

# *Reflecting* On Sunday's Readings

June 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 MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST SUNDAY—June 3, 2018

**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 ensure 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).

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website - <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/060318.cfm>

## First Reading — Exodus 24:3-8

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**

**Second Reading — Hebrews 9:11-15**

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

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

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 TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 10, 2018

## Introduction:

This Sunday's Readings may reveal the dilemma of the ages that all people face, how to answer the questions; "Who is this man Jesus?" and "What should we believe regarding him?"

In the first reading we observe Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve and their dilemma would they believe God who created all things for their good and spoke personally warn them not to eat of the Tree of Life, or Satan, the serpent, who had done nothing for them and conversely called into question the validity of God's word and warning. Unfortunately, it was at that point that their desire for *self-rule* influenced their decision to not believe God, but to believe Satan, and they disobeyed.

In the second reading St. Paul encourages them to persevere (continue on believing) and to not doubt and lose heart in the face of affliction. Previously they believed, they spoke openly of their belief, and now they were suffering and dealing with affliction and the deterioration of their outward body, would they continue to believe?

In the Gospel reading the crowd was in turmoil asking who Jesus was, and where did he get these powers. What are they to believe? Jesus patiently continues to teach them and when Mary, his mother appears, he clarifies that "he who does the will of God," these are my mother and brothers. He connects for them the issue that Adam and Eve missed, so that they would not miss it; believing is not an exercise in intellectual gymnastics, but rather *believing is doing what God wills*. Theologian Henri de Lubac explains it for us this way:

"The Latin verb *credo* (presumably derived from *cor do* = 'I give my heart.') can be understood in three ways:

- (1) *Credo Deum esse* = 'I believe that God exists';
- (2) *Credo Deo* = 'I believe God', 'I entrust myself to him';
- a third way is the specifically Christian mode that comes from biblical usage:
- (3) *Credo in Deum* = 'I believe in God', 'I believe unto God.'

Behind this last formula is the Hebrew idea of faith as the state of being anchored in God, of being moored securely in God, as it then says in the Gospel of John: 'Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me' (Jn 14:1). To believe in God means to acknowledge him, to do him homage, to worship him, to commend oneself and one's entire life to him, to believe unto him, [as one's destination] in the unity of faith, hope and love."\*

To *believe* is a life-long growing experience. These passages of Scripture and this quote by Henri de Lubac are worth our continued consideration, and it is important to pray and ask God as the apostle Thomas did, "Lord I believe, help Thou my unbelief."

\* From, *Meet Henri De Lubac: His Life and Word*, by Rudolf Voderhalzer, pages 177-178.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website - <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061018.cfm>

## First Reading — Genesis 3:9-15

1. Describe the results of their misplaced belief?

## Responsorial Reading — Psalms 130:1-8

**Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1**

2. What help does God provide for us to persevere in our belief unto the end?

**Gospel Reading — Mark 3:20-35**

3. How did Jesus respond to disbelief as expressed by the people and the scribes?
4. Did Jesus use his mother and brothers as a positive or negative example?
5. How can we apply the expression “does the will of God” without becoming legalistic?

# Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—June 17, 2018

**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).

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday’s Readings please either consult your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website - <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/061718.cfm>

## First Reading — Ezekiel 17:22-24

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**

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

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

**Gospel Reading — Mark 4:26-34**

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 NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST—June 24, 2018

**Introduction:** The nativity of Saint John the Baptist and this Sunday's readings on which we meditate remind us that God calls each of us for a special purpose which only we can fulfill. In some cases, like John the Baptist, Isaiah, David, and the twelve disciples of Jesus, the call and task are extraordinary within the history of salvation. However, for most of us the call and task are more ordinary. Additionally, within the fulfilling of that calling these extraordinary lives convey a message, and provide an example which can be instructive to those of us who live ordinary lives of faith.

For many people John the Baptist is simply depicted as a hermit who found nourishment in a weird diet (locust and honey) and made an outlandish fashion statement with his camel's hair and leather clothing. Unfortunately, many people see him as an angry person, ranting "Repent" and condemning people to Hell—which really does not describe John the Baptist, but simply reflects the way some have interpreted the message "Repent," either reflecting their own attitude toward sinners, or that of non-Christians media as they tried to interpret that which they did not understand.

John's message was actually a message of hope; that mankind can in fact change the downward spiral of their lives (repent, or turn), and in turning to Christ can know God who "has come to his people to set them free, He [God] has raised up for us a mighty Savior," who would "set us free from the hands of our enemies [including Satan], free to worship him without fear, [making us] holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our lives" (Luke 1). This is not a message of damnation but of salvation.

His birth was miraculous inasmuch as his parents, like Abraham and Sarah of the Old Testament, conceived John when they were well past the age when people could normally have children. In addition, Zechariah, John's father, was struck dumb for months until John's birth, because he failed to believe the angel who told him that Elizabeth would conceive and give birth to a son. John the Baptist was unique in that he was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb, and upon being in the presence of Mary the Mother of our Lord, and sensing his Lord's presence in the womb of Mary while he himself was yet within the womb of Elizabeth, he leaped for joy. His uniqueness portended our own experience upon becoming believers in Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, experiencing the joy that comes from recognizing Jesus, and responding in kind.

His calling was to "go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins," until the "tender compassion of our God shall break upon us."<sup>1</sup> He fulfilled his calling marvelously and humbly, directing his disciples to leave him and follow Jesus the Lamb of God by stating, "He must increase but I must decrease." John's life also portends our mission—to be vanguards among those who do not yet know the Lord, living in such a way that they are made aware of the salvation that is available in Jesus, and doing so in such a way that Jesus increases in importance to them, rather than we ourselves.

Do you want a new sense of importance, an importance which will in turn motivate you and humble you? Then simply realize that like John the Baptist you have been called to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ, as St. Paul points out; "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20), and as St. Peter points out, we are people with a mission; "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). What a calling! The world still needs people to follow John's example. Will you be one of them?

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday's Readings please either consult your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website - <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062418.cfm>

## First Reading — Isaiah 49:1-6

1. What did God do when Isaiah was struggling with his calling and his seeming lack of results?

