

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

February—2010

The following series is **free, downloadable small-group materials** based on each week's Mass readings and taking into account the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minute format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.**
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see this passage tying into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Gospel Reading, and the Second Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear the Scripture is read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.**

Sincerely in Christ,

Richard A. Cleveland
info@emmausjourney.org

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—February 7, 2010

Introduction: Someone once stated that, “God is looking for FAT Christians.” For those of us who tend to be a little plump, that was good news. However, the person was not referring to one’s weight but to the characteristics of being Faithful, Available and Teachable. In this week’s Gospel Reading Peter, a rough, simple, fisherman seems to have possessed these characteristics.

When Jesus showed up with a crowd on the shore where Peter and his partners were working, Peter could have been annoyed by the intrusion; after all he had been up all night working. When Jesus stepped into the empty boat, uninvited, and then asked Peter to move the boat away from the shore a bit, Peter could have simply responded, “Hey! Get out of my boat.” But he didn’t. He, and his possessions, were made available to Jesus.

Obviously impressed by Jesus’ teaching he didn’t hesitate to take the boat to deeper water where Jesus told him how to catch some fish. Here was a carpenter, not a fisherman, telling a professional fisherman, after a night of fishing failure, how and where to catch fish. Imagine how Peter could have responded! But in humility Peter was not only available to Jesus he was also teachable, responding, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”

Jesus’ teachings and demonstrations of power made an astonishing impression on Peter, and standing there in that old fishing boat he experienced an epiphany. Suddenly, he and his partners were conscious of their sinfulness as they became aware of who Jesus is. Consequently, when Jesus said “follow me” they left all and followed Jesus, demonstrating their faithfulness to respond to the light God gave.

Pope John Paul II speaks of this need to be responsive in *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*—“Therefore in the life of each member of the lay faithful there are particularly significant and decisive moments for discerning God’s call and embracing the mission entrusted by him. . . . No one must forget that the Lord, as the master of the laborers in the vineyard, calls at every hour of life so as to make his holy will more precisely and explicitly known. Therefore, the fundamental and continuous attitude of the disciple should be one of vigilance and a conscious attentiveness to the voice of God.”

Like Peter, we are becoming today, what we will be tomorrow. Peter’s later transformation from a tired, smelly, hard working fisherman, into an apostle and leader of the Church did not happen overnight. However, because he made some foundational decisions to be faithful, available and teachable to Jesus on that day he was able to experience future transformation. We may not have Isaiah’s revelation, or Peter’s experience, but we all have occasions where Jesus reveals himself to us to some degree, and we will hear his call to “come follow me.” Perhaps we will even hear it in these passages of Scripture. Will we make ourselves and our possessions available? Will we in humility be teachable and willing to learn? Will we in faithfulness follow? May the answer be, “Yes!”

First Reading — Isaiah 6:1-8

1 In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, with the train of his garment filling the temple. 2 Seraphim were stationed above; each of them had six wings: with two they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, and with two they hovered aloft. 3 "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!" they cried one to the other. "All the earth is filled with his glory!" 4 At the sound of that cry, the frame of the door shook and the house was filled with smoke. 5 Then I said, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 He touched my mouth with it. "See," he said, "now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!"

1. What connection is there between our concept of God and our availability to God?
2. How does consciousness of our forgiveness affect our responsiveness to God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 138:1-5, 7-8

1 Of David. I thank you, LORD, with all my heart; before the gods to you I sing. 2 I bow low toward your holy temple; I praise your name for your fidelity and love. For you have exalted over all your name and your promise. 3 When I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit. 4 All the kings of earth will praise you, LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth. 5 They will sing of the ways of the LORD: "How great is the glory of the LORD!" ...

7 Though I walk in the midst of dangers, you guard my life when my enemies rage. You stretch out your hand; your right hand saves me. 8 The LORD is with me to the end. LORD, your love endures forever. Never forsake the work of your hands!

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1 Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. 2 Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; 4 that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; 5 that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8 Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. 11 Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

3. Twice Paul used the term "in vain." How do you think Paul would describe a Christian life lived in vain?

Gospel Reading — Luke 5:1-11

1 While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. 2 He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." 5 Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." 6 When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." 9 For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, 10 and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

4. What is the most significant thing God ever asked you to do?

5. What is the object lesson Jesus taught by directing the fishermen where and how to take in a load of fish?

6. In each of the three readings individuals were confronted with an awareness of their unworthiness, followed by their responsive heart's willingness to serve God. What contributes to the development of an improper heart toward God?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—February 14, 2010

Introduction: During the next several weeks the Gospel Readings will cover Jesus' teaching which we commonly refer to as the Beatitudes. Someone has cleverly renamed this passage the "Be-attitudes," because they accurately portray the way Christians ought to **be** in their **attitudes** and behavior.

It is interesting to note that the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and the persecuted are those who warrant Jesus' compassion and his blessing. The wealthy, the full, the happy, and the popular also warrant Jesus' compassion but it appears in the form of a woeful warning. What are we to conclude from this passage? Surely it does not suggest that it is preferable for people to be poor, hungry, sorrowful and persecuted, does it? Or that being wealthy, having a full stomach, being happy, or popular is inherently evil and to be avoided, does it? Perhaps he is pointing out that God is acutely aware and consciously concerned about the physical, emotional, social and economic inequities mankind heaps upon people.

We would be remiss if we did not also pay attention to what Jesus did not say. His remedy did not speak of the economic redistribution of wealth, nor of social or political revolution and revenge. His remedy, was to bless the unfortunate; "he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, 'Blessed ...'" Jesus undoubtedly knew that over time the nature of man would make moot the leveling of society by economic redistribution, etc., and humanity would simply supplant it with another system of equal or greater evils. **Jesus' remedy was to create a society of the compassionate within the society of the indifferent.** He is looking to his disciples to bless the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, and the persecuted by sharing their wealth, their material possessions, their happiness, and their friendship. This was Jesus' remedy for alleviating suffering. As the song reminds us, "he has no body but ours."

A story of an early encounter St. Francis had with a leper provides helpful insight: "Francis felt revulsion rising in him. He could toss the man a few coins and ride away. But then a new vision dawned. In the person of this leper, God was holding out his hand to him. He sprang from his horse, pressed some money into the man's hand; then he grasped that hand and brought it to his lips. He kissed the hand, which received as if it had given. It was the hand of God which gave him strength to turn deep revulsion into love.

"This gesture is characteristic of Francis. He will never be the type to serve on a committee for aid to victims of leprosy. His kind of charity does not go about 'doing good works.' What he sees before him is not a 'life work,' but a human being. What he gives is not a handful of money, but himself" (from *Francis of Assisi* by Fr. NG Van Doornik)

The physical, emotional, economic and social welfare of the unfortunate is of utmost importance to Jesus, and should be to us. The hope that Jesus provides to sustain them in their need is the reality and presence of the Kingdom of God, and a sure future in heaven, as seen in and through those who are his body. That is why our (his disciples) participation in relieving suffering is so essential. We are the living icons and visual aids of this heavenly reality. Consequently, we too must hold out not only the temporary hope of overcoming societal ills, but also hold out the transformational reality, and the open invitation to participate in life eternal through faith in Jesus. For like Jeremiah we do not want the poor, hungry, sorrowful, and persecuted to trust in the flesh of man, but rather to trust in the Lord.

First Reading — Jeremiah 17:5-8

5 Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, But stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. 7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

1. Define what it means to "trust in the Lord."
2. Describe an occasion when you had to trust God.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 1:1-4, 6

1 Happy those who do not follow the counsel of the wicked, Nor go the way of sinners, nor sit in company with scoffers. 2 Rather, the law of the LORD is their joy; God's law they study day and night. 3 They are like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; Its leaves never wither; whatever they do prospers.

4 But not the wicked! They are like chaff driven by the wind. ... 6 The LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

12 But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? ... 16 For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. 20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

3. What influence does the resurrection have on your life?

Gospel Reading — Luke 6:17, 20-26

17 And he came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon ...

20 And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. 21 Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.

24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. 26 Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.

4. In light of your current situation which of these statements by Jesus would be most applicable to you?

5. Within your social environment how have you seen persecution "on account of the Son of man"?

6. If you could be a light to people in one of these eight categories, which would it be, and how would you like to affect them?

7. Are you living a "Blessed are you" or a "Woe to you" life? Explain your answer.

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT—February 21, 2010

Introduction: What image comes to your mind when you think of Lent? — Penance? Fasting? Sacrifice? A time to do something difficult and severe, or perhaps a time to give up or abstain from something dear to us? Though all of these may have their place during the Lenten season, Lent is primarily a time of preparation and growth through anticipation of and celebration of Christ's saving sacrifice. Marilyn Gustin points this out so aptly in her book *Living the Liturgy*, "It is a time for our own conscious, deliberate effort to cooperate in our own transformation. If our life in God is to become vital in our experience, we must be involved in ongoing and repeated transformation. It does not have to be forced, but it does have to be real. God's grace will do most of it, but our cooperation is required. During Lent we make our cooperation as conscious and disciplined as we can."

This cooperation can take many forms, from extended time reading the Scriptures and praying, to various forms of fasting to make us conscious of our Christ on whom we should focus. During this time of cooperation, though we may not have a face to face encounter with Satan as Jesus did in this week's Gospel Reading, we will undoubtedly be tempted to abandon our spiritual resolve and make light of our Lenten commitments. During Jesus' forty-day fast he too was tempted. We need to take courage and find strength in Jesus' steadfastness, and learn from his resistance. Jesus did not allow the illusionary promise of immediate gratification dissuade him from his deep-rooted commitment to entrust himself to the Father's will. Jesus confronted each temptation with confidence rooted in sacred Scripture and in knowledge of God. This intimate acquaintance with God's Word strengthened his resolve and provided the answers to combat each alluring temptation.

We have the sacred Scripture readily available to us in numerous translations. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us so that we could discern the truth and grow in Christ-likeness. He will readily and eagerly respond to our efforts to cooperate with his work of transformation. So whatever else we do during this Lenten season, we need to make sure that our hearts and minds are available to his transforming presence through the Sacraments, prayer, and reading and reflecting on the Holy Scripture. As Catholics we can readily take pride in the fact that we have preserved, defended, and venerated sacred Scripture for centuries. On the other hand we must acknowledge that many of us as Catholics are undeniably ignorant of both the Scripture and the teachings of the Church. Sadly for some Catholics' commitment to know and study God's written word is often less than that of many non-Catholic Christians. We would do well to reflect on St Chrysostom's perspective: "Here is why the exhortation of the Scripture is given: that the man of God may be rendered complete by it. Without this he cannot grow to maturity. You have the Scriptures, he says, in place of me. If you would learn anything, you may learn it from them."

One other aspect of Lent to consider is that transformation is not intended to be temporary, something that is present for only six weeks. Our disciplines and Lenten practices can be temporary but the changes they endeavor to bring about should be eternal. So perhaps it would be more beneficial to introduce into our lives during Lent, disciplines and practices that we would like to have become a permanent part of our relationship with Christ. This year during Lent, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can be introduced into a new depth of spiritual transformation. Practically, perhaps the place to begin this transformation is by asking the Holy Spirit to transform our commitment to daily read and reflect on sacred Scripture.

First Reading — Deut. 26:4-10

4 The priest shall then receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.
5 Then you shall declare before the LORD, your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous.
6 When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, 7 we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. 8 He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; 9 and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. 10 Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.' And having set them before the LORD, your God, you shall bow down in his presence.

1. What will be in “the basket from your hand,” or the “first of the fruit” as an expression of gratitude and worship this Lenten Season?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 91:1-2, 10-15

1 You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, 2 Say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust." ...

10 No evil shall befall you, no affliction come near your tent. 11 For God commands the angels to guard you in all your ways. 12 With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone. 13 You shall tread upon the asp and the viper, trample the lion and the dragon.

14 Whoever clings to me I will deliver; whoever knows my name I will set on high. 15 All who call upon me I will answer; I will be with them in distress; I will deliver them and give them honor.

Second Reading — Romans 10:8-13

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we preach), 9 for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 For the scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

2. What do these Scriptures say about salvation?

Gospel Reading — Luke 4:1-13

1 Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert 2 for forty days, 3 to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5 Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. 6 The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. 7 All this will be yours, if you worship me." 8 Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'" 9 Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' 11 and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

3. Also remembering the first temptation by Satan in the Garden of Eden, what is always at the root of temptation?

4. What part did sacred Scripture play both in the temptation of Jesus and in his overcoming the temptation?

5. When was the next occasion when Satan tempted Jesus? (See Luke 23:33-43) How does it compare to this occasion?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT—February 28, 2010

Introduction: The transfiguration, in and of itself, was a momentous event. Especially for these three Jewish disciples, the appearance of their great deliverer Moses and their fiery prophet Elijah was unbelievably significant. Moses and Elijah encapsulate the history of Israel, spanning the time of both the Law and the Prophets. Yet this momentous occasion pales in significance to the occasion that brought them all together; to speak of Jesus' coming departure (death). During Lent we are reliving this impending event, along with the dark days that lead up to Jesus' crucifixion. Hopefully, unlike Peter, James and John, we will not simply be dazzled by the glory of the transfiguration, but will discover the true meaning of the message delivered by it.

What do you imagine Moses and Elijah were thinking and experiencing? Here standing before them was the man, Son of God and Son of Man, who would make possible the genuine deliverance of Israel, the mission upon which Moses staked his life, and the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy regarding the holiness of God. I wonder if they were recalling God's words, "I have observed the misery of my people. . . . I have heard their cry. . . . I know their sufferings, and I have come to deliver them." At long last Israel would be set free, free from enslavement to sin, and along with Israel all mankind too could be saved. This inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation was always God's plan: that through Israel all nations of the earth should be blessed. How they must have glowed with the joy of knowing that now the promise was coming to completion, now it was about to be fulfilled.

Sometimes we smugly laugh at Peter's feeble attempt to process all that he saw. Prior to the cross, he did not comprehend all that was taking place, but he did recognize that it was a holy occasion. Do we, looking back with all of the wisdom of hindsight, also recognize and appropriately respond to this holy event and the occasion it foresaw? Probably not. Yet we can take courage that even in the midst of their ignorance the cloud of God's presence engulfed Peter, James and John, and spoke to them, so he might also overshadow us. We should not expect to be thrilled and excited by some "new" message, but simply expect to evermore hear the Father say, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." And so we should, especially during Lent.

Saint Jerome reminds us, "'This is my Son; hear him,' my son, not Moses or Elijah. They are servants; this is the Son. This is my Son, of my nature, of my substance, abiding in me, and he is all that I am. This is my beloved Son. They, too, indeed are dear to me, but he is my beloved; hear him, therefore. They proclaim and teach him, but you, hear him. He is the Lord and master, they are companions in service. Moses and Elijah speak of Christ; they are your fellow servants. He is the Lord; hear him."

Peter desired to make three booths, or tents, for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Perhaps the "booth" we should build in honor of this redemptive departure of Jesus should not be a booth of tents but a spiritual space in our head and heart wherein we strain to grasp his every word.

As you enter this second week of Lent how will you create this space of receptivity in your life, a place to contemplate him, and listen to his voice. Wouldn't it have been a tragedy if Jesus had invited a fourth disciple to accompany him to the Mount of Transfiguration and the disciple had been too busy to participate with him? Similarly, wouldn't it be tragic if Jesus is inviting you to participate in another transformational experience and you are too busy?

First Reading — Genesis 15:5-12,17-18

5 He took him outside and said: "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be." 6 Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

7 He then said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession." 8 "O Lord GOD," he asked, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He answered him, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon." 10 He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. 11 Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them. 12 As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.

17 When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking brazier and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. 18 It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River (the Euphrates),

1. How would you feel if you were in Abram's shoes (sandals)?
2. What makes a covenant, a covenant?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 27:1,7-9,13-14

1 Of David The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom do I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom am I afraid?

7 Hear my voice, LORD, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. 8 "Come," says my heart, "seek God's face"; your face, LORD, do I seek! 9 Do not hide your face from me; do not repel your servant in anger. You are my help; do not cast me off; do not forsake me, God my savior!

13 But I believe I shall enjoy the LORD'S goodness in the land of the living. 4 Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD!

Second Reading — Philippians 3:17-4:1

17 Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us. 18 For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their "shame." Their minds are occupied with earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself. 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

3. Describe what it means to live as an enemy of the cross of Christ. What would the opposite be?
4. Whom do you know that is a Christian example worth imitating? Why?

Gospel Reading — Luke 9:28-36

28 About eight days after he said this, he took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. 29 While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. 34 While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. 35 Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." 36 After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

5. What possible meanings does Jesus' dazzling white raiment convey?
6. What similar messages encouraging us to "listen to Him," are you aware of in Scripture? How can we enhance our ability to listen to Jesus?
7. What insight could this incident provide regarding the communion of the Saints?