (especially the first two) show God searching for sinners and experiencing great joy when they repent and come to him. In addition to helping the Pharisees and the Scribes to see God’s love for sinners, Jesus also (in the section dealing with the elder brother) wants to open the eyes of the Pharisees to the fact that *they too are sinners.*

When the younger son “comes to his senses” and realizes he *is* a sinner, he decides to go on and express his sorrow for his sin. *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”*

When the father sees that his son is coming home, he is “filled with compassion” and runs to meet his son. When he reaches his son, “he embraces him” and “kisses him.” Jesus is seeking to communicate the awesome mercy that God has for sinners. Then there is the feast to celebrate his return. This is like someone returning to the Eucharist after being away for a long time.

The elder son in the parable symbolizes the Pharisees and Scribes who think that they are sinless. *“They feel self-righteous in regard to themselves and judgmental in regard to others. They do not want sinners to be invited to the banquet, much less have sinners be the guests of honor at the banquet”* (Margaret Nutting Ralph).

As stated above, in the parable, Jesus wants the Pharisees to see that they too are in need of 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. What images of God come through to you as you read the first reading? What can we learn from Moses’ interaction with God?

3. In your journey with God and the Church, have you ever felt like the lost sheep, the lost coin or the lost son? If so, what helped you to be found and welcomed back to God and/or the Church?

4. What causes us to be sometimes like the Pharisees, quick to see the sins of others and slow to see our own sins? What can help us to be freed of this tendency, this sin?

5. In the Gospel, God is imaged as a shepherd, as a woman, and as a father. Which image speaks to you best and why?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Is there someone in your life who needs your mercy? If so, pray for the grace to forgive. If not, pray for all who are struggling to forgive some big hurt.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *“Jesus, thank you for your mercy. Help me to receive it and share it with those who have hurt or failed me.”*

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 mercy, raise me up when I fall
and bring me down when I feel entitled
to the love and mercy that are your gifts.
You look for me when I am lost.
Help me look for you.
Help me let you find me
so that I can experience
the joy you feel over one sinner
who repents and returns home.*

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 22, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Father, we come into your loving presence to share life and your Word. Grant us wisdom and courage when we are confronted with crisis situations in our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: In the first reading, Amos condemns the rich for being more concerned with money than with true worship. In the second reading, Paul encourages prayers of intercession, especially for leaders. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about the importance of decisive action in a time of crisis and about using material wealth in a way that will give honor 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: Amos 8:4-7

This Sunday and next, our first reading is from Amos, a prophet from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who is called by God to preach to the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom. Amos is often called the prophet of social justice. He proclaims that true religion involves not only worship of God on the Sabbath, but also caring for the poor during the rest of the week.

In today's reading, Amos rails against the rich who make a mockery of the Sabbath by carrying out business practices that exploit the poor and defenseless. The merchants describe their own dishonesty in different ways. "Tipping the scales" is a daily occurrence (*ephah* is a dry measure equal to a bushel and *shekel* is a unit of stone weights). In their buying and selling, the merchants adjust the scales to their advantage, and the poor pay more and receive less. Despite all their cheating, these merchants continue to worship on the Sabbath. Amos condemns such false religion in the strongest way.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 113

God's care for the needy, expressed in these verses, connects this psalm to the first reading.

SECOND READING: 1Timothy 2:1-8

Paul urges prayers for all people. He especially singles out those in leadership positions. He also believes that it is God's will that all people be saved.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 16:1-13

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 16:1-13

Commenting on today's parable, Alice Camille writes:

The story of the devious steward leaves many people scratching their heads. What is Jesus saying here? Is he congratulating a cheat for being good at what he does? The point of the story is that the steward knows how to make the kinds of friends he will need to survive beyond his present situation. He uses material goods to plot his course toward salvation.

Jesus regrets that we religious folks are not adept at using this world's goods for our spiritual survival. We don't know how to make friends with the people who will really count in our favor in the end. After all, the

last will be first and the first will be last. We who find ourselves at the front of the line, therefore, better make lots of friends at the back of the line.

The only sensible use of our power and resources is for the sake of the poor. If we neglect them, when the center of authority pivots from the world to the kingdom, we may find ourselves on the bottom with no friends in high places to speak for us.

Jesus says to his disciples: "You can learn from this child of the world. In times of crisis, don't just do nothing. Rather, take decisive action."

The second part of the Gospel (vv 9-13) contains a list of miscellaneous sayings about the use of material goods. Jesus seems to be saying to his disciples and us that if the children of the darkness are smart enough to use money to secure an *earthly* future, we should be smart enough to use money in such a way as to ensure our *heavenly* future. While we *cannot* buy our way into heaven, we can say that the right use of money and material resources will place us in a favorable light before God.

Finally, commenting on Jesus' praise of the unjust steward, Scripture scholar Fred Craddock says: "*Why should we be offended that Jesus found something to praise in a dishonest guy, for all of us are a mixed bag? Unsavory people do have some good qualities, even if it is hard for us to recognize them. The manager's dishonesty, which Jesus didn't commend, shouldn't discolor everything else about the guy.*"

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. How would the Amos-type person be received in our Church or society today? How do you feel about people who are strong advocates of social justice?

3. Should we, the wealthiest nation in the world, be doing more to help the poor at home and abroad? Does your parish tithe? If not, should it?

4. Our use of the Lord's blessings on us could save us or condemn us. Do you think most people have little or no sense of this – believing their possessions are

theirs to do however they want? How have you grown in this dimension of the Christian life?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Look for the good in some unsavory character you know. Take time to reflect on how well you are using your blessings to bless others. If the poor and your Church family are not included in your *Last Will & Testament*, consider revising it. Pray for secular and religious leaders.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: "*Good and gracious God, you bless us not to be greedy, but so that we can help the needy. Help me to be a responsible and generous steward of all the spiritual and material blessings you have placed in our care.*"

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)

(One of the blessing prayers for a couple on their wedding day.)

*May you always bear witness to the love of God
in this world so that the afflicted and the needy
will find in you generous friends,
and welcome you into the joys of heaven.*

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 29, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are 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 moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for gathering us together. Today, you speak a strong Word to us about responding to the needs of the poor. Grant us a portion of your compassion for the hurting members of society. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: In the first and third readings, Amos and Jesus address the fate of those whose wealth insulates them from caring for the less blessed members of society. In the second reading, Paul describes the kind of lifestyle that will enable us to lay hold of eternal life.

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: Amos 6:1, 4-7

Amos is regarded as a prophet of social justice at a time in Israel's history when there was a great divide between the rich and poor. This reading is not as it might seem—a condemnation of riches, merry-making and feasting—in and of themselves. Rather, Amos is condemning the *insensitivity* of the rich toward the poor, which will be punished by exile. The “collapse of Joseph” is a reference to the people of the northern kingdom, many of whom traced their ancestors back to Joseph.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 146

This psalm speaks of God's care for the poor, thus connecting it with the first reading and Gospel.

SECOND READING: 1 Timothy 6:11-16

This reading could have been better connected to the first and third readings if the four verses preceding it had been included, i.e.:

For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall take nothing out of it. If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people, in their desire for it, have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.

Given this context, Paul's challenge to Timothy is, in the words of Patricia Sanchez:

His is to be a life of faith, not finance, and of service and sharing rather than striving for a greater portion of this world's goods. His concerns are to be the long-term concerns of the kingdom rather than the short-term concerns of fleeting wealth and earthly securities.

As his model in the faith, Timothy is offered the figure of the accused Jesus, who before Pilate confessed. “I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice” (John 18:39). Following Jesus' lead, Timothy and those in his charge were to be faithful witnesses to the truth of the good news, to biblical justice and to communal solidarity until the appearance of Jesus at God's chosen time.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 16:19-31

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 16:19-31

We learn many lessons from those who go to heaven. But in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the lesson comes from one who goes to hell.

The parable is unique to Luke's Gospel and fits in well with his portrayal of Jesus as a friend of the poor and the oppressed. The parable has two distinct parts. In part one (vv 19-21), the rich man ignores the plight of Lazarus who only seeks to receive the crumbs from the man's table. In the second part (vv 22-31), the rich man becomes the afflicted party, who then appeals to Abraham to go warn his brothers lest they also end up in hell. Abraham tells the rich man that they will not listen to him just as they ignored Moses—the same way the Pharisees turn their back on Jesus. The parable is addressed to the Pharisees who believe that wealth is a token of God's blessing and poverty a sign of God's disfavor.

It is not because of his wealth that the rich man finds himself in hell, but because he failed to use his wealth to bless those who were less fortunate. As one commentator put it: *"The rich man failed to balance the equation between privilege and responsibility."* For Jesus' disciples, the rich man is a negative witness to how one should use this world's goods. The parable clearly demonstrates that ill-used riches in this life will reap torment in the next life.

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. If you suddenly came into a lot of money, how would you use it?

3. How might the rich man have gotten to the point that he saw no obligation to share his blessing with Lazarus? Could this happen to us? How do you allow the poor to figure in your life?

4. In recent weeks, we have had several Gospel readings about the use of material blessings. Why do you think that Jesus spoke so much about this issue?

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

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Take to your local Thrift Store stuff from your house that you don't need or don't use. Continue to ponder the gravity of today's Gospel and its implications for us as a nation, as a church and for us personally. Include the poor in your budget.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *"Jesus, you speak a strong word today about our obligation to share our material blessings with our less fortunate brothers and sisters. May your Word impact the way we use the material blessings of our lives."*

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,
the age to come should start now.
Now is the time to hear your Word calling us
to make this world a place of hospitality
and gracious care for all.
If we are complacent in any way,
break through our indifference and
move us to act.*