

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

November - 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

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY—November 1, 2015

Introduction: A common day for commemorating All Saints began during the persecution of Diocletian when the number of martyrs became so great that a separate day could not be assigned to each. But the Church, feeling that every martyr should be venerated, appointed a common day for all. This feast which began in Antioch spread to other cities and churches. Gregory III (731-741) consecrated a chapel in the Basilica of St. Peter to all the saints and fixed the anniversary for 1 November. Later Gregory IV (827-844) extended the celebration on 1 November to the entire Church.¹

It is appropriate that we should remember and honor those individuals who have gone before us who modeled a life of sacrifice and holiness, and in some cases martyrdom, for it is God himself through sacred Scripture that calls them *blessed*. One of the dictionary's primary meanings of the word "blessed" is to be "held in reverence," or as one Greek word study states it "to praise and celebrate with praises." We see in the Scripture readings several words and phrases that describe and define the people whom we commemorate on All Saints Day.

- In the first reading the Apostle John describes them as martyrs; "*a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, ... who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"
- The Psalmist describes them as people of holiness; "*He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*"
- St. John includes us, ordinary Christians who are changed into Jesus' image; "*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; ... it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

It is helpful to keep in mind that to be an *ordinary* Christian does not mean to be a nominal, lukewarm Christian but a vibrant Christian who lives his life in Christ, and one in whom Christ lives. Here is how the early Christians are described by one Apostolic Father, "They dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if sojourners in them; they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry as [do] all men, they bear children, but they do not expose their offspring. They offer free hospitality, but guard their purity. Their lot is cast 'in the flesh,' but they do not live 'after the flesh.' They pass their time upon the earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the appointed laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all men. They are unknown and they are condemned. They are put to death and they gain life."²

As we commemorate those who have gone before us, may our prayer be that of the early Christian, Eusebius, "Pray for me, that God will give me both inward and outward strength so that I may not only be called a Christian but found to be one ..."³

¹ Mersman, Francis. "All Saints' Day." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 5 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01315a.htm>>.

² *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, by Jordan Aumann, page 26.

³ Ibid.

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

²Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel, ...

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and

they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen." ¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

1. What are the attitudes of "servants of our God"?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 24:1-6

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

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

⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of his salvation. ⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. [Selah].

Second Reading — 1 John 3:1-3

¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

2. Define what you think John meant when he said that Jesus is "pure."
3. How should the realization that "we are God's children now," affect the way we think and live?

Gospel Reading — Matthew 5:1-12

¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. ²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Where do you see yourself in this list?
5. IN which category of the people whom Jesus lists would you like to be included in? Why? In which category would you most like to avoid being included?
6. What do you think this reward will be like and should it motivate us?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 8, 2015

Introduction: “Every time I go to church they are asking for money,” is the woeful refrain often heard from people to justify their non-participation in worship services. There may be some validity in the statement for many churches are struggling to simply maintain their presence and make ends meet, and are completely hampered due to low finances from vigorously advancing the Gospel. However, if the same people who hide behind this refrain were equally honest they would have to confess that the church’s need to continually ask for financial support says more about their own financial irresponsibility than it does about the church’s greed.

It is interesting to note, though perhaps uncomfortable to realize, that Jesus’ references to money far outnumber his references to any other aspect of life, and he was not greedy. Jesus and his disciples lived a simple, unencumbered life, free from materialism. So why did Jesus speak so often of our relationship to our money? Because Jesus knew that there was a battle going on for our hearts and where our treasure is there also would be our hearts, our affections. The two cannot be separated. Jesus was most concerned that people love God “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” To do so, Jesus knew that we would have to be confronted regarding our relationship to our money, and how we view our treasure.

When a man gives his money he is giving a part of his life. The converse is also true, when a man withholds his money he is withholding a significant part of himself, withholding his heart. Various means have been utilized to motivate people to give. For instance fear and guilt; if you don’t give God will be upset with you and will punish you. Or selfish reward; if you give, God will reward you and make you even richer with the money you retain. Or self-glorification; if you give a lot, think how much you will be admired. Or for power; if you give significantly you will have greater control, influence, etc. Though these various motivations have within them a valid kernel of truth, the only legitimate motivation for giving is love. Where your treasure is there is your heart also; God has my heart and love and I want my money and treasure to reflect that love.

Paul states it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:14, “The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” If God’s people, in any parish, develop their love for Christ and practice the generosity of which this week’s Scripture readings speaks, there will be an abundance of money for serving Christ and advancing his Kingdom, and we might add, an abundance of love.

In the first reading the widow of Zarephath reminds us of another widow, the one Jesus observed tossing the last two cents she had into the Temple offering. This widow from Zarephath gave the last of her oil and bread. Both received commendation from God — why? I think it was because they did not stop loving God, and expressing their love for him by giving of their substance in the midst of poverty, and difficulty. By contrast, it is not commendable for us to drop a dollar, or even a five into the offering, when we are spending plenty for the necessities, toys, and entertainments of life? It may be truthful; accurately expressing the limited degree of our love, but it isn’t commendable. God deserves more. God expects more.

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusement, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small.”*

* *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis.

First Reading — I Kings 17:10-16

¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” ¹¹ And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹² And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³ And Elijah said to her, “Fear not; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD the God of Israel, ‘The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’”

¹⁵ And she went and did as Elijah said; and she, and he, and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which he spoke by Elijah.

1. How do you respond to personal requests for financial or material help?
2. What value does the very specific promise to the widow of Zarephath hold for us today?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 146:7-10

...[The LORD] ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign for ever, thy God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!

Second Reading — Hebrews 9:24-28

⁴ For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

3. What point is the writer of Hebrews addressing with his reference to “once for all” and “offered once”?
4. How does this passage relate to the sacrifice of the Mass?

Gospel Reading — Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places ³⁹ and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

⁴¹ And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.”

5. What principles of behavior is Jesus warning us to avoid? How would you restate them positively?
6. How does Jesus measure the size of our contributions?
7. How would you advise people regarding giving?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—November 15, 2015

Introduction: History is undaunting. It just continues on to its natural conclusion with or without our agreement. We have the privilege to contribute to and influence it, but not to alter its grand design. Because history can rightly be called *his-story*. The natural conclusion of history becomes in reality a supernatural outcome. *His-story* is one in which God determined to create and claim through love, a people of his own (1 Peter 2:9). Though Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and thus affected history, God in his love would not allow them to alter *his-story's* purpose. This week's Scripture readings portray three aspects of *his-story*; the promise, the prescription, and the preview.

The promise: Imagine, some 100-200 years before Jesus was born, Daniel predicted the promise of eternal resurrection and eternal punishment. This week's first reading says, "those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." During Jesus' time walking on earth, and from before Daniel's time to the present, people have wondered and debated about the end of life, resurrection and damnation. Many base their view of eternity on their own limited understanding. We who follow Christ base our views on the divine revelation of sacred Scripture, which holds unlimited promises. This passage in Daniel is a promise worth clinging to, for those who believe.

The prescription: Many contemplate the end times with distress and fear. The real possibility of a life spent in "shame and everlasting contempt" looms evermore as a real possibility when they reflect on their life lived outside the will of God. Though the terror is real it is not of itself sufficient to either bring about change or remove the fearful debt they owe. Only God's powerful prescription can do that. Jesus, as Christ, became and becomes our high priest entering into God's presence offering his own life, death, and resurrection as the Sacrifice which can remove every stain of sin, making perfect and freeing from guilt and judgment those who believe.

The preview: Jesus gives us a glimpse of his glorious and triumphant return. It does not matter that at times in history it appears that the forces of evil will overwhelm his people, the drama is not yet over until he returns and wraps up *his-story*. This week's Gospel passage gives us just a hint of the final outcome. Jesus and his people will be in the "win" column, while his opponents will experience the ultimate "loss." His will be a glorious victory and a triumphant return. The joy and jubilation his people feel will far surpass that which people experience when tearing down the goal post, or cutting down the net over the biggest upset of the season. Ours will be the upset of eternity—the inevitable and sure conclusion to *his-story*.

"God reconciling the world to himself is also God reconciling himself to the world. In working out the plan of redemption, the Bible does not say that man became God, but that God became man. Further, he reconciled himself to the world by 'not counting their trespasses against them.' He forgave us not by ignoring our trespasses but by assuming our trespasses. 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' God became what by right he was not, so that we might become what by right we are not. This is what Christians through the ages have called 'the happy exchange.' This exchange, this reversal, is at the very epicenter of the story of our redemption,"*

Persuaded!: So persuaded that these things are true we can with the Psalmist rejoice and say, "I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." This is the blessed assurance of which we sing.

* *Death on a Friday Afternoon*, by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, (page)

First Reading — Daniel 12:1-3

¹ "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

1. Which provides more motivation for people to live righteously, the promise of the resurrection or the fear of damnation and punishment?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 16:5, 8-11

⁵The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my lot. ... ⁸I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. ¹⁰For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. ¹¹Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore..

Second Reading — Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

¹¹And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified... ¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

2. What will turn the forgiveness we have in Christ into living a life of gratitude?

Gospel Reading — Mark 13:24-32

²⁴“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

3. As you reflect on verses 24-27 what feelings are generated; awe, fear, jubilation, wonder, doubt, etc.?

4. How should the promise, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” influence us today?

5. What affect, do you think, knowing the exact time of Jesus’ return would have on people?

6. How does Mary’s response to the announcement of Jesus’ first Advent, prepare us for our response to the announcement of his second Advent?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY—November 22, 2015

Introduction: This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. It is appropriate that we do so as this is the end of the Liturgical Year and it reminds us that Christ, at the end of years, will rule forever in eternity. However, like Christians in New Testament times his lordship as King should be a conscious part of our daily existence as Catholic Christians.

In the Scriptures we have several examples of how not to relate to his kingship and reign. For instance, early in the life of Israel the nation rejected God's rule in their lives and nation, as we see in 1 Samuel 8. This passage records that the nation of Israel threw off God's rule, and demanded a human king, so that they would "be like the other nations." Though warned of the audacious demands of earthly kings they were willing to ignore the negative consequences so that they could discard the privileges and responsibilities of relating to and following God as their ruler.

Years later God's Son, Jesus, came proclaiming the Kingdom of God. One would think that by this time, after having experienced centuries of corrupt rule of earthly kings, that Israel and their leaders would welcome the opportunity to return to the benevolent rule of God, with arms welcoming him. But they didn't. Why?

In addition, We also see in Scripture how the host of people welcomed Jesus as king when he entered Jerusalem riding on a colt. They acclaimed him the new heir of King David for whom they had been looking. Yet their celebration was superficial, their acclamation insincere, and one which turned to mob rejection in a matter of hours. Why?

Pilate, perhaps, epitomizes all that we should avoid. He too superficially recognized that Jesus was a king, and in fact acknowledged that Jesus was King of the Jews. But then, Pilate washed his hands of Jesus and his kingship, and disavowed any responsibility to respond to this recognized reality. Why?

In each of these instances, to varying degrees, people liked the idea of being under the rule and in the kingdom of God, but they did not like the demands it put upon them. Rebelliousness is in our DNA. We want to rule ourselves. We love the benefits of a heavenly king, with his benevolent ways, his care and his protection, but reject the demands of citizenship in his kingdom. This fear of surrendering self-rule to his rule, and our will to his will, often drives us to offer lip service during times of celebration, and selfish rebellion during the rest of the time. Even we who have gladly united with his kingdom recognize the war that often resides within us between practical allegiance and external acknowledgement. This year as we celebrate Jesus Christ's Lordship and reign as King, may we pray and resolve that during the next fifty-one weeks we will live to his honor and practically surrender to his will.

Pope Pius XI, in *Quas Primas*, clearly explains what it means to let Christ truly reign in us. "If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God."^{*}

^{*} *Quas Primas*, by Pope Pius XI, (33).

First Reading — Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

1. What does “dominion, glory, and kingship” mean to you?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 93:1-2, 5

¹ The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved; ² thy throne is established from of old; thou art from everlasting. . . . ⁵ Thy decrees are very sure; holiness befits thy house, O LORD, for evermore.

Second Reading — Revelation 1:5-8

⁵ . . . from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. ⁷ Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

2. What are the responsibilities of the subjects of Christ’s kingdom?

Gospel Reading — John 18:33-37

³³ Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” ³⁷ Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.”

3. If you were Jesus’ spokesman, how would you answer Pilate’s question, “What have you done?”
4. How would you describe the inhabitants of his Kingdom?
5. Where and how have you experienced the call to live as a member of his Kingdom?
6. If someone asked you, “Why should I volunteer to be a member of Christ’s Kingdom?” how would you respond?

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT—November 29, 2015

Introduction: “My Daddy! My Daddy!” the little boy sang out as he spotted his father progressing up the long airport corridor, returning after a long trip. For some time the little boy had pranced around animatedly waiting and watching. His eyes, his face, his whole body strained forward scanning the faces of other passengers to find his father, moving back and forth trying to see around the emerging throng of passengers. Then, sighting his dad, he lit up with recognition, joyfully exclaiming for all to hear, “My Daddy! My Daddy!”

This Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, and the experience of this little boy provides an apt study of what it means to await Christ’s coming. Waiting is not a passive exercise of the marginally interested, instead it should be active anticipation. All our faculties should be attuned to the fact that someone important is about to appear. There should be a concentration of our attention and a readiness to respond in enthusiastic greeting.

This week’s Gospel reading provides an appropriate transition from the end of one liturgical year to the beginning of a new liturgical year, for it alerts us to Jesus’ second advent, when he will return from heaven to claim his own. We are encouraged to “look up,” “raise your heads,” “take heed,” “watch,” and pray for his coming is real and redemptive, as real and redemptive as was his first coming. And these actions we are encouraged to follow are the actions of active waiting.

With the Second Advent in mind we are stimulated to celebrate his first Advent with similar active waiting, anticipating a fresh appearing of Jesus’ presence in our lives. Will we be like the little boy mentioned above focusing and concentrating our attention on seeing him? Or will we have our attention diverted by the glitz and secular trappings of a Christmas that ignores that he ever existed, or could ever again reappear to us? Perhaps this is the week when we should determine a plan for peering around the emerging onslaught of secular traditions and purely mercenary celebrations, to actively watch for Jesus. If we take time now to sort out what we are going to do to actively watch for him in the face of this onslaught, and then follow through on our intention, we too will burst forth with exclamations of joy.

“For while all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from thy royal throne...’ The passage, brimming with the mystery of the Incarnation, is wonderfully expressive of the infinite stillness that hovered over Christ’s birth. For the greatest things are accomplished in silence—not in the clamor and display of superficial eventfulness, but in the deep clarity of inner vision; in the almost imperceptible start of decision, in quiet overcoming and hidden sacrifice. Spiritual conception happens when the heart is quickened by love, and the free will stirs to action,” (from *The Lord*, by Romano Guardini.)

Let us pray as we dwell in this time period between Jesus’ first and second appearing that there might be a third appearing, the reappearing of Jesus in our hearts and lives. When the little boy’s dad appeared he scooped up his son in his arms in mutual love and spent a lifetime mentoring his son to growth and maturity. So may it be with the reappearing Christ in our lives that our hearts would be quickened by love and our free will stirred into action.

First Reading — Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

1. Compare this promise of Jesus’ first advent with the promise of his second advent found in this week’s Gospel reading.
2. How did Jesus “execute justice and righteousness”?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14

⁴ Make me to know thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. ⁵ Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day long. . . .

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. . . . ¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

Second Reading — 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

^{3:12} And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

^{4:1} Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3. Define holiness. What are proper motives for pursuing holiness?

4. What does it mean to “establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father”?

Gospel Reading — Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

²⁵ “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” . . .

³⁴ “But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; ³⁵ for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man.”

5. Compare your feelings toward the First Advent with your feelings about the Second Advent.

6. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had Luke write about these things?

7. How do you think we could practically implement this advice?

8. What inner message of the heart is the Spirit whispering to you and your community this week?