Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

February 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
Introduction: The media’s preoccupation with the New Year makes for interesting reading. Have you, like me, felt inundated this past month with useless advice on how to make the coming year meaningful? It is amazing how new age spirituality has permeated our society and at this time of the year. It along with the help of the media, confidently offers up its drivel in hopes that the unknowing but well-meaning people might trust in fantasy spirituality. In comparison this week’s Scripture readings offer a stark contrast between hoping in something and hoping in nothing. Luke’s account of the presentation of the Lord is an illustration of what it means to hope in the Lord.

Do you sometimes find it hard to remain hopeful, waiting to see the goodness of the Lord? Of course, we all do sometimes feel this way. Imagine how Simeon and Anna must have felt. Though we don’t know Simeon’s age the implication of the Scriptures is that he was an old man who some commentators suggest his age was 115. Anna was at least 84 at the time this incident took place.

Both Simeon and Anna were probably very familiar with the Old Testament prophesies concerning the Messiah. Simeon, had for some time been looking for the “consolation of Israel” and Anna had been looking for the “redemption of Jerusalem,” and they were both probably familiar with Isaiah 52:8-10. These verses almost sound like a pre-telling of this incident; “Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Their faith was not a fair-weather faith. It had stood the test of time standing with Israel’s future in fair weather and foul. Theirs was not a rootless faith based on some pie-in-the-sky psycho-babble. Rather their faith was rooted in the promises of the Almighty God. Theirs was not an individualistic, isolated faith, outside the realm of orthodoxy. Instead it was securely contained within the realm of historic Judaism. And as we see in this incident it was not an empty faith but one filled with power generated by the Holy Spirit and the understanding that redemption only comes through him. Theirs is a faith to be emulated.

Though some speculate that Simeon might have been a temple priest somewhat similar to Zechariah, Luke gives us no indication of this but simply refers to him as “this man.” Anna was an ordinary homemaker, who when widowed devoted herself to the Lord and was given the gift of prophesy; two ordinary people who lived an extraordinary life of faith.

Each of us probably also consider ourselves to be quite ordinary, yet like Simeon and Anna, by devoting ourselves to the Lord we too can have an extra-ordinary experience of faith. But like them we should not seek the experience, but rather seek the Lord. Like them we can seek the Lord in an extraordinary way through the ordinary practice of our faith. Like them we can meditate and reflect on the Lord in sacred Scripture to find the promises of hope to sustain us. Like them we will find that God, the author of our faith, will sustain us through fair weather and foul.

It is from a faith-life like theirs that we too will embrace a world vision of salvation; one that is not simply for me and my people, but one that is for all people. Theirs was a salvation, and Jesus was a Savior, which was to be both “a light for revelation to the Gentiles,” and a “glory to thy people Israel.” May God help us to present ourselves to the Lord to bring about the “new springtime of evangelization,” that the late St. Pope John Paul II envisioned and as Pope Francis has encouraged us.

First Reading — Malachi 3:1-4

1 “Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? “For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap; 3 he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

1. As messengers, preparing the way for people to receive the Lord, what do you think is the message of hope we should bring?
**Responsorial Reading — Psalms 24:7-10**

7 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!

9 Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!

**Second Reading — Hebrews 2:14-18**

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil. 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. 16 For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

2. What does this passage teach about Jesus’ sharing in our humanity?

**Gospel Reading — Luke 2:22-40**

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; 30 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation 31 which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.”

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; 34 and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, 37 and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

3. How does the Law’s requirement of presenting the first-born male to the Lord, reveal salvation to us? Ref: Exodus 13:11,12,14-16

4. What commitments should we be making when we “present” our children to the Lord?

5. How would you state in your own words the three prophesies regarding Jesus’ presentation? (vs 29-32, 34-35, and vs. 38)?

Introduction: “A man once stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. ‘Dear God,’ he cried out, ‘look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in your world. Why don’t you send help?’ God responded, ‘I did send help. I sent you.’ When we tell our children that story, we must tell them that each one of them was sent to help repair the broken world—and that it is not the task of an instant or of a year, but of a lifetime.”

God is still repairing broken lives in this our broken world. All that is necessary is in place for broken lives to be repaired, put in place by a reconciling Savior who heals. Jesus knows, first hand, the darkness of our world because he lived in it, suffered from it, and then took that darkness on himself to redeem us from it. Later in the year we will celebrate at dawn his resurrection. The light of dawn represents the hope that Jesus, the Light of the world, brings to our darkened world.

Today, many people live in places of such dark desolation and despair, that their spiritual condition receives little or no attention, for everything is simply focused on their physical survival. As light bearers, we have been placed in our broken world to expedite the healing of broken lives. Two verses from the poem, “He Dawns Through the Darkness” capture both the empty isolation of man’s plight and the light-bearing hope that only you can bring to someone’s darkness.

Within our darkness, fear and fright when light seems gone, quenched from sight.

Then through his Word, some act, a deed, he brings the Dawn, dark night recedes.”

God often brings the light of dawn to people sitting in darkness through you and me, as we lovingly share his words of help and encouragement and as we do those things that ease the weight of darkness. Christ came sharing the truth, but he also came meeting the real needs of people.

The promise in this week’s first reading is that as we share our abundance with those less fortunate our light will “break forth like the dawn” also. Many times, we refrain from sharing with others because we don’t think we have an abundance, and because we often see our own situation as rather bleak. However, as we take our eyes off of our need and focus on meeting the needs of others, we will discover that the darkness and gloom of our situation will dissipate as well, and God’s light will also break through for us.

Salt and light are the two descriptive words Jesus uses to explain how we are to relate to the world. Saint Chrysostom explains, “It is not for your own sake, he says, but for the world’s sake that the word is entrusted to you. I am not sending you into two cities only or ten or twenty, not to a single nation, as I sent the prophets of old, but across land and sea to the whole world. … Therefore, he requires of these men [women] those virtues which are especially useful and even necessary if they are to bear the burdens of many. For the man [or woman] who is kindly, modest, merciful and just will not keep his good works to himself but will see to it that these admirable fountains send out their streams for the good of others. Again, the man [or woman] who is clean of heart, a peacemaker and ardent for truth will order his life so as to contribute to the common good.”

This Sunday’s readings help us understand how to be the salt of the earth and light bearers for others and they promise that as we become salt and light to others, we will experience the light of the Lord as well. Let’s determine to be Light bearers.

1From Teaching Your Children About God.
2From a homily on Matthew by Saint John Chrysostom, in The Liturgy of the Hours-IV, page 120.

First Reading — Isaiah 58:7-10

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, “Here I am.” If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

1. How has darkness been manifest in your environment and in your world?
2. In what way(s) have you seen the Lord show himself as light in the midst of this darkness?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 112:4-9

4 Light rises in the darkness for the upright; the Lord is gracious, merciful, and righteous.
5 It is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice. 6 For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered for ever. 7 He is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. 8 His heart is steady, he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire on his adversaries.
9 He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever; his horn is exalted in honor.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

1 When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

3. What does it mean to be with someone in weakness, fear and trembling?

4. How could we “demonstrate” through our message of hope, the presence of the Holy Spirit and power?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 5:13-16

13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.
14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. 15 Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

5. Why do you think Jesus used salt and light to illustrate the characteristics of a fruitful Christian life?

6. What are some of the “bushels” under which we obscure Christ’s light in us?

7. Practically how can we put our light on a stand so that everyone can see it, yet do it without seeming prideful?

Introduction: An acquaintance once explained that the reason he did not make his small children wear seat belts was that they cried and protested too much when he required it. When I asked if he and his wife wore their seat belts, he sheepishly confessed that they didn’t. Monkey see, monkey do. We all are teachers by the choices we make. Sometimes we teach wisdom by our example and sometimes we teach foolishness.

We can teach others to have disrespect for God’s Word and God’s will and to break his commands, or we can teach others to honor God’s Word and God’s will, and to fulfill the intent and spirit in which the commands were given. The choice is ours. In many respects the history of our lives is the history of our choices.

Jesus also came teaching choices. He did not simply teach about the Law, but rather taught the heart and soul of God’s commands. By his words and life, he taught not the sterile fulfillment of God’s commands, but how to embrace the spirit of them, thus going beyond sterile fulfillment. As we see in today’s Gospel reading, when the spirit of the command is embraced, the fulfillment far exceeds the minimum requirement. Jesus’ teaching shows a wisdom far exceeding that which was humanly taught.

The wisdom Jesus taught is available to us through his Word and through the Holy Spirit’s illumination. Thomas a’ Kempis said, “Blessed is the soul that hears the Lord speaking within, and receives comfort through His Word. Blessed are the ears that hear the still small voice of God, and disregards the whispers of the world.”

To ensure that we were not devoid of wisdom Jesus promised to place the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Church and within every member of it, wherein the Holy Spirit would “guide us into all truth.” We can learn wisdom. We do so by applying ourselves to sacred Scripture, reading it and meditating on it. We acquire wisdom by listening to the Holy Spirit as he speaks to our heart and mind. But we must be careful not to confuse our own inclinations, desires, and opinions with the illumination and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. We should not fall into the danger of interpreting sacred Scripture by our experience, but rather should interpret our experience by sacred Scripture.

In wisdom the Father insured that when we became his child that we would also be placed into his family, the Church. Though this community is made up of a range of spiritually immature and mature believers it is the place where the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” can be imparted and received. The Church is and has been used by the Holy Spirit to clarify and enunciate truth, and we find in the Church a history of the Holy Spirit’s illumination. It is to our own harm that we ignore the truth which he has imparted in the past and simply rely on our own devices to discover wisdom. So we can choose to grow in wisdom by listening to what the Holy Spirit has imparted to the Church over the centuries, and what he currently is saying through our spiritual leaders. And we can choose to make time in our life to read and study sacred Scripture. Like any child it takes effort to learn the “ABC’s” but we must expend that effort before we can read the simplest children’s book. But like a child eager to learn to read, the effort will pay off, and we will be able to reach the point where we can read and understand complex scriptural concepts.

God’s wisdom is still available. He still speaks in a still small voice, if we will only stop and listen. The choice is ours.

First Reading — Sirach 15:15-20
15If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. 16He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. 17Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. 18For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; 19his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. 20He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin.

1. What hope for living a righteous life do you see in this passage?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34
1Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! 2Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, …
Thou hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently. O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes. …  

Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and observe thy word. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. … Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law and observe it with my whole heart.

**Second Reading — I Corinthians 2:6-10**

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

2. In what way(s) is God’s wisdom available to us?

**Gospel Reading — Matthew 5:17-34, 37**

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. … Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

3. What do you think Jesus meant by “fulfill” the law and commands of God?

4. Explain the difference between the commands Jesus quoted, and the examples he used to explain them.

5. What is the difference between obeying the spirit of the Law and obeying the letter of the Law?

**Introduction:** I enjoy watching track and field events, and when I read this week’s readings, I was reminded of a high jumper who having just competed at the highest level, raises the brackets a notch higher to try and break his all-time best jump. This week’s First Reading with its “You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy,” and the Gospel Reading with its “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” are like brackets setting the bar one notch higher to express God’s expectation for his children. The goal is to be like the Father in our attitudes and behavior, to set the bar any lower is to not have a goal worth shooting for.

If the First Reading and Gospel Reading establishes the “end” for which we should strive, perhaps the second reading indicates the means by which we can attain to righteousness. St. Paul reminds the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” … For all things are yours, … you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” You see, living a life of holiness or perfection (spiritual maturity) would be wholly unattainable if we only had our own human resources to rely upon, but thankfully that is not the case. Instead God chose to make his dwelling place within us. Additionally, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, all things we need for a life of holiness comes to us with, and in, Christ, as Christ unites us to the Father. This is especially clear from 2 Peter 1:3: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”

As most people know, there is no end to human hurts and wounded-ness due to the injustices of others. To various degrees we are faced with them continually. Stoically enduring injustice may enable some people to survive emotionally, but stoicism is not sufficient to triumph over these injustices. Lashing out in anger or withdrawing in fear may provide a moment of release, but invariably anger and withdrawal settle into our heart as resentment and bitterness which taints all of our life and sadly the lives of many around us. Unfortunately, there are many, many Christians who are walking around heavy hearted with hurts and wounded-ness from which they have found no release, nor escape.

Many, relying on the foolish wisdom of the world, respond to injustice with the comment, “I’ll forgive, but I will never forget what was done.” They are trying to be forgiving but they do not realize that in choosing to remember, the wound is never allowed to heal nor the peace of forgiveness ever found. Each bitter remembrance picks the wound open again, and again.

This week’s Responsorial Psalm illustrates God’s holy and perfect standard of forgiveness. “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities. … As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” Notice in this passage that God, who had every right to exact retribution for the wrongs done by us to him, instead chooses to remove or separate our sins from us (that is what forgiveness is) to such an infinite distance that they are no more. In another passage in Isaiah the Father says, “I will not remember them anymore.” That does not mean that he cannot remember them but that he wills not to remember them anymore. From personal experience I know this is difficult, but I also know it is possible to choose to will, not to hold someone’s sins against them, and to remember them no more. If our Heavenly Father who is holy can do this for us and our sins, surely the forgiveness we receive should motivate us to be forgiving like him.

Like the high-jumper, rising to new heights of righteousness may be difficult, but remember that in Christ we have been given all that is necessary to help us attain to Christ-likeness. When it comes to how we relate to others, lowering the bar to simply human standards is not an option, it is only an illusion of righteousness.

**First Reading — Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18**

1And the LORD said to Moses, 2“Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.” … 17“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. 18You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

1. How does your dictionary define “holy”? Which part of the definition is most significant to you?
Responsorial Reading — Psalm 103:1-4, 8,10, 12-13
1Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

… 5The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. …10He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities.

…12As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 3:16-23
16Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are. 18Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; 22and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

2. How would you answer the question in verses 16?

3. What are the practical implications of “For all things are yours, … and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.”

Gospel Reading — Matthew 5:38-48
38You have heard that it was said, `An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; 40and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; 41and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

43You have heard that it was said, `You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

4. How literally should verses 38-42 be taken? If they are not intended to be taken literally, how should we apply them?

5. Have you ever had an opportunity to put this passage into practice? If so, would you share it briefly, while still maintaining the person’s confidentiality?

6. What should we do if our graciousness toward another person is ignored or taken advantage of?