

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

³ Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do." ⁴ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶ And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." ⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

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

¹²What shall I render to the LORD for all his bounty to me? ¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD...

¹⁵Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

¹⁶O LORD, I am thy servant; I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds. ¹⁷I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁸I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

Second Reading — Hebrews 9:11-15

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

¹⁵Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

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

Gospel Reading — Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

¹²And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" ¹³And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." ¹⁶And the disciples set out and went to the city, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the passover...

²²And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

²⁶And when they had sung 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 myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain; ²³ on the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.

²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it."

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

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 92:1-2, 12-15 (Psalms 92:2-3, 13-16 NAB)

¹ It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to thy name, O Most High; ² to declare thy steadfast love in the morning, and thy faithfulness by night,

¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD, they flourish in the courts of our God.

¹⁴ They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green, ¹⁵ to show that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

⁶ So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

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

Gospel Reading — Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, ²⁷ and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." ³³ with many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

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.

First Reading — Job 38:1, 8-11

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: ...

⁸ "Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb; ⁹ when I made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?'"

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

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

²³ Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; ²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. ²⁵ For he commanded, and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. ²⁶ They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; ... ²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; ²⁹ he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. ³¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men!

Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has 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

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” ⁴¹ And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

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

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?
2. What does the statement “God created man for incorruption” tell you about God and his will for us?

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 30:1, 3-5, 10-12 (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."

3. 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.

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, that will sustain us during the difficult times?