

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

November - 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

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY—November 1, 2009

Introduction: A common day for commemorating All Saints began during the persecution of Diocletian when the number of martyrs became so great that a separate day could not be assigned to each. But the Church, feeling that every martyr should be venerated, appointed a common day for all. This feast which began in Antioch spread to other cities and churches. Gregory III (731-741) consecrated a chapel in the Basilica of St. Peter to all the saints and fixed the anniversary for 1 November. Later Gregory IV (827-844) extended the celebration on 1 November to the entire Church.¹

It is appropriate that we should remember and honor those individuals who have gone before us who modeled a life of sacrifice and holiness, and in some cases martyrdom, for it is God himself through sacred Scripture that calls them *blessed*. One of the dictionary's primary meanings of the word "blessed" is to be "held in reverence," or as one Greek word study states it "to praise and celebrate with praises." We see in the Scripture readings several words and phrases that describe and define the people whom we commemorate on All Saints Day.

- In the first reading the Apostle John describes them as martyrs; "*a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, ... who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"
- The Psalmist describes them as people of holiness; "*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*"
- St. John includes us, ordinary Christians who are changed into Jesus' image; "*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; ... it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

It is helpful to keep in mind that to be an *ordinary* Christian does not mean to be a nominal, lukewarm Christian but a vibrant Christian who lives his life in Christ, and one in whom Christ lives. Here is how the early Christians are described by one Apostolic Father, "They dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if sojourners in them; they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry as [do] all men, they bear children, but they do not expose their offspring. They offer free hospitality, but guard their purity. Their lot is cast 'in the flesh,' but they do not live 'after the flesh.' They pass their time upon the earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all men. They are unknown and they are condemned. They are put to death and they gain life."²

As we commemorate those who have gone before us, may our prayer be that of the early Christian, Eusebius, "Pray for me, that God will give me both inward and outward strength so that I may not only be called a Christian but found to be one ..."³

¹ Merishman, Francis. "All Saints' Day." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 5 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01315a.htm>>.

² *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, by Jordan Aumann, page 26.

³ *Ibid.*

First Reading — Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

Then I saw another angel come up from the East, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who were given power to damage the land and the sea, 3 "Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." 4 I heard the number of those who had been marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand marked from every tribe of the Israelites:

9 After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb." 11 All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They

prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, 12 and exclaimed: "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

1. What are the attitudes of "servants of our God"?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 24:1-6

1 A psalm of David. The earth is the LORD'S and all it holds, the world and those who live there. 2 For God founded it on the seas, established it over the rivers.

3 Who may go up the mountain of the LORD? Who can stand in his holy place?

4 "The clean of hand and pure of heart, who are not devoted to idols, who have not sworn falsely. 5 They will receive blessings from the LORD, and justice from their saving God. 6 Such are the people that love the LORD, that seek the face of the God of Jacob." Selah.

Second Reading — 1 John 3:1-3

1 See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

2. Define what you think John meant when he said that Jesus is "pure."
3. How should the realization that "we are God's children now," affect the way we think and live?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 5:1-12

1 When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 He began to teach them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

6 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

4. Where do you see yourself in this list?
5. Which category of people Jesus lists would you like to be included in? Why? Which category would you most like to avoid being included?
6. What do you think this reward will be like and should it motivate us?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 8, 2009

Introduction: “Every time I go to church they are asking for money,” is the woeful refrain often heard from people to justify their non-participation in worship services. There may be some validity in the statement for many churches are struggling to simply maintain their presence and make ends meet, and are completely hampered due to low finances from vigorously advancing the Gospel. However, if the same people who hide behind this refrain were equally honest they would have to confess that the church’s need to continually ask for financial support says more about their own financial irresponsibility than it does about the church’s greed.

It is interesting to note, though perhaps uncomfortable to realize, that Jesus’ references to money far outnumber his references to any other aspect of life, and he was not greedy. Jesus and his disciples lived a simple, unencumbered life, free from materialism. So why did Jesus speak so often of our relationship to our money? Because Jesus knew that there was a battle going on for our hearts and where our treasure is there also would be our hearts, our affections. The two cannot be separated. Jesus was most concerned that people love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” To do so, Jesus knew that we would have to be confronted regarding our relationship to our money, and how we view our treasure.

When a man gives his money he is giving a part of his life. The converse is also true, when a man withholds his money he is withholding a significant part of himself, withholding his heart. Various means have been utilized to motivate people to give. For instance fear and guilt; if you don’t give God will be upset with you and will punish you. Or selfish reward; if you give, God will reward you and make you even richer with the money you retain. Or self-glorification; if you give a lot, think how much you will be admired. Or for power; if you give significantly you will have greater control, influence, etc. Though these various motivations have within them a valid kernel of truth, the only legitimate motivation for giving is love. Where your treasure is there is your heart also; God has my heart and love and I want my money and treasure to reflect that love.

Paul states it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” If God’s people, in any parish, develop their love for Christ and practice the generosity of which this week’s Scripture readings speaks, there will be an abundance of money for serving Christ and advancing his Kingdom, and we might add, an abundance of love.

In the first reading the widow of Zarephath reminds us of another widow, the one Jesus observed tossing the last two cents she had into the Temple offering. This widow from Zarephath gave the last of her oil and bread. Both received commendation from God — why? I think it was because they did not stop loving God, and expressing their love for him by giving of their substance in the midst of poverty, and difficulty. By contrast, it is not commendable for us to drop a dollar, or even a five into the offering, when we are spending plenty for the necessities, toys, and entertainments of life? It may be truthful; accurately expressing the limited degree of our love, but it isn’t commendable. God deserves more. God expects more.

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small,”*

* *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis.

First Reading — I Kings 17:10-16

10 He left and went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." 11 She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." 12 "As the LORD, your God, lives," she answered, "I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." 13 "Do not be afraid," Elijah said to her. "Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something

for yourself and your son. 14 For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, "The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth."

15 She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; 16 The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

1. How do you respond to personal requests for financial or material help?
2. What value does the very specific promise to the widow of Zarephath hold for us today?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 146:6-10

6 The maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, Who keeps faith forever, 7 secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free; 8 the LORD gives sight to the blind.

The LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. 9 The LORD protects the stranger, sustains the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked.

10 The LORD shall reign forever, your God, Zion, through all generations! Hallelujah!

Second Reading — Hebrews 9:24-28

24 For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. 25 Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; 26 if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. 27 Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, 28 so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

3. What point is the writer of Hebrews addressing with his reference to "once for all" and "offered once"?
4. How does this passage relate to the sacrifice of the Mass?

Gospel Reading — Mark 12:38-44

38 In the course of his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, 39 seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation."

41 He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. 43 Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. 44 For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

5. What principles of behavior is Jesus warning us to avoid? How would you restate them positively?
6. How does Jesus measure the size of our contributions?
7. How would you advise people regarding giving?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 15, 2009

Introduction: History is undaunting. It just continues on to its natural conclusion with or without our agreement. We have the privilege to contribute to and influence it, but not to alter its grand design. Because history can rightly be called *his*-story. The natural conclusion of history becomes in reality a supernatural outcome. *His*-story is one in which God determined to create and claim through love, a people of his own (1 Peter 2:9). Though Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and thus affected history, God in his love would not allow them to alter *his*-story's purpose. This week's Scripture readings portray three aspects of *his* -story; the promise, the prescription, and the preview.

The promise: Imagine, some 100-200 years before Jesus was born, Daniel predicted the promise of eternal resurrection and eternal punishment. This week's first reading says, "those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." During Jesus' time walking on earth, and from before Daniel's time to the present, people have wondered and debated about the end of life, resurrection and damnation. Many base their view of eternity on their own limited understanding. We who follow Christ base our views on the divine revelation of sacred Scripture, which holds unlimited promises. This passage in Daniel is a promise worth clinging to, for those who believe.

The prescription: Many contemplate the end times with distress and fear. The real possibility of a life spent in "shame and everlasting contempt" looms evermore as a real possibility when they reflect on their life lived outside the will of God. Though the terror is real it is not of itself sufficient to either bring about change or remove the fearful debt they owe. Only God's powerful prescription can do that. Jesus, as Christ, became and becomes our high priest entering into God's presence offering his own life, death, and resurrection as the Sacrifice which can remove every stain of sin, making perfect and freeing from guilt and judgment those who believe.

The preview: Jesus gives us a glimpse of his glorious and triumphant return. It does not matter that at times in history it appears that the forces of evil will overwhelm his people, the drama is not yet over until he returns and wraps up *his*-story. This week's Gospel passage gives us just a hint of the final outcome. Jesus and his people will be in the "win" column, while his opponents will experience the ultimate "loss." His will be a glorious victory and a triumphant return. The joy and jubilation his people feel will far surpass that which people experience when tearing down the goal post, or cutting down the net over the biggest upset of the season. Ours will be the upset of eternity—the inevitable and sure conclusion to *his*-story.

"God reconciling the world to himself is also God reconciling himself to the world. In working out the plan of redemption, the Bible does not say that man became God, but that God became man. Further, he reconciled himself to the world by 'not counting their trespasses against them.' He forgave us not by ignoring our trespasses but by assuming our trespasses. 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' God became what by right he was not, so that we might become what by right we are not. This is what Christians through the ages have called 'the happy exchange.' This exchange, this reversal, is at the very epicenter of the story of our redemption,"*

Persuaded!: So persuaded that these things are true we can with the Psalmist rejoice and say, "I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." This is the blessed assurance of which we sing.

* *Death on a Friday Afternoon*, by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, (page)

First Reading — Daniel 12:1-3

1 "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. 3 But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever

1. Which provides more motivation for people to live righteously, the promise of the resurrection or the fear of damnation and punishment?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 16:5, 8-11

5 LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you have made my destiny secure. ...

8 I keep the LORD always before me; with the Lord at my right, I shall never be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure, 10 For you will not abandon me to Sheol, nor let your faithful servant see the pit. 11 You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.

Second Reading — Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

11 Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12 But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; 13 now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. ... 18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

2. What will turn the forgiveness we have in Christ into living a life of gratitude?

Gospel Reading — Mark 13:24-32

24 "But in those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, 27 and then he will send out the angels and gather (his) elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

28 "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. 30 Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

3. As you reflect on verses 24-27 what feelings are generated; awe, fear, jubilation, wonder, doubt, etc.?

4. How should the promise, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" influence us today?

5. What affect, do you think, knowing the exact time of Jesus' return would have on people?

6. How does Mary's response to the announcement of Jesus' first Advent, prepare us for our response to the announcement of his second Advent?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 22, 2009

Introduction: This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is appropriate that we do so as this is the end of the Liturgical Year and it reminds us that Christ, at the end of years, will rule forever in eternity. However, like Christians in New Testament times his lordship as King should be a conscious part of our daily existence as Catholic Christians.

In the Scriptures we have several examples of how not to relate to his kingship and reign. For instance, early in the life of Israel the nation rejected God's rule in their lives and nation, as we see in 1 Samuel 8. This passage records that the nation of Israel threw off God's rule, and demanded a human king, so that they would "be like the other nations." Though warned of the audacious demands of earthly kings they were willing to ignore the negative consequences so that they could discard the privileges and responsibilities of relating to and following God as their ruler.

Years later God's Son, Jesus, came proclaiming the Kingdom of God. One would think that by this time, after having experienced centuries of corrupt rule of earthly kings, that Israel and their leaders would welcome the opportunity to return to the benevolent rule of God, with arms welcoming him. But they didn't. Why?

In addition, We also see in Scripture how the host of people welcomed Jesus as king when he entered Jerusalem riding on a colt. They acclaimed him the new heir of King David for whom they had been looking. Yet their celebration was superficial, their acclamation insincere, and one which turned to mob rejection in a matter of hours. Why?

Pilate, perhaps, epitomizes all that we should avoid. He too superficially recognized that Jesus was a king, and in fact acknowledged that Jesus was King of the Jews. But then, Pilate washed his hands of Jesus and his kingship, and disavowed any responsibility to respond to this recognized reality. Why?

In each of these instances, to varying degrees, people liked the idea of being under the rule and in the kingdom of God, but they did not like the demands it put upon them. Rebelliousness is in our DNA. We want to rule ourselves. We love the benefits of a heavenly king, with his benevolent ways, his care and his protection, but reject the demands of citizenship in his kingdom. This fear of surrendering self-rule to his rule, and our will to his will, often drives us to offer lip service during times of celebration, and selfish rebellion during the rest of the time. Even we who have gladly united with his kingdom recognize the war that often resides within us between practical allegiance and external acknowledgement. This year as we celebrate Jesus Christ's Lordship and reign as King, may we pray and resolve that during the next fifty-one weeks we will live to his honor and practically surrender to his will.

Pope Pius XI, in *Quas Primas*, clearly explains what it means to let Christ truly reign in us. "If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God."*

* *Quas Primas*, by Pope Pius XI, (33).

First Reading — Daniel 7:13-14

13 As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, 14 He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

1. What does “dominion, glory, and kingship” mean to you?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 93:1-2, 5

1 The LORD is king, robed with majesty; the LORD is robed, girded with might. The world will surely stand in place, never to be moved. 2 Your throne stands firm from of old; you are from everlasting, LORD.

5 Your decrees are firmly established; holiness belongs to your house, LORD, for all the length of days.

Second Reading — Revelation 1:5-8

5 ... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever (and ever). Amen. 7 Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him. Yes. Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

2. What are the responsibilities of the subjects of Christ's kingdom?

Gospel Reading — John 18:33-37

33 So Pilate went back into the praetorium and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants (would) be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." 37 So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

3. If you were Jesus' spokesman, how would you answer Pilate's question, "What have you done?"
4. How would you describe the inhabitants of his Kingdom?
5. Where and how have you experienced the call to live as a member of his Kingdom?
6. If someone asked you, "Why should I volunteer to be a member of Christ's Kingdom?" how would you respond?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT—November 29, 2009

Introduction: “My Daddy! My Daddy!” the little boy sang out as he spotted his father progressing up the long airport corridor, returning after a long trip. For some time the little boy had pranced around animatedly waiting and watching. His eyes, his face, his whole body strained forward scanning the faces of other passengers to find his father, moving back and forth trying to see around the emerging throng of passengers. Then, sighting his dad, he lit up with recognition, joyfully exclaiming for all to hear, “My Daddy! My Daddy!”

This Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, and the experience of this little boy provides an apt study of what it means to await Christ's coming. Waiting is not a passive exercise of the marginally interested, instead it should be active anticipation. All our faculties should be attuned to the fact that someone important is about to appear. There should be a concentration of our attention and a readiness to respond in enthusiastic greeting.

This week's Gospel reading provides an appropriate transition from the end of one liturgical year to the beginning of a new liturgical year, for it alerts us to Jesus' second advent, when he will return from heaven to claim his own. We are encouraged to “look up,” “raise your heads,” “take heed,” “watch,” and pray for his coming is real and redemptive, as real and redemptive as was his first coming. And these actions we are encouraged to follow are the actions of active waiting.

With the Second Advent in mind we are stimulated to celebrate his first Advent with similar active waiting, anticipating a fresh appearing of Jesus' presence in our lives. Will we be like the little boy mentioned above focussing and concentrating our attention on seeing him? Or will we have our attention diverted by the glitz and secular trappings of a Christmas that ignores that he ever existed, or could ever again reappear to us? Perhaps this is the week when we should determine a plan for peering around the emerging onslaught of secular traditions and purely mercenary celebrations, to actively watch for Jesus. If we take time now to sort out what we are going to do to actively watch for him in the face of this onslaught, and then follow through on our intention, we too will burst forth with exclamations of joy.

“For while all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne...’ The passage, brimming with the mystery of the Incarnation, is wonderfully expressive of the infinite stillness that hovered over Christ's birth. For the greatest things are accomplished in silence—not in the clamor and display of superficial eventfulness, but in the deep clarity of inner vision; in the almost imperceptible start of decision, in quiet overcoming and hidden sacrifice. Spiritual conception happens when the heart is quickened by love, and the free will stirs to action,” (from *The Lord*, by Romano Guardini.)

Let us pray as we dwell in this time period between Jesus' first and second appearing that there might be a third appearing, the reappearing of Jesus in our hearts and lives. When the little boy's dad appeared he scooped up his son in his arms in mutual love and spent a lifetime mentoring his son to growth and maturity. So may it be with the reappearing Christ in our lives that our hearts would be quickened by love and our free will stirred into action.

First Reading — Jeremiah 33:14-16

14 The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah.
15 In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.
16 In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The LORD our justice."

1. Compare this promise of Jesus' first advent with the promise of his second advent found in this week's Gospel reading.
2. How did Jesus “execute justice and righteousness”?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14

4 Make known to me your ways, LORD; teach me your paths. 5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior. For you I wait all the long day, because of your goodness, LORD.

8 Good and upright is the LORD, who shows sinners the way, 9 Guides the humble rightly, and teaches the humble the way.

10 All the paths of the LORD are faithful love toward those who honor the covenant demands. ...

14 The counsel of the LORD belongs to the faithful; the covenant instructs them.

Second Reading — 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

3:12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, 13 so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. (Amen.) 4:1 Finally, brothers, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God--and as you are conducting yourselves--you do so even more. 2 For you know what instructions¹ we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3. Define holiness. What are proper motives for pursuing holiness?
4. What does it mean to “establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father”?

Gospel Reading — Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens⁸ will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."

34 "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise 35 like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. 36 Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

5. Compare your feelings toward the First Advent with your feelings about the Second Advent.
6. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had Luke write about these things?
7. How do you think we could practically implement this advice?
8. What inner message of the heart is the Spirit whispering to you and your community this week?