

# *Reflecting* On Sunday's Readings

June 2015

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 MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY—June 7, 2015

**Introduction:** When bringing our dog, Oreo, home from the vet my wife's finger was pierced through by the leash clip when Oreo rushed forward. With one end of the leash fastened to a pulling dog, which she was restraining with her uninjured hand, and the clip on the other end of the leash embedded through my wife's finger, she called to our teenage son for help removing the clip. Though having just completed a First Aid course, he looked at the clip protruding through the flesh of her finger and cringing and grimacing, said, "I can't, I can't do it." The sight of the pierced bleeding hand almost sickened him. Many of us can identify with him as we have said or heard another say to us, "I can't stand the sight of blood."

What is it about blood that has this affect on us? It isn't the beautiful, deep red color of blood that gets to us but the fact that the blood represents the pain and suffering associated with spilling it. Yet for Christians the world over, the pierced Body and Blood of Jesus has become precious, not something to cringe at and shrink from but rather to remember, appreciate, and adore. We honor the Body and Blood of Jesus because of the pain, suffering and sacrifice it represents, and the saving effect it has.

We would all be shocked and highly offended if someone treated the Eucharist with disdain, or partook of it with a cavalier attitude. How can we insure that we properly honor, appreciate, and express gratitude to Jesus for shedding his blood, and giving his body to secure our salvation? This week's second Scripture reading provides some insight. We can do this by cooperating with the eternal intent and purpose for which it was shed; to "purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

Three purposes are revealed here. First his Body and Blood should "purify your conscience." Which in fact it does, as Jesus' sacrifice of his Body and Blood on our behalf, brings forgiveness and cleansing from every stain of sin. However, this purification should not simply be a theological reality but also should be an experiential cleansing from the "dead works" that defile us. This cleansing is expressed in real repentance and true conversion. In addition, appreciation for the Body and Blood of Christ should constrain, or impel us forward, so that we no longer live for ourselves but live to "serve the living God." This is the efficacious cycle that should be our spiritual reality. The Body and Blood of Christ should effect cleansing from sin within us, bring transformation to us, and mobilization of us to serve him. These are the eternal purposes for which Jesus gives us his Body and Blood. We can honor both it and Jesus' purpose by eagerly participating in this cycle.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, speaking of the Eucharist, "... recounts many of the miracles described in the Scriptures, including Christ's birth of the Virgin Mary, and then turning to the work of creation, concludes this: 'Surely the Word of Christ, which could make out of nothing that which did not exist, can change things already in existence into what they were not. For it is not less extraordinary to give things new natures than to change their natures.' "

This mystery of faith which we profess each Sunday as we receive the Eucharist is reinforced and validated by us as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to insure that a similar process takes place within us. For the Spirit also works in us changing us into what we are not, by implanting within us his new nature; "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

\* *Mysterium Fidei*, by Pope Paul VI (page 22).

## First Reading — Exodus 24:3-8

<sup>3</sup> When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the LORD has told us."

<sup>4</sup> Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD, <sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. <sup>7</sup> Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do." <sup>8</sup> Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

1. What parallels do you see between this Old Testament worship and our Mass?

2. How do you think we can apply verses 7-8?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalms 116:12-13, 15-18**

<sup>12</sup> How can I repay the LORD for all the good done for me?

<sup>13</sup> I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. ...

<sup>15</sup> Too costly in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his faithful. <sup>16</sup> LORD, I am your servant, your servant, the child of your maidservant; you have loosed my bonds. <sup>17</sup> I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. <sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people...

**Second Reading — Hebrews 9:11-15**

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

3. What new concept have you learned that will make participating in Eucharist more meaningful?

**Gospel Reading — Mark 14:12-16, 22-26**

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup> He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. <sup>14</sup> Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" <sup>15</sup> Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there."

<sup>16</sup> The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

<sup>22</sup> While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." <sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. <sup>25</sup> Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

<sup>26</sup> Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

4. Read about the Passover meal in Exodus 12. What does it foreshadow?
5. Describe the difference between the meaning of the Passover meal as the disciples perceived it, and the real meaning, which only Jesus knew.
6. Obviously, the depth of devotion and celebration varies for us as we participate in communion. What makes the Eucharist celebration especially meaningful for you?

# Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 14, 2015

**Introduction:** In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, depending on the translation you use the word “kingdom” or “reign” and the phrase “kingdom of God” or “reign of God” appear numerous times. And like today’s Gospel Reading it was an important topic of Jesus’ discourses, and obviously an important concept that he wanted his disciples, and future generations, to understand.

Jesus used many parables as verbal visual aids to express the immensity, nature, and value of the Kingdom or Reign of God. These word pictures, such as a woman sweeping her house until she finds the missing coin, still communicate to us today, and at the same time, like the disciples, we need a further explanation to grasp the full significance of what Jesus is teaching regarding the Kingdom/Reign of God. The Holy Spirit is ever present to illuminate our minds and give us understanding and hopefully we all are investing time daily to read and meditate on sacred Scripture. Fortunately the Holy Spirit has been actively illuminating the meaning of Scripture for over 2000 years and we can draw upon this history of understanding and interpretation to enhance and focus our own meditation. I have found the book *Jesus of Nazareth*\* by Pope Benedict XVI to be very helpful in this way. Referencing Origen, an early Church Father, Pope Benedict XVI introduces three dimensions in which the Kingdom/Reign of God can be interpreted:

**Christological**—Wherein the Kingdom is a person. “Jesus himself is the Kingdom; the Kingdom is not a thing, it is not a geographical dominion like worldly kingdoms. It is a person; it is he. ... Jesus leads men to realize the overwhelming fact that in him God himself is present among them, that he is God’s presence.”

**Idealistic or Mystical**—Wherein the Kingdom is a reflection of God’s reign in us. “It sees man’s interiority as the essential location of the Kingdom of God. ... The basic idea is clear: The ‘Kingdom of God’ is not to be found on any map. It is not a kingdom after the fashion of worldly kingdoms; it is located in man’s inner being. It grows and radiates outward from the inner space.”

**Ecclesiastical**—Wherein the Kingdom/Reign of God is expressed in the Church. “But nineteenth– and early –twentieth century theology did tend to speak of the Church as the Kingdom of God on earth; the Church was regarded as the actual presence of the Kingdom within history.”

As we meditate on the different statements of Jesus these three dimensions do shed light and help us understand what Jesus was emphasizing. Through them all though, is the presupposition that a Kingdom must have a King, and that King is Jesus. It presupposes that only one person can *reign* in the Kingdom, and that person should be Jesus not ourselves, or another. Pope Benedict XVI states it this way, “What is meant is not an imminent or yet to be established ‘kingdom’ but God’s actual sovereignty over the world, ... It would be better to speak of God’s being –Lord, of his lordship.”

Many of us have been baptized into his Kingdom as infants, some later in life, consequently it is easy to miss this concept and fail to answer the question, “Who is reigning in my life?” In one sense this reign comes about in our life gradually as this week’s Gospel Reading may speak of, yet for many when we ask ourselves this question there comes a sudden awakening that we need to step aside and allow Jesus to be seated on the throne of *our* lives—to genuinely experience “God’s actual sovereignty” in our life. His rule and reign is wonderful.

\**Jesus of Nazareth*, by Pope Benedict XVI, (quotes taken from pages 49-56).

## First Reading — Ezekiel 17:22-24

22Thus says the Lord GOD: I, too, will pluck from the crest of the cedar the highest branch. From the top a tender shoot I will break off and transplant on a high, lofty mountain. 23On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Every small bird will nest under it, all kinds of winged birds will dwell in the shade of its branches.

24Every tree of the field will know that I am the LORD. I bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, Wither up the green tree, and make the dry tree bloom. As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do!

1. What does this passage from Ezekiel tell us about the nature and character of God’s sovereignty?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalms 92:2-3, 13-16**

2It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, 3To proclaim your love at daybreak, your faithfulness in the night,

13The just shall flourish like the palm tree, shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon. 14Planted in the house of the LORD, they shall flourish in the courts of our God. 15They shall bear fruit even in old age, they will stay fresh and green, 16To proclaim: “The LORD is just; my rock, in whom there is no wrong.”

**Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:6-10**

6 So we are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. 9Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

2. What should be the focus or orientation of citizens of the Kingdom of God?

**Gospel Reading — Mark 4:26-34**

26He said, “This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land 27and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. 28Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come.”

30 He said, “To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? 31It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. 32 But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade.” 33With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. 34Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

3. What do these two parables tell you about the Kingdom/Reign of God?

4. In what way(s) are we to be involved in the expansion of the Kingdom of God?

5. To whom or what is the “seed” referring?

# Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 21, 2015

**Introduction:** Jesus asks the disciples two interesting questions in this week's Gospel reading; "Why are you afraid" and "Have you no faith?" The first deals with our circumstances and the second with our responses to our circumstances.

In response to the first we can list a host of reasons why we are afraid, for life is full of frightening situations. We enter the world frightened as we are taken from the warmth and security of the womb and thrust into the cold insecurity of the birthing room where we promptly get our bottom spanked. We live our lives having to confront many real and imagined fears such as sickness, abandonment, broken relationships, and unexpected and uncontrollable disasters, the last of which often ends in an untimely and/or humiliating death. "Why are you afraid?"—because a fearful storm can break around us at any time.

But the second question "Have you no faith?" is the one that a Christian should have a different answer to than does the non-Christian. Because though the rain storms on both the good and the bad our response to the storm should be different. When fearsome storms enter our lives do we think that God is distant, asleep in the boat, uncaring about what's happening to us and impotent to help? Or are we convinced and assured that God is here walking with us in the midst of the storm awake and in control, and that his love will assuredly cause all things to work together for our good and his (Romans 8:28), and that he is able to do anything and everything that needs to be done to see us through the storm? "Have you no faith?"—not as much as we should yet he will remain faithful.

We will invariably encounter fearful situations in life but the issue will always boil down to whether we will allow fear to control us or whether, as the second reading suggests, we will allow the love of God to control us. Whenever, in our weakness and in the face of fearful situations the question arises, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" we must let the love of Christ provide the answer and control our response, and not let the unknown fear reign in our mind. When we let fear control our response to the unexpected and uncontrollable tragedy that enters our life we become self-serving with self-preservation being our primary goal. But the love of Christ enables us to abandon living for ourselves during these times of danger and instead to live for him, and for those around us because of him. This is one way in which the "new creation" is expressed within us, changing our fear and self-preservation into love which no longer views the disastrous situation simply from "a human point of view."

Horatio Spafford's life is a good example of this changed outlook in the face of life's storms. In the Chicago fire of 1871 he suffered financial devastation and shortly thereafter had to endure yet a more terrifying loss. On a transatlantic trip the ship his wife and four daughters were on was struck by another ship. Only his wife survived and she wired him the tragic news, "Saved alone." Only a few can truly imagine the feeling of devastation he experienced, but many of us can realize how questions similar to those of the disciples must have flooded his thinking. A few weeks later as his ship passed nearby the spot where his four daughters drowned, he penned the following words: "When peace, like a river attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed His own blood for my soul."\* An amazing testimony of faith in God's love in the midst of life's storms.

We must allow ourselves to also be taught that the only answer to the question "do you not care if we perish?" must be, assuredly he does. "Be not afraid!" was not only the hallmark of Pope John Paul II's pontificate but also the very message sent to us from the Father, first by angels and then by his only Son. "Peace, be still!"

\* From the song *It is Well With My Soul*, by Horatio G. Spafford, as related on [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## First Reading — Job 38:1, 8-11

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD addressed Job out of the storm and said: ...

<sup>8</sup> "And who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb; <sup>9</sup> When I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? <sup>10</sup> When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, <sup>11</sup> And said: 'Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!'"

1. How can we change, enlarge and enhance our concept of God?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalms 107:23-26, 28-31**

<sup>23</sup> Some went off to sea in ships, plied their trade on the deep waters. <sup>24</sup> They saw the works of the LORD, the wonders of God in the deep. <sup>25</sup> He spoke and roused a storm wind; it tossed the waves on high. <sup>26</sup> They rose up to the heavens, sank to the depths; their hearts trembled at the danger. . . .

<sup>28</sup> In their distress they cried to the LORD, who brought them out of their peril, <sup>29</sup> hushed the storm to a murmur; the waves of the sea were stilled. <sup>30</sup> They rejoiced that the sea grew calm, that God brought them to the harbor they longed for. <sup>31</sup> Let them thank the LORD for such kindness, such wondrous deeds for mere mortals.

**Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:14-17**

<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. <sup>15</sup> He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. <sup>16</sup> Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. <sup>17</sup> So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.

2. What are some areas of your life in which you have become a “new creation” in Christ?
3. What are some indicators in our lives that reveal whether we are living for ourselves or living for Christ?

**Gospel Reading — Mark 4:35-41**

<sup>35</sup> On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, “Let us cross to the other side.” <sup>36</sup> Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” <sup>39</sup> He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm. <sup>40</sup> Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” <sup>41</sup> They were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

4. What lessons can we draw from the disciples’ experience?
5. What do you think would have happened if they had not taken Jesus with them into the boat? How is this applicable to our lives?
6. What have you learned about God’s love and provision through the storms you have encountered in life?
7. Identify one or two main lessons we can learn from this experience.

# Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 28, 2015

**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 claims of 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**

<sup>13</sup> Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. <sup>14</sup> For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome, And there is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of the nether world on earth, <sup>15</sup> For justice is undying. ...

<sup>23</sup> For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. <sup>24</sup> But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.

1. What do you conclude when bad things happen to good people?
2. What does the statement “God created man for incorruption” tell you about God and his will for us?

### **Responsorial Reading — Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-13**

<sup>2</sup> I praise you, LORD, for you raised me up and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. ...

<sup>4</sup> LORD, you brought me up from Sheol; you kept me from going down to the pit. <sup>5</sup> Sing praise to the LORD, you faithful; give thanks to God's holy name. <sup>6</sup> For divine anger lasts but a moment; divine favor lasts a lifetime. At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing. ...

<sup>11</sup> Hear, O LORD, have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper. <sup>12</sup> You changed my mourning into dancing; you took off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness. <sup>13</sup> With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks.

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

<sup>7</sup> Now as you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also. ... <sup>9</sup> For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ... <sup>13</sup> not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality <sup>14</sup> your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality. <sup>15</sup> As it is written: "Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less."

3. How can we excel in faith?

### **Gospel Reading — Mark 5:21-43**

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had crossed again (in the boat) to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. <sup>22</sup> One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet <sup>23</sup> and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." <sup>24</sup> He went off with him, and a large crowd followed him and pressed upon him. <sup>25</sup> There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. <sup>28</sup> She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."

<sup>29</sup> Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. <sup>30</sup> Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?"

<sup>31</sup> But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

<sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction."

<sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" <sup>36</sup> Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." <sup>37</sup> He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." <sup>40</sup> And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. <sup>41</sup> He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" <sup>42</sup> The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. (At that) they were utterly astounded. <sup>43</sup> He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

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

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

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