Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

April 2020

The following series is free, downloadable small-group materials based on each week’s Mass readings and 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 minutes 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.** (The booklet *A Facilitator’s Guide:* is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)
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 that this passage ties 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, Second Reading and the Gospel 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 Scripture 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,

Richard A. Cleveland
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Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION—April 5, 2020

Introduction: Passion Sunday introduces us to a week of intense reflection on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. What difference will it make in our lives two weeks, or two months, from now?

Pope John Paul II begins the encyclical Mission of the Redeemer, by reiterating a truth he set forth in his very first encyclical: “The Church’s fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man’s gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity toward the mystery of Christ.” This statement presupposes that we, the Church, have sufficiently gazed upon and contemplated the mystery of Christ, ourselves, so that it has become a compelling force in our lives.

Pope John Paul II goes on to explain why we, and all of humanity, need to direct our gaze to him: “In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. Christ is truly ‘our peace’ (Eph 2:14); ‘the love of Christ impels us’ (2 Cor 5:14) giving meaning and joy to our life.” He further explains, “Indeed, all people are searching for it, albeit at times in a confused way, and have a right to know the value of this gift and to approach it freely.” In these two statements the Holy Father explains the benefits we personally will receive by coming to know the Savior more fully.

Hopefully during this Holy Week we will slow down our other activities and concentrate on grasping and understanding all that Jesus went through on our behalf. But what about the remaining fifty-one weeks, or for that matter, the remaining weeks of our lives? Should we not during this week, along with those being newly baptized, renew our baptismal vows to be lifelong disciples of Jesus?

Richard McBrien, in his classic work, Catholicism, explains, “To become a disciple, therefore was to enter into a lifelong relationship with Jesus. . . . discipleship was not only a process of learning, but of shaping one’s whole life around the Master without reservation.”

Many people gazed on Jesus’ death on the cross, some mocked, some cried, some were duly impressed, and a few dedicated their lives to believing and following his instructions. Those few who committed their lives to knowing and following Christ, subsequently turned their world upside down with the Good News we celebrate this week.

During this coming week we will be faced with several important choices. The first very simply is; Will we longingly gaze on Jesus’ agony and death, and his resurrection for us, or will we only give him a cursory glance? The Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, Eucharistic Adoration, and a host of spiritual readings are all means we can use to longingly and continually reflect on his passion and resurrection. Will we?

Then, if we choose to gaze at length on our Savior’s passion, we will have another choice. Will we only briefly respond emotionally to all he has done for us, or will we dedicate our lives to believing and following him? This moving and motivating experience need not only take place once a year during Lent and Easter, but it can be a constant and recurring way of life. Philippians 2:5 the verse preceding this week’s second reading encourages us to let Christ’s mind be in us, in our mind. The ability to live the year controlled by Christ is dependent on this ongoing reflection of Christ’s humility and passion.

Perhaps there may be no better finale to this week than to dedicate ourselves to follow Jesus for a lifetime, and for the remainder of our life, by our actions and words, direct the gaze of others to him. If we do the latter it will make a difference in our lives not just for two days, two weeks, or even two months, but a difference that will last a lifetime.

First Reading — Isaiah 50:4-7

4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary. Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. 5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. 6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. 7 For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

1. What attitudes do you see in this prophecy of Christ that we should embrace?


**Respontorial Reading — Psalm 22:7-8, 16-19, 22-23 (8-9, 17-20, 23-24 NAB)**

7 All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; 8 “He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” …

16 Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet—17 I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; 18 they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. 19 But thou, O LORD, be not far off! O thou my help, hasten to my aid! …

21 I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel!

**Second Reading — Philippians 2:6-11**

…6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form he humbly himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1. How did Jesus express humility through his life and death?

2. What do the expressions, “every knee shall bow” and “every tongue confess” really mean?

**Gospel Reading — Matthew 26:14-27:66**

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you prepare for us to eat the passover?” 18 He said, “Go into the city to a certain one, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at your house with my disciples.’” 19 And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the passover.

20 When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples; 21 and as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” 22 And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” 23 He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me, will betray me. 24 The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” 25 Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Is it I, Master?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ 32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” 33 Peter declared to him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” 34 Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” 35 Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.” 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” 39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” 40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.” 43 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking
your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

57 While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.” 49 And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Hail, Master!” And he kissed him. 50 Jesus said to him, “Friend, why are you here?” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. 51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” 55 At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. 56 But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

57 Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’” 62 And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” 63 But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” 64 Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 65 Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” 67 Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, 68 saying, “Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a maid came up to him, and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” 71 And when he went out to the porch, another maid saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 And again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” 74 Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the cock crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

27:1 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death; 2 and they bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pilate the governor.

3 When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 4 saying, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” 5 And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since they are blood money.” 7 So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” 12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. 13 Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly.

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?” 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. 19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.” 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” 22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified.” 23 And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified.”
24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this righteous man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” 25 And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, 29 and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 As they went out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.”

38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 40 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 41 “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 42 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 43 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

44 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 45 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” 46 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 47 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. 48 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 49 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

50 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, the rocks were split; 51 the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 52 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 53 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

54 There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; 55 among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

56 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. 57 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 58 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, 59 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewed in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 60 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.

61 Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 62 There- fore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” 63 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” 64 So they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

4. How were you moved through this account of Jesus’ last days?

5. What are the three most profound truths of these passages?
Introduction: Easter, when disappointment was turned to delight, and delight was turned to destruction.

Surely Satan and the forces of evil must have thought they had won. And if the forces of evil could have danced, surely they must have been dancing since the day that they thought they had killed the Son of God. Darkness seemed to have been reigning supreme from the time when Judas and an armed crowd, came under the cloak of darkness to arrest Jesus. Darkness provided the cover for their evil intentions and also for the shameful abandonment of Jesus by his disciples. Even Peter had to slink away into the darkness to hide his shame.

How Satan and the forces of evil must have rejoiced as “from noon onward there was darkness over the whole land,” until at last Jesus “gave up His spirit.” How they must have believed that this darkness was just a foretaste of the spiritual darkness which would rule the earth unabated by the Light of the World. But God had another plan and turned their delight to disappointment. Darkness instead of triumphing over Jesus simply provided a backdrop against which the dawning of the Light of the World could shine with increased glory.

While darkness still seemed to reign, Mary Magdalene and her companions, and later Peter and John, came “while it was still dark” only to find an empty tomb. Disappointment upon disappointment, or so it seemed at first, but when they realized that the face cloth was separate from the other burial wrappings, a ray of hope and light, pierced the darkness, never to be extinguished again. It was a ray of hope and light which was to grow in brilliance as Christ’s resurrection became known and understood. Praise God, disappointment is turned to delight!

“The New Testament writers speak as if Christ’s achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He is the ‘first fruits’, the ‘pioneer of life.’ He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.”

Wherever or whenever you are experiencing darkness of the soul, Jesus is there, a Light shining in darkness. He can turn our disappointment to delight. The resurrection not only holds the promise of eternal life, but also the promise that Satan and the forces of evil will not prevail in our lives. In Christ, you are a new creation, and can experience the joy of living as a new creation. Like the disciple in today’s Gospel reading, we must see and believe.

1 C.S. Lewis, from Miracles.

First Reading — Acts 10:34, 37-43

34 And Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality,... 37 the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; 41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

1. How did God affirm the life and ministry of Jesus, according to this passage?

2. How do you feel about being a witness? How can this passage change your view?
Responsorial Reading — Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23
1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever! 2 Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.”…
16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!” 17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. …
22 The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. 23 This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Second Reading — Colossians 3:1-4
1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

3. What does “your life is hidden with Christ in God” mean to you?

4. What have you found helpful to enable you to “think of what is above” during your daily life?

Gospel Reading — John 20:1-9
1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. 2 So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” 3 Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. 4 They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; 5 and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, 7 and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

5. What can we learn from these disciples and their various responses?

6. What is the significance of such detail in reporting the resurrection?

He is Risen!
Hallelujah!!

Introduction: “To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others” is the first goal of Go and Make Disciples. Hopefully your enthusiasm for your faith in Christ is riding high after having focused on his passion, death and resurrection. Now you are faced with the ever-present option, do you keep the fire of Christ burning in your heart or do you let the embers grow cold and ashen like an abandoned fire? Because God is a gracious God, the option is yours.

How can a person maintain enthusiasm for Christ, and the things of Christ? It seems that when we look at the first century Christians, who turned their world upside down with their enthusiasm, several things stand out. We see in the first reading that they were “devoted” to Jesus and to pleasing him. The word “devoted” means to give ourselves over to something, purposefully, and ardently. Lukewarmish-ness wasn’t an issue to these early believers because they knew they might be called on to die for their faith. Unlike Thomas, who would only believe when he could see and feel Jesus’ wounds, early believers loved Jesus, even though having not physically seen him. And though they did not see, still they believed. Was it easier for them, than for us? No! It still took faith and commitment. And like the early Christians, when we reaffirm our love and faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will respond to our receptivity, and like a breath from heaven that blows on the embers of our faith, he will reignite our enthusiasm.

Sometimes, in good times, it seems easy to be a Christian, but what about the difficult times, the times of trials and testing of which the second reading speaks, and the psalmist during his times of “falling” found that the “Lord helped me.” Many of the early Christians experienced very difficult times, even times of persecution, and they found that the Lord’s help and strength often came in the form of Christian community and companionship. Consequently, they availed themselves of the opportunities to be with others who were alive with faith. They were devoted to Jesus in the midst of community and communion. If we were to take a brilliantly glowing coal from a roaring, hot fire, and set it off by itself, in a short period of time the formerly glowing coal would become ashen and cold. Similarly, when we withdraw ourselves from the warmth and glow of others who are alive in Christ, we will also grow cold in a short period of time. God provides community for us through other believers, and we need this life-giving presence of Jesus’ body to maintain our enthusiasm. Accordingly, the rest of Christ’s body needs us, for it is in relationship with other believers that both the Living Word and the written Word are more fully made known to us.

“But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation.”

The option is yours! What will you do differently this year to keep the fires of your faith enthusiastically aflame?

1 Published by the National Council of Catholic Bishops.
2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Life Together.

First Reading — Acts 2:42-47
42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
43 And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

1. How can a person who isn’t in a religious vocation “devote” themselves to the teachings, communal life, breaking bread, and praying?
2. What do you think attracted others to put their trust in Jesus for salvation, and unite with these early Christians?

**Responsiorial Psalm — 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24**

2. Let Israel say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.”

3. Let the house of Aaron say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.”

4. Let those who fear the LORD say, “His steadfast love endures for ever.” …

13. I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me.

14. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.

15. Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, …

22. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. 23. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

**Second Reading — 1 Peter 1:3-9**

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, 7 so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.

9. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

3. Salvation is described as being “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” Explain each of these terms in your own words.

**Gospel Reading — John 20:19-31**

19. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

20. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

21. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”

22. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

24. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

25. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in his side, I will not believe.”

26. Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.”

27. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.”

28. Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

29. Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

30. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

4. How do you feel when you hear someone express doubt regarding Christ? What do you think causes doubt and fear to arise in our lives?

5. What is Jesus’ message for our fears and doubt?

6. What does the phrase “that you may come to believe” imply to you?

**Introduction:** How do you feel when you meet someone for the second time, and they don’t recognize you or know who you are? Do you feel somewhat diminished? Do you not wonder whether this relational disconnect is a reflection of your unimportance, their lack of understanding of your value, or is it just a case of bad memory? Jesus also went unrecognized by many, but he was not lessened by their failure to recognize him. In some cases, people like the Israelites Peter spoke to in the first reading, didn’t recognize Jesus as being from God, or as being the Messiah and Savior. Others, like the disciples in today’s Gospel reading, caught up in their own woundedness, also failed to recognize him as they moved through their daily life.

It is difficult to imagine that the disciples could be in the actual presence of the resurrected Savior, conversing with him, yet unable to recognize him. But is it really so hard to believe? We too are often in the actual presence of Jesus and fail to recognize him. When we are with other believers, in whom Jesus lives, he is there, really there. When we read or hear the Scriptures, he is there, really there. When we unite with others around the Eucharist, Christ is present, really present. Sadly, we often fail to recognize him.

Like the disciples’ experience on the road to Emmaus, there is no recognition unless the Lord opens our understanding and reveals himself. It was in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples. These are the means he still chooses to show himself to us. We find throughout sacred Scripture pleas such as: “Speak Lord your servant listens.” “Grant me understanding, that I may know your testimonies.” “Incline my heart to the words of your mouth.” Thoughts and prayers similar to these should be the continual response of our heart and lips. It is unfortunate, if we participate in spiritual activities without experiencing the Lord’s presence. He is what our life is really all about.

Speaking of the need for the Lord to reveal himself, St. Thomas à Kempis says: “The Prophets can preach the word, but they cannot bestow the Spirit. They speak most eloquently, but if You are silent, they cannot fire the heart. They instruct in the letter, but You open the understanding. They set forth the mysteries, but You reveal the meaning of all secrets. They teach your commandments, but You help us to observe them. They point the way, but You grant us strength to follow it. Their action is external; You instruct and enlighten the heart. They water the seed; You make it fruitful. They proclaim the words, but You impart understanding to the mind.

“Therefore, let not Moses speak to me, but You, O Lord my God, the Everlasting Truth, . . .”

The plaintive words of the disciples, “we had hoped,” stand out in sharp contrast to the psalmist’s exultation that “because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Our spiritual future can be characterized by a hopeless, dull disappointment or by a vibrant experience of fulfillment. God is ever ready to open our eyes through the Scriptures and through the Eucharist, but we must be willing to seek him there. We do that by reading and meditating on sacred Scripture and by seeking his presence in the Eucharist. If we do either with only token commitment, we cannot expect anything other than a token recognition of his presence.

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1 Introduction to the Devout Life.

**First Reading — Acts 2:14, 22-33**

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. . .

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. 27 For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption.28Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.’

29 “Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.
1. What convincing support does Peter offer to prove Jesus is the Messiah?

**Responsorial Psalm — Psalms 16:1-2, 5, 7-11**

1. Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge. 2. I say to the LORD, “Thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee.”

5. The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my lot.

7. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

8. I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure.

10. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit.

11. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

**Second Reading — 1 Peter 1:17-21**

17. And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

18. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

20. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.

21. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

2. What is the motivation that would empower us to conduct our lives with reverence?


13. That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,

14. and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

15. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

16. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

17. And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad.

18. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

19. And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,

20. and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.

21. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.

22. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

24. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see.”

25. And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

26. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

27. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

28. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further,

29. but they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.”

30. So he went in to stay with them.

31. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.

32. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.

33. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?”

33. And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them,

34. who said, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

35. Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

3. Contrast the psychological make-up of these disciples before and after Jesus revealed himself to them.

4. What are one or two ways in which we can cooperate with Jesus’ desire to reveal himself to us through the sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist?