Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

November 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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ALL SAINTS SUNDAY—November 1, 2020

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.” ²
- 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.” ³
- 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.” ⁴

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.” ⁵

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 ….” ⁶

³ Ibid.

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

²Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ⁵saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, …

⁹After this I looked, and behold, 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, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever!"
Amen.” 13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

1. What should be the attitudes of “servants of our God”?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 24:1-6

1 The earth is the LORD’s and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; 2 for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 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. 5 He will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of his salvation. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. [Selah].

Second Reading — 1 John 3:1-3

1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God’s children now; 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. 3 And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself 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 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

4. Where do you see yourself in this list?

5. In which category of the people whom Jesus lists would you like to be included? Why? In 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?
Reflected On Sunday’s Readings

THE THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 8, 2020

Introduction: Wisdom: “The ability to discern inner qualities and relationships.” (From Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary)

Have you ever been in a place where all light was obscured? It is disconcerting isn’t it? I’ve experienced this disconcerting darkness on a moonless summer night, walking on an unlit Colorado dirt road. The majestic evergreens and the sandstone rock formations obscured all real and all ambient light, creating a black cavern of uncertainty. We could not see where the dirt roadside ended and the steep sides of the perilous ditch began. Consequently, progress was slow as we carefully walked feeling with our feet for the road’s edge. For the person without wisdom, life is equally as perilous and confusing. As one progresses through life with the absence of wisdom, God’s light on our human darkness, quickly magnifies the dangers and confusion.

By contrast the presence of God’s light makes even the darkest hours light. On another occasion at 3:00 a.m. on a Colorado mountainside, some 11,000 feet in elevation, all darkness was dispelled by the large, brilliant, illuminating full moon. Though we were in the deepest hours of night’s darkness, this heavenly light was so illuminating that we could have literally read a book without difficulty. This too is a good analogy about God’s wisdom. When we are immersed in situations that normally would be dark and confusing, the heavenly presence of God’s wisdom, dispels the darkness, and enlightens our path.

These two contrasting analogies are not an overstatement, or an over-simplification of the value of wisdom. Though wisdom doesn’t enable a person to escape the difficulties and challenges of life, wisdom does enable us to make sense of the seemingly senseless, and provides enlightening direction when choices must be made. On the other hand a foolish person, one who does not avail himself of God’s wisdom, suffers both confusion and the consequences of humbling responses to life’s choices, made without light.

Where does one get wisdom? It comes from dwelling in the presence of Wisdom. Saint Cyprian explains it well, “The commands of the Gospel are nothing else than God’s lessons, the foundations on which to build up hope, the support for strengthening faith, the food that nourishes the heart. They are the rudder for keeping us on the right course, the protection that keeps our salvation secure. As they instruct the receptive minds of believers on earth, they lead safely to the kingdom of God.”

We make ourselves available to soak in, and absorb wisdom as we make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit through sacred Scripture and godly people. Insight becomes second nature, as we become “partakers of the divine nature,” (2 Peter 1:3-4) and as we learn from God’s truth and see life from God’s perspective. Saint James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.” We simply need to develop a lifelong program of asking God for wisdom, and making ourselves available to God to be taught wisdom by the Holy Spirit. Pope John XXIII provides a good example to follow. Not only did he begin pursuing wisdom as a youth, but even at 76 years of age, he was still seeking wisdom and praying, “O Lord, we are now in the evening of our life. Give me more light as evening falls.” May God find us also pursuing wisdom.

1 Saint Cyprian, in Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. II, page 104.

First Reading — Wisdom 6:12-16

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. He who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for he will find her sitting at his gates. To fix one’s thought on her is perfect understanding, and he who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

1. Define wisdom from your perspective.

2. How could you apply to your life one or more of the suggestions for acquiring wisdom found in this passage?
Responsorial Reading — Psalms 63:1-7 (2-8 NAB)

1 O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.  
2 So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory.  
3 Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee.  
4 So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.  
5 My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips, when I think of thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the watches of the night;  
6 for thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.

Second Reading — 1Thessalonians 4:13-18

13 But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.  
14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.  
15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.  
16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first;  
17 then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.  
18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

3. What wisdom does Paul share, to provide light on what is normally viewed as a dark and terrifying event?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 25:1-13

1 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.  
2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.  
3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;  
4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.  
5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.  
6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’  
7 Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.  
8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’  
9 But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’  
10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.  
11 Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’  
12 But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’  
13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

4. Where do you see yourself in this parable?

5. What are the attitudes that underlie the maidens’ behavior?

6. What lesson(s) does this parable teach about wisdom and one’s personal spirituality?

7. What is the “oil” you need for your “lamp”?

**Introduction:** With today’s climate of fixation on the stock market and our economic situation, we ought to be able to clearly make sense of this week’s Gospel reading. Imagine if you will, how you would feel if during prosperous times you divided a large portion of your net worth among three stockbrokers. Then, after some time, two of them report back to you that they have made substantial returns on your investment, while the third one reports back that he didn’t even invest your money, but held it for safe keeping. You would be somewhat miffed also. You would probably take back your money from the third stockbroker, and give it to the one who had seen the best returns.

When we become members of God’s family and followers of Jesus, he invests the Holy Spirit into our lives. With the Holy Spirit comes new gifts and chrisms, which God intends to be used along with our natural abilities, to advance and grow his kingdom. Some, with false humility, bemoan that they don’t really have any gifts or abilities. This is not only untrue but also an illegitimate excuse. If we have the Holy Spirit, we have gifts and abilities.

Several years ago, our parish priest along with a team of individuals, visited our sister parish in Sumi, Ukraine. While there they met a woman, who had been bedridden with arthritis for some 24 years. Though her body was made inactive, her faith thrived as she grew in holiness and prayer. As they prepared to leave, she blessed them and Holy Apostles Parish back in the U.S. All those present knew that they were standing in the presence of a holy, godly woman whose faith was alive and active even though her body was immobile. Had she dared to have hidden behind her physical limitations and offered the excuse, “I have no gifts; I cannot do anything in my condition,” both she and the Body of Christ would have been the poorer. So, it is when you fail to invest the gifts God has invested in you.

This week’s second reading indicates that we are sons and daughters of the light. This phrase reminds us of Jesus’ admonition that, we are to be “salt” and “light.” Salt should whet people’s appetite for God and light should illuminate their darkness and give them hope. What is it that Jesus is actually referring to if not the utilization of our gifts and abilities for other’s well-being? He said that we should let our light shine before men, that they would see our “good works,” here on earth and glorify God who is in heaven. So rather than be complacent, doing little or nothing we should be investing the gifts Jesus gives us.

In the parable in this week’s Gospel reading the master never criticized the fact that the work of one servant did not match or exceed the work of another. Rather he commended each for their effort to make the most with what had been entrusted to them. Each received, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The only displeasure shown was toward the one who did not attempt to advance the master’s interest by working as best he could. If the Lord returns suddenly, will he find you occupied using for his Kingdom what he has invested in you?

When next you find yourself hesitating to get involved using your gifts, think of Saint Catherine of Siena, one of the few women ever to receive the title of “Doctor of the Church.” “She was a woman … She was a lay person … Most striking of all, she was almost illiterate … Catherine’s humble background and lack of education may have made her an unlikely candidate for such an honor, but they never hindered her ability to receive divine revelation. In fact, God has so consistently revealed His word to the poor and the humble that, as Paul VI put it, we can consider them to be “God’s preferential choice.” (From *Catherine of Siena: A Biography* by Anne B. Baldwin) What if Catherine had simply said, “I can’t. I have nothing to offer”?

**First Reading — Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31**

10 A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. 13 She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. … 19 She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. 20 She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. … 30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

1. What do you find most commendable about this woman?
Responsorial Reading — Psalms 128:1-5

1 Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

5 The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!

Second Reading — 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

1 But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When people say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

2. How can we as a group help one another to be ready for Christ’s coming?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 25:14-30

14 “For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. 17 So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ 21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’

22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ 23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’

24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ 26 But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’

3. What are some things (gifts, talents, etc.) God has entrusted to you?

4. What attitudes controlled the servants’ behavior?

5. How do you feel about the harshness or leniency with which the master treated the servants?

6. What are God’s expectations for you and your gifts and abilities for the coming 12 months?
Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

THE SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY—November 22, 2020

Introduction: Over the years as we have observed the enthusiastic coverage of various British royal personages, we could aptly conclude that people in the U.S. are enamored with Great Britain’s royalty, even though kings, queens, and the monarchy are really foreign to the political and social structure of America. At least they have been ever since we threw off English rule and demanded independence and the right of self-rule.

We probably did not realize during the revolutionary process that we were not simply determining our future political structure but were also injecting a spirit of independence and individualism into the very DNA of the American people. Consequently, as various political and social scientists examine our culture, they find personal independence and individualism deeply engrained in our psyche. We see this trait expressed by our preoccupation with personal rights and freedom, to the exclusion of personal responsibility and corporate well-being. Many, many people in this country are not only comfortable demanding their rights but in fact are committed to defending their rights at all cost, even at the cost of others’ freedom.

Does this independence and individualism spill over into our Christian life? Does it infringe on Christ’s rule as King. Undoubtedly it does! We frequently see examples of people believing in their personal infallibility regarding both their value system and their behavior choices. Many are committed to the concept that, “I will determine what I believe, and I will judge what is the acceptable behavior I will pursue.” And if we are honest, we would readily admit that many Christians, sometimes even we ourselves, live under the rule of a personal trinity of “I, me, and my” enthroned in their heart.

Most of us are not fighting the battle of whether Jesus is the Savior or not. We know and believe that he is. Furthermore, we welcome the grace of having him pay for our sins. The battle we are fighting is the one of who will rule in our lives, who will call the shots on how we will live. Many have not yet bowed the knee in loving surrender and welcomed Jesus as both Christ and King. Consequently, an internal battle often goes on over every issue of Christian spirituality and behavior, “Do I give in on this issue, or keep control? Resist or surrender?” “Obey God, or obey my passions?” With these battles raging inside of us it is no wonder that we often experience little of the joy promised to us as Christians and members of Christ’s Kingdom. But the promised joy primarily comes to those who willingly submit to his rule.

In the secret recesses of our soul dwells a throne room, and we alone hold the key that controls the door to this room and the right to sit and rule there. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen explains it well, “The best introduction to it may be told in the story of a painting. It is a picture of Christ standing at the side of an ivy-covered door and knocking. Holman Hunt, its artist, was criticized because there was no latch to be seen on the outside of the door. The answer of the artist was that the latch is on the inside—we open it. Heaven knocks down no doors.”

On this coming Christ the King Sunday we need to recognize Jesus standing at the door to our heart and knocking. Let’s willingly unlatch the door and ask him to enthroned himself in our heart to rule for evermore. This is indeed the way to honor Christ the King.

1 On Being Human

First Reading — Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. …

15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. 17 As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, rams and he-goats.

1. Which aspect of the Lord’s care do you find most comforting? Why?
Responsorial Reading — Psalms 23:1-3, 5-6

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; 2 he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. …

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. …

28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

2. How do you think life would change if Jesus reigned more fully in Christian’s lives?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 25:31-46

31 “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. 34Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? 38 And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? 39 And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ 40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ 46 And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

3. What are the six areas of service which Jesus identifies?

4. Which of these six areas of ministry would you find most difficult?

5. How is your understanding of Jesus’ Kingship affected by this passage?

6. How do you feel about the concept of Christ’s return as pictured here?

Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT—November 29, 2020

**Introduction:** Befana, the Housewife, scrubbing her pane, saw three old sages ride down the lane, saw three grey travelers pass her door—Gaspar, Balthazar, Melchior.

“Where journey you sirs?” she asked of them.

Balthazar answered, “To Bethlehem, for we have news of a marvelous thing. Born in a manger is Christ the King.”

“Give Him my welcome!”

Then Gaspar smiled, “Come with us, mistress, to greet the Child.”

“Oh, happily, happily would I fare, were my dusting through and I’d polished the stair.”

Old Melchior leaned on his saddle horn, “Then send but a gift to the small Newborn.”

“Oh, gladly, gladly I’d send Him one, were the hearthstone swept and my weaving done. As soon as ever I’ve baked my bread, I’ll fetch Him a pillow for His head, and a coverlet too,” Befana said. “When the rooms are aired and the linen dry, I’ll look at the Babe.” But the Three rode by.

She worked for a day and a night and a day, then, gifts in her hands, took up her way. But she never found where the Christ Child lay.

And still she wanders at Christmastide, houseless, whose house was all her pride. Whose heart was tardy, whose gifts were late; wanders, and knocks at every gate. Crying, “Good people, the bells begin! Put off your toiling and let Love in.”

This week marks the beginning of Advent Season, followed by the Christmas Season. We, like Befana are faced with equally daunting responsibilities and routines. Whether housewife or executive, laborer or retiree the demands made upon us by the many good things in life never diminish from distracting us from pursuing the best in life. Will we allow the demands to also cause us to put off recognizing his coming and postpone bringing him the gift of ourselves?

Before we know it the gifts will be opened and relatives will be returning home, and the only lasting impression on our heart will be one of exhaustion and disappointment. Once again, we may be faced with the emptiness of heart that comes from realizing that another Advent/Christmas season has passed and we missed the opportunity to worship, and celebrate the Christ child.

Saint Bernard explains that there are three comings of Christ. The first is what we celebrate as Christmas, where he came in our flesh and in our weakness. In his final coming he will come in glory and majesty. “The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved. In his first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming he comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming he will be seen in glory and majesty.”** Saint Bernard reminds us of Jesus’ words, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him.” What will we do with his coming to us?

These coming Advent and Christmas Seasons can be different, filled with awe and reflection, and with joy, peace, and adoration bubbling up within us. Instead of being like Befana, when the Befanas of our world knock on our door looking for where the Christ Child lays, we can invite them in, to find Jesus in our heart and in our home.

This week let’s determine that the birth of Christ the King will be celebrated this season and all year long in our heart and lives.

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* “The Ballad of Befana: An Epiphany Legend” from Starlight: Beholding the Christmas Miracle All Year Long by John Shea.


**First Reading — Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1-8**

16 For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O LORD, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name. 17 O LORD, why dost thou make us err from thy ways and harden our heart, so that we fear thee not? Return for the sake of thy servants, the tribes of thy heritage…. 19 We have become like those over whom thou hast never ruled, like those who are not called by thy name.
O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence -
as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil --to make thy name known to thy
adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at thy presence! 3 When thou didst terrible things which we
looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains quaked at thy presence. 4 From of old no one has heard or
perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him. 5 Thou meetest
him that joyfully works righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways. Behold, thou wast angry, and we
sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? 6 We have all become like one who is
unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like
the wind, take us away. 7 There is no one that calls upon thy name, that bestirs himself to take hold of thee; for
thou hast hid thy face from us, a nd hast delivered us into the hand of our iniquities. 8 Yet, O LORD, thou art our
Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand.

1. With what part of Isaiah's prayer of longing do you most identify?


1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! Thou who art enthroned upon the
cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh! Stir up thy might, and come to save us! …
14 Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, 15 the stock
which thy right hand planted. …
17 But let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the son of man whom thou hast made strong for
thyself!
18 Then we will never turn back from thee; give us life, and we will call on thy name!

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
4 I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,
5 that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony to
Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the
revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus
Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. Read this passage inserting your name where the pronoun “you” appears. How does this affect your view of
yourself?

3. What does it mean to you to be called into the “fellowship of his Son”?

Gospel Reading — Mark 13:33-37

33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a
journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the
doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will
come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you
asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.”

4. How can this passage be applied to the Advent Season?

5. What are the practical ramifications of “Take heed, watch, and pray”?

6. How can the lessons of Christ’s first advent be applied to his second coming (advent)?

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