

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

July 2018

The following series is **free, downloadable small-group materials** based on each week's Mass readings and taking into account the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group's discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minute format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.
2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, "What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?" or "What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?" As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.
3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. **Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation.**
4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.
5. You can either read this week's Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, **so do not feel like you need to force a connection.** However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, "How do you see this passage tying into the theme of the readings?"
6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Gospel Reading, and the Second Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.
8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear the Scripture is read and taught. **We would appreciate knowing if you are using the *Reflecting on Sunday's Readings*, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.**

Sincerely in Christ,

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Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 1, 2018

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³ Because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. ¹⁴ For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. ¹⁵ For righteousness is immortal ...

²³ for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, ²⁴ but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.

1. What do you conclude when bad things happen to good people?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 30:1, 3-5, 10-12 (Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13 NAB)

¹ I will extol thee, O LORD, for thou hast drawn me up, and hast not let my foes rejoice over me. ...

³ O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. ⁴ Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. ⁵ For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. ...

¹⁰ Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be thou my helper!" ¹¹ Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, ¹² that my soul may praise thee and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever.

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

⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us—see that you excel in this gracious work also ... ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ... ¹³ I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, ¹⁴ but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. ¹⁵ As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

2. How can we excel in faith?

Gospel Reading — Mark 5:21-43

²¹ And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him; and he was beside the sea. ²² Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, ²³ and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." ²⁴ And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. ²⁵ And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well." ²⁹ And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, "Who touched my garments?" ³¹ And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" ³² And he looked around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

³⁵ While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" ³⁶ But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." ³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³ And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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

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

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

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 8, 2018

Introduction: On May 13, 1981 an assassin's bullet ripped through the stomach of Pope John Paul II, and initiated a trial of suffering that lasted several months, required multiple surgeries, was complicated by a viral infection, and required two lengthy hospital stays. Yet through this ordeal Pope John Paul II maintained a positive spirit, and demonstrated ongoing concern for others and for the Church. Whereas many would have bemoaned their fate, Pope John Paul II confessed, "One hand fired, and another one guided the bullet." For him there is no doubt about the protection which saved him from death...¹

How people respond to the difficulties they encounter in life is a theme of this Sunday's Mass readings. We see God's people confronted with difficult situations, situations which most of us would call major problems. For instance, Ezekiel was given the very difficult task of trying to communicate with obstinate and rebellious people. Paul faced a different problem, he experienced a physical malady that some think was an eye disease, which hindered and limited his freedom to serve Christ. These problems, which are similar to ones we confront, reinforce the reality that a Christian believer is not immune to difficulties. On the contrary, they demonstrate that sometimes a believer's problems are multiplied by virtue of being a believer.

The issues we must face when we encounter problems is whether we view them as obstacles or opportunities, and whether we view ourselves as victims or victors. In honesty we must confess that frequently these situations are viewed primarily as obstacles wherein we do not see the opportunities, but only see ourselves as being victimized by unpleasant circumstances. The perspective which we need in order to change the way we view difficult circumstances, is faith, faith in the goodness of God and faith in the power of God to help.

We see in this week's Gospel reading that people's obstinate unwillingness to trust in Jesus created a situation where they could not experience Christ's power. They had the unfortunate inclination to view Jesus' power in light of their own limitations. However, for God's children life's problems are really opportunities for us to exercise our faith. As our faith is exercised it is made stronger through the process, and we experience Christ's power in new and unusual ways. Ezekiel couldn't be obedient and at the same time sit around and bemoan his job assignment. He had to believe that God knew what was best and in faith proceed with the assignment given him. Paul, utilized his faith to ask for deliverance from his malady, and when God said, "No," Paul used his faith not to simply surrender stoically to his condition, but to glory in it, looking to see how God's grace would be magnified through his life *because* of his sickness. Their faith in God's love and power enabled them to recognize, as did John Paul II, that in reality another hand, God's, directed their lives. When we view the difficulties and complications that enter our lives as wonderful opportunities to experience God's love, grace, and power, we will find ourselves at peace, energized to do what we can, and amazed at the miracles God works in us and on our behalf.

"For this reason, Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim the blessedness of those who suffer: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ...

"This blessedness can only be understood if one admits that human life is not limited to our time spent on earth, but is wholly directed to perfect joy and fullness of life in the hereafter. Earthly suffering, when accepted in love, is like a bitter kernel containing the seed of new life, the treasure of divine glory to be given humanity in eternity. ... It is this hope that is nourished by Christ's promise."²

¹ *Be Not Afraid*, by Andre Frossard.

² *Go in Peace*, by Pope John Paul II, (page 171).

First Reading — Ezekiel 2:2-5

² And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me.

³ And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The people also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' ⁵ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that there has been a prophet among them.

1. Different temperaments would respond to this assignment in different ways. How would you have responded?

2. What provision did God make for Ezekiel to fulfill this assignment?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 123:1-4

¹To thee I lift up my eyes, O thou who art enthroned in the heavens! ²Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he have mercy upon us.

³Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.

⁴Too long our soul has been sated with the scorn of those who are at ease, the contempt of the proud.

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

...⁷and to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; ⁹but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

3. How have you seen God glorified through someone's problems and difficulties?

4. What attitude or belief is at the heart of Paul's contentment?

Gospel Reading — Mark 6:1-6

¹He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. ²And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." ⁵And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. ⁶And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

5. How do you view the miracles and power of Christ?
6. Why do you think people take offense at Jesus' words and works?
7. Define skepticism and unbelief.
8. How can we avoid responding to Jesus' words and works with skepticism and unbelief?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 15, 2018

Introduction: Imagine how you and the world would respond if there existed a medical team who had discovered a sure cure for cancer many years ago, but for reasons known only to them, had refused to tell the world about their discovery. Most of us have one or more beloved family members, or dear friends, who have suffered terribly from the ravages of cancer, before finally succumbing to this devastating disease. We would at best be flabbergasted that people dedicated to healing could be so callous as to withhold this information. More than likely we would justifiably be outraged, bitter, and vengeful. How in the world could one human treat another so dispassionately, not caring enough about their suffering and death to share the means of a cure which they had discovered?

Yet, spiritually, the same disservice to mankind is being perpetrated by many Christians. The world is suffering a more serious eternal fate due to the cancer of sin and unbelief. Lives are being destroyed with an equal or greater devastation because the cancer of sin and unbelief destroys not only the life of the non-believer, but also the lives of loved ones and friends associated with the non-believer. There is a cure! The love of God in Jesus not only cures the diseased non-believer but also provides rehabilitating help to remove the affects of the disease. As Catholic Christians we know and have experienced the life saving cure, yet we are often guilty by our silence of withholding similar life saving help.

Our discovery of life in Jesus is a wonderful, life saving, discovery for humankind. It has not only secured our eternal destiny but also enhanced our earthly existence. Rather than keeping silent we should be joyfully contagious messengers of God's grace to those around us. Sometimes our witness can simply be the witness of a pleasant, smiling, affirming life that engages the people around us by showing interest and concern. However, there are times when we should also be committed to sitting down face to face with someone and telling them the story of God's love which was expressed through Christ's death on their behalf. The Good News does not need to dwell on their sinfulness, for most people are fully aware of their shortcomings and estrangement from God. Instead we need to dwell on the saving work of Jesus, and the love of God that initiated salvation. In this week's second reading we see a brilliant synopsis of all that salvation entails. If we could simply help people to understand these wonderful truths, we would be introducing them to the "Cure" of a lifetime. We must awaken to the gift held within us, and to the opportunities to share that gift with others who are awaiting without.

"Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places," Pope John Paul II urged, "like the first apostles who preached Christ and the good news of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. . . . It is the time to preach it from the rooftops."*

Like Amos the Lord can enable us to become "go-ers," people who go forth into their daily activities with the message of hope. However, we need not view ourselves as prophets going to a hostile audience, but simply as friends willingly going to introduce a friend (Jesus) to our friends.

* *Witness To Hope: The Biography To Pope John Paul II*, by George Weigel, (683).

First Reading — Amos 7:12-15

¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there;

¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵ and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

1. Explain the difference between being a prophet and being a witness.

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 85:8-13 (Psalms 85:9-14 NAB)

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts. ⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹²Yea, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way.

Second Reading — Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ⁵He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸which he lavished upon us.

⁹For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹²we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

2. In the Second Reading mark the things that have already been done for us regarding salvation. What new aspect of salvation have you discovered?

3. What is man's responsibility in salvation according to this passage?

4. What are the purposes of salvation revealed in this passage?

Gospel Reading — Mark 6:7-13

⁷And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰And he said to them, "Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." ¹²So they went out and preached that men should repent. ¹³And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them

5. What principles for sharing the Good News do you discover from this passage?

6. What are some advantages of two people partnering in the process of sharing the Good News?

7. Why do you think that Jesus didn't send more "stuff" with them? How is that applicable to us?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 22, 2018

Introduction: Spiritual burn-out is a common problem among church workers, both professionals and volunteers. Because the needs of people are great and workers are few, gifted individuals step forward to meet these needs, sometimes taking on more than is humanly possible. Often excessive energy is expended through prolonged periods of service, then suddenly a vital laborer who is discouraged, will resign and withdraw from church life and activities, leaving everyone wondering what happened. Though several patterns may emerge, such as interpersonal conflict and feelings of being unappreciated, often the real problem is due to the violation of a basic principle: “If your output, exceeds your intake, then your upkeep, becomes your downfall.” They simply have burned-out, or expended all their existing spiritual and emotional reserves. They had nothing left to give.

In this week’s Gospel Jesus seems aware of the principle, that when people have been heavily concentrating on ministry they need to renew and refresh their spiritual and emotional resources. This is true in any situation that draws heavily on one’s spiritual and emotional reserves.

The disciples, had just been sent out two-by-two into a stressful witnessing situation to share the Good News throughout the region. Probably they returned weary, only to find Jesus’ ministry situation to be even more demanding. Consequently, Jesus invited them to temporarily come apart with him from the ministry demands of people, to rest and renew their energies. Later, when the enthusiastic crowds interrupted the start of this retreat, the disciples’ spiritual and emotional reserves were tested.

Jesus undoubtedly was equally as tired as the disciples, yet we see him caring for both their needs and the needs of the crowd. He is the promised Good Shepherd, caring for their needs wisely, so that they can dwell securely. As this week’s second reading indicates, “He is our peace,” and only as we are in close harmony with him will we be able to experience the peace he offers. It is essential for life and ministry that we avail ourselves of the necessary opportunities to refill our spiritual reservoir with his presence and the peace he offers. Obviously, the first place to do this is by regular and meaningful participation in Mass and Eucharist. However, with our hectic, fast-paced lifestyles we should also avail ourselves of time to read sacred Scripture and pray daily. In addition, we have the privilege, through personal or directed retreats to also withdraw into a lonely place to rest and renew our soul for an extended period of time. Stressful living is not work-free living. Jesus said that his “yoke is easy” and his “burden is light.” Perhaps, in life and ministry, when we find that the opposite is true we should see our stress as a sign, or a red flag so to speak, that our reservoir is nearly empty, and that it is time to concentrate on being refilled by the Holy Spirit.

“Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and Him alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching, and guiding—we need to set aside a time and space to give him our undivided attention. Jesus says, ‘Go to your private room and, when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place’ (Matthew 6:6). “...But we do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to Him.”*

Let’s make this concept of coming apart from the busyness of life to a daily retreat with Jesus a reality for us even if it only involves a few minutes each day. We will find that it will become a great reservoir of strength.

* *Making All Things New*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen, (pages 69, 71).

First Reading — Jeremiah 23:1-6

¹“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” says the LORD. ²Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be

saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' ”

1. Contrast the results of the two kinds of shepherds.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 23:1-6

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

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. ⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. ⁶Surely 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 — Ephesians 2:13-18

¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

2. How did God bring about reconciliation between the Gentiles and Jews?
3. Define reconciliation from this passage.

Gospel Reading — Mark 6:30-34

³⁰The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. ³³Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

4. How do you respond when you are thrown into a hectic situation?
5. Do you think people appreciate being shepherded? Why, or why not?
6. Explain Jesus' comment that they were “like sheep without a shepherd.”
7. What have you discovered personally about Jesus' care?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 29, 2018

Introduction: In difficult times do you see the donut, or the hole? Is the glass half-empty, or half-full? More importantly when you see the glass as half-empty and there is a need for a full glass, do you see God as fully capable of supplying the missing portion? The chorus of a children's song goes, "There are infinite possibilities in little beginnings, if God is in it, if God is in it." This week's Gospel is about the infinite possibilities God can do with little beginnings.

Jesus' ministry, and several Old Testament accounts of God's dealing with Israel, demonstrate God's power to create and multiply food to meet people's needs. For instance, the Israelites were saved from starvation during the Exodus, by the provision of manna from heaven. The prophet Elisha in this week's first reading saw God multiply a small portion of bread and corn sufficiently enough to feed a hundred hungry men. Elijah's life, along with that of a widow and her son, was spared when the widow of Zarepath unselfishly gave the last of her meager supply of oil and flour to make Elijah's meal (1 Kings 17). And in the New Testament we see Jesus create wine from water, and twice multiply a few loaves of bread and fish sufficiently enough to feed thousands. In most of these incidences there was more food left over than when they began.

Can God create something out of nothing, and multiply a little bit into the needed amount? The answer is without question, "Yes!" However, the questions that should occupy us are, "Why did he insure that we would have a written record of his miraculous power, and saving grace in these incidences?" and "What is the lesson he wants us to learn, and the knowledge he wants us to possess about him?"

One lesson may well be that we should not discount the impact of the infinite possibilities our little contribution can make in the Kingdom of God, when it is willingly given over to God. The widow of Zarepath only had a cup of oil and a bit of flour, Elisha's servant only had a twentieth of what was needed, and the disciples had only a few loaves of bread and a few fish. Their resources, in proportion to what they needed, could only be described as falling far short even of being half-full. Yet even these small portions given over to an all-powerful God, could be multiplied to meet needs in tremendous ways in God's kingdom. Imagine how different sacred Scripture would be if the widow of Zarepath, Elisha, and the young boy had not voluntarily made their little beginnings available to God's infinite power. Imagine how impoverished would be both their faith and ours if they had not come to understand this "infinite possibilities" concept of God.

"From all sides people have streamed to the man whose name is on every tongue. Their physical hunger is expressive of their spiritual. Jesus sees both, and performs the symbolic act of blessing bread and fish and distributing them. Thousands eat their fill, and quantities of food are left over. The meaning of the miracle is clear. It does not consist of the feeding of the crowd. From the practical standpoint, the disciples are quite right to suggest that the people go into the surrounding villages and buy food. No, the feeding of the thousands is a revelation of divine abundance. This is the gesture of the active, giving source of divine love; the nourishing of the bodies is but the prefiguration of the sacred nourishment soon to be proclaimed from Capharnaum."^{*}

Let's become like little children in our faith and once again nourish the belief that , "There are infinite possibilities in little beginnings, if God is in it, if God is in it."

^{*} *The Lord*, by Romano Guardini, (page 230).

First Reading — 2 Kings 4:42-44

⁴² A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." ⁴³ But his servant said, "How am I to set this before a hundred men?" So he repeated, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" ⁴⁴ So he set it before them. And they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

1. What is the difference between Elisha's attitude and that of his servant?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 145:10-11, 15-18

¹⁰ All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O LORD, and all thy saints shall bless thee! ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power,...

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season. ¹⁶ Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing. ¹⁷ The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. ¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.

Second Reading — Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

2. If the things listed in Ephesians 4:4-6 are supposed to be the basis of our unity, why are they so often a factor in disunity?

Gospel Reading — John 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself

3. Describe the convictions of the multitudes before and after the miracle.

4. What is the difference between Philip's response and Andrew's?

5. How can you apply the truths this passage teaches to your life?