

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

June 2009

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 MOST HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY—June 7, 2009

Introduction: “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the ‘hierarchy of the truths of the faith.’”¹

At many times, and in many ways we affirm again and again our belief in the Holy Trinity. Prayers, such as, “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever; Amen,” speak of this mystery of the Christian faith. How was it “in the beginning”? This is an important question, for we profess that is the way it is now, and that is the way it will be in the future. This statement speaks of the individual uniqueness of each person of the Trinity, and yet of the complete unity which exists. Each one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has a distinct role and function, yet they are One, existing in perfect harmony in will and purpose.

In an attempt to explain the Holy Trinity people have developed various analogies. Perhaps you have heard someone explain how an egg, consisting of shell, white, and yoke, expresses the unity and diversity of the Trinity. Or another analogy of how a person can simultaneously be a son, a father, and a husband, demonstrating the oneness, while fulfilling three distinctly different roles. There are other such illustrations; however each of them leaves much to be desired by way of explanation. The reason they fall short is that the Holy Trinity, by its very nature, defies explanation. That is why it is called a mystery and requires faith to accept its reality.

A mystery is defined in several helpful ways in the book *Catholicism* by Richard P. McBrien, one of which is “truths of faith which are entirely beyond the natural powers of reason to apprehend.”² Somewhere I read that Pope Paul VI defined mystery as “a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.” The Holy Trinity is also called an absolute mystery inasmuch as it cannot be really understood even after it is revealed to us, it remains a mystery. Thus it is “the central mystery of faith,” professed at our baptism and confirmation and acclaimed at each Mass.

It is in the Holy Trinity that we see the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working in perfect unity to bring about our salvation and their eternal purposes. Though it is a mystery it is a “reality” whose presence and effects can be seen and experienced. Ephesians chapter one is a wonderful exposition of the “mystery of His will.” In it we are able to see how each member of the Trinity is involved in completing our salvation. In verses 3-6 we see the Father choosing us and destining us to be adopted through his Son. In verses 7-11 we see how Jesus the Son accomplishes our salvation through the mercy and grace of his blood. Lastly, in verses 13-14 we see how the Holy Spirit seals our salvation and guarantees it by taking up residency in our lives. This is the Holy Trinity, One in being, united in purpose, yet unique in their roles.

The prayer of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity is a fitting conclusion and response to these truths: “O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery...”³

1 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (234).

2 *Catholicism*, by Richard P. McBrien, (page 244).

3 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (260).

First Reading — Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

³² “Ask now of the days of old, before your time, ever since God created man upon the earth; ask from one end of the sky to the other: Did anything so great ever happen before? Was it ever heard of? ³³ Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking from the midst of fire, as you did, and live? ³⁴ Or did any god venture to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, with his strong hand and outstretched arm, and by great terrors, all of which the LORD, your God, did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ... ³⁹ This is what you must now know, and fix in your heart, that the LORD is God in the heavens above and on earth below, and that there is no other. ⁴⁰ You must keep his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you today, that you and your children after you may prosper, and that you may have long life on the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you forever.”

1. What are the promises revealed in these passages?
2. Why do you think the Israelites' well being and long life was directly tied to their obedience to the Scripture?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 33:4-6, 9, 18-20, 22

⁴ For the LORD'S word is true; all his works are trustworthy. ⁵ The LORD loves justice and right and fills the earth with goodness.

⁶ By the LORD'S word the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host. ...

⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be, commanded, and it stood in place. ... ¹⁸ But the LORD'S eyes are upon the reverent, upon those who hope for his gracious help, ¹⁹ delivering them from death, keeping them alive in times of famine. ²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and shield. ... ²² May your kindness, LORD, be upon us; we have put our hope in you.

Second Reading — Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

3. What does it mean to "be led by the Spirit of God"?
4. How would you explain the significance of being heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

5. How do you respond to the fact that some of Jesus' original eleven disciples doubted?
6. How do you feel when doubts enter your thinking? How do you handle them?
7. In what manner do you believe that these instructions of Jesus refer to you personally as a member of Christ's Church?
8. What difference will it make if these instructions are viewed as having been given to each of the eleven individually, or if you view them as having been given to them collectively?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY—June 14, 2009

Introduction: When bringing our dog, Oreo, home from the vet my wife's finger was pierced through by the leash clip when Oreo rushed forward. With one end of the leash fastened to a pulling dog, which she was restraining with her uninjured hand, and the clip on the other end of the leash embedded through my wife's finger, she called to our teenage son for help removing the clip. Though having just completed a First Aid course, he looked at the clip protruding through the flesh of her finger and cringing and grimacing, said, "I can't, I can't do it." The sight of the pierced bleeding hand almost sickened him. Many of us can identify with him as we have said or heard another say to us, "I can't stand the sight of blood."

What is it about blood that has this affect on us? It isn't the beautiful, deep red color of blood that gets to us but the fact that the blood represents the pain and suffering associated with spilling it. Yet for Christians the world over, the pierced Body and Blood of Jesus has become precious, not something to cringe at and shrink from but rather to remember, appreciate, and adore. We honor the Body and Blood of Jesus because of the pain, suffering and sacrifice it represents, and the saving effect it has.

We would all be shocked and highly offended if someone treated the Eucharist with disdain, or partook of it with a cavalier attitude. How can we insure that we properly honor, appreciate, and express gratitude to Jesus for shedding his blood, and giving his body to secure our salvation? This week's second Scripture reading provides some insight. We can do this by cooperating with the eternal intent and purpose for which it was shed; to "purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

Three purposes are revealed here. First his Body and Blood should "purify your conscience." Which in fact it does, as Jesus' sacrifice of his Body and Blood on our behalf, brings forgiveness and cleansing from every stain of sin. However, this purification should not simply be a theological reality but also should be an experiential cleansing from the "dead works" that defile us. This cleansing is expressed in real repentance and true conversion. In addition, appreciation for the Body and Blood of Christ should constrain, or impel us forward, so that we no longer live for ourselves but live to "serve the living God." This is the efficacious cycle that should be our spiritual reality. The Body and Blood of Christ should effect cleansing from sin within us, bring transformation to us, and mobilization of us to serve him. These are the eternal purposes for which Jesus gives us his Body and Blood. We can honor both it and Jesus' purpose by eagerly participating in this cycle.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, speaking of the Eucharist, "... recounts many of the miracles described in the Scriptures, including Christ's birth of the Virgin Mary, and then turning to the work of creation, concludes this: 'Surely the Word of Christ, which could make out of nothing that which did not exist, can change things already in existence into what they were not. For it is not less extraordinary to give things new natures than to change their natures.' "*

This mystery of faith which we profess each Sunday as we receive the Eucharist is reinforced and validated by us as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to insure that a similar process takes place within us. For the Spirit also works in us changing us into what we are not, by implanting within us his new nature; "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

* *Mysterium Fidei*, by Pope Paul VI (page 22).

First Reading — Exodus 24:3-8

³ When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the LORD has told us."

⁴ Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD, ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. ⁷ Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do." ⁸ Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

1. What parallels do you see between this Old Testament worship and our Mass?
2. How do you think we can apply verses 7-8?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 116:12-13, 15-18

¹² How can I repay the LORD for all the good done for me?

¹³ I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. ...

¹⁵ Too costly in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his faithful. ¹⁶ LORD, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your maidservant; you have loosed my bonds. ¹⁷ I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people...

Second Reading — Hebrews 9:11-15

¹¹ But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, ¹² he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.

¹⁵ For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

3. What new concept have you learned that will make participating in Eucharist more meaningful?

Gospel Reading — Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

¹² On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. ¹⁴ Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' ¹⁵ Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there."

¹⁶ The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. ²² While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." ²³ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. ²⁵ Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

²⁶ Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

4. Read about the Passover meal in Exodus 12. What does it foreshadow?
5. Describe the difference between the meaning of the Passover meal as the disciples perceived it, and the real meaning, which only Jesus knew.
6. Obviously, the depth of devotion and celebration varies for us as we participate in communion. What makes the Eucharist celebration especially meaningful for you?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 21, 2009

Introduction: Jesus asks the disciples two interesting questions in this week's Gospel reading; "Why are you afraid" and "Have you no faith?" The first deals with our circumstances and the second with our responses to our circumstances.

In response to the first we can list a host of reasons why we are afraid, for life is full of frightening situations. We enter the world frightened as we are taken from the warmth and security of the womb and thrust into the cold insecurity of the birthing room where we promptly get our bottom spanked. We live our lives having to confront many real and imagined fears such as sickness, abandonment, broken relationships, and unexpected and uncontrollable disasters, the last of which often ends in an untimely and/or humiliating death. "Why are you afraid?"—because a fearful storm can break around us at any time.

But the second question "Have you no faith?" is the one that a Christian should have a different answer to than does the non-Christian. Because though the rain storms on both the good and the bad our response to the storm should be different. When fearsome storms enter our lives do we think that God is distant, asleep in the boat, uncaring about what's happening to us and impotent to help? Or are we convinced and assured that God is here walking with us in the midst of the storm awake and in control, and that his love will assuredly cause all things to work together for our good and his (Romans 8:28), and that he is able to do anything and everything that needs to be done to see us through the storm? "Have you no faith?"—not as much as we should yet he will remain faithful.

We will invariably encounter fearful situations in life but the issue will always boil down to whether we will allow fear to control us or whether, as the second reading suggests, we will allow the love of God to control us. Whenever, in our weakness and in the face of fearful situations the question arises, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" we must let the love of Christ provide the answer and control our response, and not let the unknown fear reign in our mind. When we let fear control our response to the unexpected and uncontrollable tragedy that enters our life we become self-serving with self-preservation being our primary goal. But the love of Christ enables us to abandon living for ourselves during these times of danger and instead to live for him, and for those around us because of him. This is one way in which the "new creation" is expressed within us, changing our fear and self-preservation into love which no longer views the disastrous situation simply from "a human point of view."

Horatio Spafford's life is a good example of this changed outlook in the face of life's storms. In the Chicago fire of 1871 he suffered financial devastation and shortly thereafter had to endure yet a more terrifying loss. On a transatlantic trip the ship his wife and four daughters were on was struck by another ship. Only his wife survived and she wired him the tragic news, "Saved alone." Only a few can truly imagine the feeling of devastation he experienced, but many of us can realize how questions similar to those of the disciples must have flooded his thinking. A few weeks later as his ship passed nearby the spot where his four daughters drowned, he penned the following words: "When peace, like a river attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul."* An amazing testimony of faith in God's love in the midst of life's storms.

We must allow ourselves to also be taught that the only answer to the question "do you not care if we perish?" must be, assuredly he does. "Be not afraid!" was not only the hallmark of Pope John Paul II's pontificate but also the very message sent to us from the Father, first by angels and then by his only Son. "Peace, be still!"

* From the song *It is Well With My Soul*, by Horatio G. Spafford, as related on www.cyberhymnal.org.

First Reading — Job 38:1, 8-11

¹ Then the LORD addressed Job out of the storm and said: ...

⁸ "And who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb; ⁹ When I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? ¹⁰ When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, ¹¹ And said: 'Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!'"

1. How can we change, enlarge and enhance our concept of God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 107:23-26, 28-31

²³ Some went off to sea in ships, plied their trade on the deep waters. ²⁴ They saw the works of the LORD, the wonders of God in the deep. ²⁵ He spoke and roused a storm wind; it tossed the waves on high. ²⁶ They rose up to the heavens, sank to the depths; their hearts trembled at the danger. . . .

²⁸ In their distress they cried to the LORD, who brought them out of their peril, ²⁹ hushed the storm to a murmur; the waves of the sea were stilled. ³⁰ They rejoiced that the sea grew calm, that God brought them to the harbor they longed for. ³¹ Let them thank the LORD for such kindness, such wondrous deeds for mere mortals.

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

¹⁴ For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. ¹⁵ He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶ Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. ¹⁷ So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.

2. What are some areas of your life in which you have become a “new creation” in Christ?

3. What are some indicators in our lives that reveal whether we are living for ourselves or living for Christ?

Gospel Reading — Mark 4:35-41

³⁵ On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, “Let us cross to the other side.” ³⁶ Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹ He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm. ⁴⁰ Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” ⁴¹ They were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

4. What lessons can we draw from the disciples’ experience?

5. What do you think would have happened if they had not taken Jesus with them into the boat? How is this applicable to our lives?

6. What have you learned about God’s love and provision through the storms you have encountered in life?

7. Identify one or two main lessons we can learn from this experience.

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 28, 2009

Introduction: Because we live in a damaged world sickness is very prevalent, as is the awareness of the need for healing. Besides looking to modern medicine when we are sick, we pray for God to bless the procedures, and we pray for miraculous healing as well. Consequently the connection between faith and healing is being recognized more and more, it is sought by many, and abused by some. On the one hand incidents of miraculous healing are known and reported, while on the other hand claims of healing attributes are used by some for selfish purposes. Frequently the burden of sickness is increased by well meaning but accusatory advice that, “If you will only believe more completely you will be healed.” Simultaneously, we also know of godly, faith filled believers, recipients of many people’s prayers, who succumb to their illness and experience what seems like an untimely death.

This week’s Gospel reading records Jesus’ healing power graciously given to both a well-off leader, and to the humble unknown. In one instance fear and hopelessness was present and in the other fear and faith, yet both were recipients of Jesus’ healing power. And so we rightly wonder what is the proper understanding of this relationship between faith and healing.

Perhaps the best way to approach this question is to begin with what we know: 1) Sickness and death are a normal part of the human condition, a condition accompanying our fallen nature. 2) Jesus’ death and resurrection restores our fallen nature so that we can become partakers of his divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world. 3) Reversing the natural progression of sickness and death requires miraculous power which resides only within the power of God, and through his grace he has allowed mankind to discover many medical cures. 4) In all of life we are to have faith, faith in God’s love and concern for our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well being, and faith in his ability and desire to help us. 5) The quantity of our faith is not as important as its quality, for Jesus said if we even have the faith of a mustard seed, a very tiny thing, we can do wonders. So it isn’t how much faith *we* have but in *whom* our faith resides. 6) Our faith needs to be exercised not only in trusting God’s power to heal, but also in trusting God’s will for us when healing is not granted. God does allow his children to incur sickness and even death to bring about his glory and to accomplish his purposes. It takes equally as great faith to say, as Jesus did, “Nevertheless, thy will be done,” as it does to say, “Please heal me.” The things God allows in our lives are designed to bring us closer to him, to help us discover the depths of his love for us, and to illicit the willing abandonment of ourselves to his love and mercy. And though we often fear sickness and death, the abandonment of ourselves to his love in the midst of our illness and in the face of death is what the Holy Spirit enables us to do, replace fear with faith.

“There is a sense in which no doctor ever heals. The doctors themselves would be the first to admit this. The magic is not in the medicine but in the patient’s body ... What the treatment does is to stimulate Natural functions or to remove what hinders them. We speak for convenience of the doctor, or the dressing, healing a cut. But in another sense every cut heals itself: no cut can be healed in a corpse ... All who are cured are cured by Him, not merely in the sense that His providence provides them with medical assistance and wholesome environments, but also in the sense that their very tissues are repaired by the far-descending energy which, flowing from Him, energizes the whole system of Nature.”

* From *Miracles*, by C.S. Lewis.

First Reading — Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

¹³ Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. ¹⁴ For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome, And there is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of the nether world on earth, ¹⁵ For justice is undying. ...

²³ For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. ²⁴ But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.

1. What do you conclude when bad things happen to good people?
2. What does the statement “God created man for incorruption” tell you about God and his will for us?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

² I praise you, LORD, for you raised me up and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. ...

⁴ LORD, you brought me up from Sheol; you kept me from going down to the pit. ⁵ Sing praise to the LORD, you faithful; give thanks to God's holy name. ⁶ For divine anger lasts but a moment; divine favor lasts a lifetime. At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing. ...

¹¹ Hear, O LORD, have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper. ¹² You changed my mourning into dancing; you took off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. ¹³ With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

⁷ Now as you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also. ... ⁹ For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ... ¹³ not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality ¹⁴ your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. ¹⁵ As it is written: "Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less."

3. How can we excel in faith?

Gospel Reading — Mark 5:21-43

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again (in the boat) to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. ²² One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet ²³ and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." ²⁴ He went off with him, and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him. ²⁵ There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. ²⁸ She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."

²⁹ Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?"

³¹ But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction."

³⁵ While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" ³⁶ Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." ³⁷ He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. ⁴¹ He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" ⁴² The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. (At that) they were utterly astounded. ⁴³ He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

4. With which of the people in this passage to you most identify? Why?

5. How would you describe Jesus' concern for these individuals?

6. How can we develop a spirit of faith during the good times in our lives, what will sustain us during the difficult times?