

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

January—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,

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD—January 3, 2010

Introduction: Famous searches, such as the search for the Loch Ness Monster, and the search for Noah's Ark, pale in comparison to the search that Israel had been conducting for the Messiah. For many millennia Israelites watched the heavens for a sign, and probed historical events for a clue to discovering the Messiah's appearing. Epiphany Sunday celebrates the end of that search with the manifestation of Christ to the Magi.

"The young creature in the stall of Bethlehem was a human being with human brain and limbs and heart and soul. And it was God ... Jesus did not 'experience' God; he was God. He never at any moment 'became' God; he was God from the start. His life was only the process by which this innate divinity came into its own. His task was to place divine reality and power squarely in the realm of his human consciousness and will; to reflect holy purity in his relations to all things, and to contain infinite love and divinity's boundless plenitude in his heart of flesh and blood." (Romano Guardini in *The Lord*).

In this week's Gospel reading it is interesting to note that the search was conducted not only by the Magi, but also by Herod. He searched for the child who was the newly born "King of the Jews," but, oh how different was the search! The Magi *personally* searched for the place of his appearing so that they could *personally* worship and serve him. Herod, on the other hand, made an impersonal second-hand search, with the evil intent to thwart and end the reign of this newborn King of the Jews before it began.

This search is unusual inasmuch as the One sought for, is in fact the One who discloses himself to the searchers, and makes the discovery possible. We see this foretold in this week's First Reading where the light of Christ's glory arose out of darkness to be a light to the nations. It was in fact the hand of God manifest in a heavenly star that led the Magi to the place of Jesus' birth. All men, like Israel and the Magi, spend their life searching for God. Some people, like Herod, search with poor methods and wrong motives, following their own devices and inclinations, finding instead of the Messiah, frustration, disappointment, and emptiness. Others, like the Magi, search by following God's illumination with full intention not to thwart his rule but with a personal commitment to worship and serve him.

For those who have found him, or should we say to whom he has disclosed himself, the challenge is to continually pay homage to him and to offer to him the "gold, frankincense and myrrh" of our lives. We can be encouraged by the hope and the sure promise that God will reveal the Son to those who seek him, for "He seeks such to worship him." For those with a desire to discover more and more of Christ, Jesus revealed the secret of knowing him during that last night with his disciples prior to his crucifixion. Jesus promised, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." What a glorious confidence it is to know that in our search we will be found by him.

First Reading — Isaiah 60:1-6

1 Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; But upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory. 3 Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. 4 Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses. 5 Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, For the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. 6 Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

1. How can we as individuals, and as a community, be Christ's light in a dark world to those who are searching for Christ?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13

2 O God, give your judgment to the king; your justice to the son of kings; That he may govern your people with justice, your oppressed with right judgment,

7 That abundance may flourish in his days, great bounty, till the moon be no more. 8 May he rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. 10 May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts. 11 May all kings bow before him, all nations serve him.

12 For he rescues the poor when they cry out, the oppressed who have no one to help. 13 He shows pity to the needy and the poor and saves the lives of the poor.

Second Reading — Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

...2 if, as I suppose, you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, 3 (namely, that) the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly earlier. ...5 which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, 6 that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

2. It bothered many Jews that Christ was being disclosed to the Gentiles who were so ethnically and culturally different. What has God shown you about unity among all followers of Christ?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 2:1-12

1 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." 9 After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 They were overjoyed at seeing the star, 11 and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

3. Who and what are Magi, and what is their importance to the birth of Jesus?

4. What does it mean to be "governed" by Jesus?

5. What are the "gold, frankincense and myrrh" of your life? How can they be offered to the Lord?

6. Having found the babe, the gift of the Father, and knowing the babe willing became the gift of salvation through his death, burial and resurrection, what will you do with him?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD—January 10, 2010

Introduction: For all that we know from Scripture Jesus was reared by Mary and Joseph pretty much in obscurity. We can deduce this from the hometown skeptics' who voiced surprise when Jesus came healing and teaching about the Kingdom; "*Is not this the carpenter's son? ... Where did this man get all this?*" These humble origins increase the complexity and wonder of the Incarnation. Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us, miraculously born, but fully one with us in our humanity. Like other babies he needed changing, he had to learn to walk, to feed himself, to talk and to do all those other things involved in growing up. We can only imagine that his life in most respects was quite normal progressing physically, mentally, and socially through the stages of growth like other children. Yet, on the day of his baptism the Holy Spirit and the Father endorsed him as Son. The Spirit in the form of a dove descended to rest on him, while the Father spoke from heaven, "*You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.*"

As yet, as far as we know, Jesus had not performed any miracles, had not taught any crowds, had not proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom, had told no parables, and had called and led no disciples. Yet, the Eternal God, God the Father, was not simply pleased with him, he was *well pleased* with him.

This incident tells us something both about the Father and the Son. The worth and value of Jesus the Son, was intrinsic, part of his essential nature. He was significant because of who he was, not only because of what he would do. In fact, what he later did was a result of who he was, not the other way around. This incident also indicates that the Father does not assign us worth based on our utilitarian value. We can not impress God, or make him love us more, or esteem us more valuable because we are *useful* to him. Contrariwise, we have value and significance because we are created in his image. In addition, through conversion and transformation we are being recreated into his divine image, "...*through them [his power and promise] you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.*" (2 Peter 1:4)

Each baptism we observe should remind us of two things. First, we should recall the Lord's baptism, where he totally entered into our humanity, the Father and the Spirit esteemed him as the Son, *well pleasing*. Second, we should be reminded of our son-ship, that we too are the Father's child, esteemed as significant and well pleasing through faith in Jesus, and have been made "*heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*"

"The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' ... At his baptism 'the heavens were opened'— the heavens that Adam's sin had closed — and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation. ... The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and 'walk in newness of life.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 536 and 537)

First Reading — Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

1 Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, 2 Not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, 4 Until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching. ... 6 I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, 7 To open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

1. What does this passage tell you about *who Jesus is*?
2. What does this passage tell you about *what He came to do*?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 29:1-4, 9-10

1 A psalm of David. ² Give to the LORD, you heavenly beings, give to the LORD glory and might; 2 Give to the LORD the glory due God's name. Bow down before the LORD'S holy splendor!

3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over the mighty waters.

4 The voice of the LORD is power; the voice of the LORD is splendor. ...

9 The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. All in his palace say, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned above the flood! The LORD reigns as king forever!

Second Reading — Acts 10:34-38

34 Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. 35 Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. 36 You know the word (that) he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, 37 what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him

3. How do you see all of mankind included with in the Good News, and not just Israel?

Gospel Reading — Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

15 Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. ...

21 After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

4. Why do you think that Jesus chose to be baptized?

5. What does this incident reveal about Jesus?

6. What do the baptism of water and the baptism by the Holy Spirit signify? (Note: Some of these more difficult questions should encourage you to use the Catechism for research.)

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 17, 2010

Introduction: Marriage is a human relationship which through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is elevated to a place of supreme importance to depict God's relationship with his people. In the Old Testament Israel is described as "espoused" to the Lord, and in the New Testament we are described as the bride of Christ. So it is not surprising that Jesus chose a marriage ceremony to begin displaying his power and glory. It is also not surprising that the first miracle was the changing of a very ordinary element, water, into an extra-ordinary new substance, fine wine. This event and early miracle from the life of Christ provides signs that foreshadow what Jesus and his ministry intended to accomplish.

He had come to initiate, and secure for mankind, a new more intimate relationship with the Father through our uniting with him in faith. The miracle of changing ordinary, utilitarian water into the finest wine pointed to the transforming aspect of that relationship. When we unite with him by faith, it is not the simple merging of the Holy with the unholy, but rather we are transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit into a holy thing, his holy people, the Bride of Christ. Even as the water was changed in appearance into fine and flavorful wine, so our union with Christ should result in the transformation of who we are into people whose appearance (character, values, behavior) is qualitatively more flavorful (holy) than what we would naturally be.

This miracle was also a sign, or glimpse into Jesus' divinity, enabling the disciples to begin perceiving what Mary already knew—that Jesus is the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us, full of glory and power. And this week's Gospel reading indicates that they did begin to recognize and believe in Christ. Each week as we observe and participate in the consecration and celebration of the Eucharist we should be reminded of the transforming power and glory of Christ, and that Jesus wants to also change us into his likeness. To those around us we may look like just the same old person but by God's grace our character, values and behavior should reflect a miracle; his transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Transformation begins when we respond to the all consuming gift of Christ with the freely given gift of ourselves. "Jesus is God-for-us, God-with-us, God-within-us. Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. Jesus doesn't hold back or cling to his own possessions. He gives all there is to give. 'Eat, drink, this is my body, this is my blood ... this is me for you.' ... God desires communion: a unity that is vital and alive, an intimacy that comes from both sides, a bond that is truly mutual. Nothing forced or 'willed,' but a communion freely offered and received." (from *With Burning Hearts* by H.J.M. Nouwen)

First Reading — Isaiah 62:1-5

1 For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, Until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch. 2 Nations shall behold your vindication, and all kings your glory; You shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the LORD. 3 You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem held by your God. 4 No more shall men call you "Forsaken," or your land "Desolate," But you shall be called "My Delight," and your land "Espoused." For the LORD delights in you, and makes your land his spouse. 5 As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

1. In our society where marriage is often demeaned, how do you feel about his marriage analogy?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 96:1-3,7-10

1 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name; announce his salvation day after day. 3 Tell God's glory among the nations; among all peoples, God's marvelous deeds.

7 Give to the LORD, you families of nations, give to the LORD glory and might; 8 give to the LORD the glory due his name! Bring gifts and enter his courts; 9 bow down to the LORD, splendid in holiness. Tremble before God, all the earth; 10 say among the nations: The LORD is king. The world will surely stand fast, never to be moved. God rules the peoples with fairness.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; 5 there are different forms of service but the same Lord; 6 there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. 7 To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; 10 to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes

2. How have you experienced the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in your life—or in the life of another?

Gospel Reading — John 2:1-12

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons.

7 Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. 9 And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

12 After this, he and his mother, (his) brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days.

3. Where do you see yourself in this wedding story?
4. What do Mary's remarks indicate about her understanding of Jesus?
5. What do Jesus' responses to Mary, and to the wedding party's needs, indicate about Jesus?
6. What affect should Jesus' miracles have on you and your faith?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 24, 2010

Introduction: Many converts to the Catholic Church are emotionally moved and deeply impressed by the veneration of the Word of God which is first encountered in the processional as the people stand and the Holy Scriptures are carried elevated, and then enthroned on the altar. The elevation of the Word, and our standing and crossing ourselves at the reading of the Gospel are rooted not only in our beliefs but also in the historic tradition of Judaism. We see in this week's First Reading as Ezra read the Scriptures aloud the people venerated God, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood...all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground ..." This veneration of God through the written Word reflects our conviction that Scripture does in fact contain the presence of the Living Word.

This veneration of the Scriptures is explained more fully by Lucien Deiss in his book, *The Mass*: "Vatican II spoke about the 'extreme importance' of God's Word. This extreme importance is the very one of the Eucharist... 'The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred Liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ.' That is why the Magisterium could rightly speak about the 'real presence' of Christ in the Word.

"This is a marvelous teaching that, after centuries of forgetfulness or carelessness, restores the Word to the place that tradition assigned it. Saint Jerome affirmed: 'I think that the Gospel is the body of Christ and that the Holy Scriptures are his doctrine. When the Lord speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood certainly this can mean the mystery (of the Eucharist). However, his true body and blood are (also) the Word of the Scriptures and its doctrine.'"

Unfortunately ritual and tradition often lose their meaning when they become familiar. If for a moment we could have Jesus the Living Word appear again in human form to walk down the aisle of our churches we would see the difference. Our response, if we did not simply faint dead away, would be more like Ezra's people. We would bow down and prostrate ourselves in worship and ready obedience. When the Living Word strode to the pulpit we would not simply listen with half an ear but rather would hang on Jesus' every word, believing and obeying it. This is what our ritual and worship is all about, the external expression of inner beliefs and values.

During these coming months we will be looking at the Gospel according to Luke. It is not simply one man's depiction of Jesus' life but a Holy Spirit inspired communication by God of his love to us, his people. Let us arise to acknowledge his presence in the Word and listen attentively with the inner ear of our heart to his message to us. "It is Christ who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

First Reading — Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10

2 On the first day of the seventh month, therefore, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. 3 Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion; at his right side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, and on his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, Meshullam. 5 Ezra opened the scroll so that all the people might see it (for he was standing higher up than any of the people); and, as he opened it, all the people rose. 6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, "Amen, amen!" Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground. ... 8 Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.

9 Then (Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and) Ezra the priest-scribe (and the Levites who were instructing the people) said to all the people: "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep"-for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. 10 He said further: "Go, eat rich

foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!"

1. How can we allow sacred Scripture to have a more prominent role in our lives?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 19:8-10,15

8 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. 9 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye. 10 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The statutes of the LORD are true, all of them just;

15 Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor, keep the thoughts of my heart before you, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

12 As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

14 Now the body is not a single part, but many. 15 If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. 16 Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." 22 Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, 23 and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, 24 whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. 26 If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. 28 Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

2. What do you feel is the most essential truth to remember from this passage about the Body?

Gospel Reading — Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

1 Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, 3 I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. 15 He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. 16 He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read 17 and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19 and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

20 Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. 21 He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

3. How would you feel if something similar took place in your presence?

4. What authority should sacred Scripture have in our lives?

5. To what extent are we to identify with the mission of Christ as seen in verses 18-19?

6. Explain the connection between Jesus' mission, as stated here, and Jesus' position of authority in our lives.

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—January 31, 2010

Introduction: Someone has observed that, “there is no better test for a man’s ultimate integrity than his behavior when he is wrong.” All too often we are graciously willing to discuss God’s Word, and listen to God’s truth proclaimed just as long as those doing it don’t talk about things that are personal to us. When they do begin drawing inferences that really touch our lives we often respond either outwardly or inwardly, “Now you’ve stopped preaching and gone to meddling!” Jesus encountered this same response in this week’s Gospel Reading. As he finished reading the Scripture the hearers were all graciously amiable as they expressed their amazement at Jesus’ reading. However, as Jesus looked beyond their outward response to their unresponsive and unbelieving hearts their amazement turns to open rejection and hostility at his apparent “meddling.”

This Gospel account raises a question which warrants our attention: “How do we respond to God’s call for conversion and change when we encounter it?” And perhaps there is even a more basic question we should consider: “Do we desire conversion and change?” The hope of the Gospel, is that Christ brings a holy and powerful force into our lives which will enable us to break the bonds of enslavement to our old nature and its passions and habits. Real inner change is often uncomfortable because it requires us to admit that there is an area of our lives that is *wrong*. Consequently, we also often respond to the agent of change with defensiveness, resistance, and resentment, rather than welcoming the encouragement to change. Someone has aptly said, “If you think your green you’ll grow, if you think you’re ripe, you’ll rot.” The first step in conversion and change is to be dissatisfied with our status quo and to recognize that there is a need for spiritual change.

We have entered into a new year, will it be a year of responsiveness to Christ, and a year of change and growth, or will it be a year of passive resistance and complacency to the Holy Spirit’s working within us? What the new year holds for us reminds me of a story from *Forty Days and Forty Nights* by Brother Ramon, SSF. He tells of two boys endeavoring to play a joke on a holy hermit. They intended to hold a bird in their hands behind their back and ask the hermit if the bird was dead or alive. If the hermit said it was dead the boy planned to open his hand and let the bird fly up to the sky. If the hermit said it was alive, the boy planned to crush the bird in his hand to prove that the wise old man was wrong. “Father,” said one of the lads, “I have a small bird in my hand. Is it alive or dead?” There was a silence. The old man fixed him with his gaze. Eventually he chuckled and said: “Well, boys—it all depends on you!”

Will it be a year of responsiveness to Christ, and a year of change and growth, or will it be a year of passive resistance and complacency to the Holy Spirit working within?— “It all depends on you!”

First Reading — Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19

4 The word of the LORD came to me thus: 5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. ...

17 But do you gird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you. Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them; 18 For it is I this day who have made you a fortified city, A pillar of iron, a wall of brass, against the whole land: Against Judah's kings and princes, against its priests and people. 19 They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.

1. What does this passage say about the creative, or re-creative, will of God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17

1 In you, LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. 2 In your justice rescue and deliver me; listen to me and save me! 3 Be my rock and refuge, my secure stronghold; for you are my rock and fortress.

4 My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked, from the clutches of the violent. 5 You are my hope, Lord; my trust, GOD, from my youth. 6 On you I depend since birth; from my mother's womb you are my strength; my hope in you never wavers.

15 My mouth shall proclaim your just deeds, day after day your acts of deliverance, though I cannot number them all. 16 I will speak of the mighty works of the Lord; O GOD, I will tell of your singular justice. 17 God, you have taught me from my youth; to this day I proclaim your wondrous deeds.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

12:31 Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way.

13:1 If I speak in human and angelic tongues² but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. 2 And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, 5 it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, 6 it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. 9 For we know partially and we prophesy partially, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. 12 At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. 13 So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

2. Why does Paul say that love is a more excellent way than just pursuing the higher gifts?
3. What are the “childish ways” to which Paul is referring?

Gospel Reading — Luke 4:21-30

21 He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" 23 He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. 25 Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. 26 It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. 27 Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

28 When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. 29 They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

4. How do you feel when someone points out an area of deficiency in your life?
5. What are the issues that made these people react so violently?
6. How do you think the people felt when Jesus “passing through the midst of them ... went away”? What are the ramifications of his doing this?
7. Looking ahead to 2010, how would you like your spiritual life to be different? What decision(s) can you make now that will enable these changes to take place?