

A Season of Growth

As we prepare to conclude the Easter Season, this time of the liturgical year presents us with a myriad of solemnities and feasts to inspire and nourish our faith. The readings for the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord invite us to reflect on our call to carry on the mission of Christ and to spread the Good News of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. At Pentecost, we reflect upon the gift of the Holy Spirit, who fills us with the grace and boldness needed to proclaim Christ in the world. The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity reminds us that the end goal of all our evangelizing work is to draw others into communion with Father, Son, and Spirit. The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood draws our focus to the Eucharist and the ways that it provides ongoing nourishment for the life of discipleship. The Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul places before us two glorious apostles to inspire us as we strive to share the Gospel in our own time. These great celebrations strengthen us to continue our growth in discipleship as we ease our way into summer and Ordinary Time.

The reflections on each Sunday's readings in this article are followed by citations from documents from our teaching tradition that connect to the readings. These connections provide perspectives to aid your understanding and application of the readings to your parishioner's lives. The questions under Liturgy and Life may be discussed among staff or the liturgy commission or inserted into the bulletin for parishioners' reflection. The petitions with the universal prayer may be used at Mass or during staff or liturgy committee meetings. Finally, you may find it valuable to end your meeting or reflection with the concluding prayer.

ASCENSION OF THE LORD Readings

Psalm 47 anticipates Jesus' ascension with its joyful invitation to shout with gladness as God ascends to his heavenly throne. This is a royal coronation scene, reenacting the truth that God reigns over all the nations.

Christ's ascension into heaven is narrated twice, at the end of Luke's Gospel and at the beginning of Acts. After having been raised by God from the dead, Jesus shows himself to his disciples and gives them additional instructions about the kingdom of God. He then tells them to gather and wait in Jerusalem, where they will receive the powerful baptism of the Holy Spirit. The disciples want to know if Jesus is going to return the kingdom to Israel. We ask a similar question today whenever we



Photo © John Zich

The Gospel reading on the Solemnity of the Ascension reminds us that we are called to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth.

wonder when Jesus will return in glory. Jesus tells them it is not for them (or for us) to know such things. Instead, they are given a task: to be his witnesses throughout the world. In Luke, the joy of the disciples after Jesus ascends (24:52) resonates with the joy of the peoples who observe God mount the heavenly throne (Psalm 47:6).

If Acts and Luke narrate Jesus' ascension from an earthly perspective (from the point of view of the watching disciples), the Letter to the Hebrews narrates it from a heavenly perspective. We are given a glimpse into the heavenly sanctuary as the risen Christ enters it, bearing his blood as the sacrifice that ended all earthly sacrifices.

While Luke and Acts focus on the disciples' active role as witnesses and agents of Jesus' mission, Hebrews focuses on

Christ's unique role in opening the way into the heavenly sanctuary for us. The risen Christ is a great high priest who eagerly awaits our cries for help and mercy because he sympathizes with our frailties and weaknesses.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In the Gospel of Luke, we hear Jesus tell the disciples to await the Holy Spirit as he says, "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." *Gaudium et spes*, (the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church*) tells of the faithful's reliance on the Spirit as they try to discern the signs of God's presence and purpose. The Second Vatican Council document states: "The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world. Impelled by that faith, they try to discern the true signs of God's presence and purpose in the events, the needs and the desires which it shares with the rest of humanity today. For faith casts a new light on everything and makes known the full ideal which God has set for humanity, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human" (11).

While promising to send the Spirit, Jesus says, "Not as the world gives do I give it (peace) to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." *Gaudium et spes* explains that through the Spirit, humankind contemplates God. "Our age, more than any of the past, needs such wisdom if all humanity's discoveries are to be ennobled through human effort. Indeed the future of the world is in danger unless wiser people are forthcoming. It should also be pointed out that many nations which are poorer as far as material goods are concerned, yet richer in wisdom, can be of the greatest advantage to others. It is by the gift of the holy Spirit that humanity, through faith, comes to contemplate and savor the mystery of God's design" (15).

Liturgy and Life

(1) Do you consider yourself a witness for Christ? (2) What delays you from letting others know of God's work in your life? (3) How do you find reason to rejoice amidst your trials?

Universal Prayer

The Lord is with us always and prompts us to pray for the needs of the world.

That Christ's return will find the Church ready and waiting expectantly, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That we may have eyes to see God where we might not expect to recognize him, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That we may serve mercifully and walk humbly with God every day of our lives, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That those mourning the loss of a loved one may know God's consolation in their grief, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the faithful departed: that they live forever with the ascended Christ, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Lord of heaven and earth,
you exercise your saving power
through those who have been baptized in your name.
Make us holy and living witnesses of your eternal glory.
Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Readings

The readings this week continue the theme of Jesus' glorified and risen life after his ascension. Psalm 97 sings of God as the Most High who is "exalted far above all gods" (Psalm 97:9). In the reading from Acts 7, the Spirit gives Stephen the gift of seeing into heaven, where he sees the risen Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Just as the psalm states about God, Jesus is the Most High who reigns in glory (Psalm 97:6).

The death of Stephen mirrors the death of Jesus. When Jesus is about to die, he calls out for the Father to receive his spirit (Luke 23:46). When Stephen is about to die, he calls out instead for the Son, Jesus, to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59). And just as Jesus forgives the people who crucified him (Luke 23:34), Stephen forgives the people who stone him to death (Acts 7:60).

In his faithful witness to Jesus, Stephen fulfills the prayer of Jesus in John 17 for the loving unity of the Son, the Father, and the followers of Jesus. Through the Spirit, Stephen has become united to Jesus so that his death follows the pattern of Jesus' death. For Jesus, love binds Father and Son and draws Christians into unity with one another and with God. This close equation of the Spirit with love appears in Scripture in the letters of Paul (see Romans 5:5) and in the writings of St. Augustine.

In the reading from Revelation, the risen Jesus is the bright morning star. Jesus is the dawn of God who has broken upon the darkness of the world (Luke 1:78) and life-giving water offered to anyone who is thirsty (John 4:13-14; 7:38). The reading concludes with the final words of Scripture, the longing and hopeful cry of the Church for the Lord Jesus to come again.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

Today's reading from the Gospel of John provides Jesus' prayer. It is obvious that the prayer comes from the deep love and union of the Father and Son. Pope Francis writes of how the prayer form of *lectio divina* helps us listen to God. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, he states: "There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us. . . : *lectio divina*. It consists of reading God's word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us. The spiritual reading of a text must start with its literal sense. Otherwise we can easily make the text say what we think is convenient" (152).

Jesus prays to the Father for unity among his followers, praying "that they may be one, as we are one." In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II writes of how the faithful are united with Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The pope states: "Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. . . . Our union with

Christ . . . makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body. . . .The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism through the gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13, 27)” (23).

Liturgy and Life

(1) How is Stephen able to seek forgiveness for those who are murdering him? (2) Jesus prays for his followers. When do you pray for others? (3) What can you do to root your life more deeply in prayer?

Universal Prayer

The love of the Lord dwells within us and inspires us to pray for those in need.

That the pope and all Church leaders may preach Christ’s name to all the nations, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That all Christians may embrace the Great Commission and make evangelization a joyful duty, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That the ascended Lord may lead and guide us wherever we may go, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

That those who have died may dwell in peace in the kingdom of heaven, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the faithful departed whose lives were consecrated to God’s Word: that they may feast forever at the banquet of divine love, we pray: **Risen Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Mighty God,
you fill us with the power of the Spirit
and send us forth to be your witnesses.
Hear our prayers,
and grant that the testimony of our lives may glorify you
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PENTECOST

Readings

The Gospel reading presents the promise of the Spirit. Jesus reassures his followers that they will not be left alone after his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Jesus tells them that he will ask the Father to send them an Advocate: the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). As their Advocate, the Spirit will remind the disciples of Jesus’ teachings (John 14:26). An advocate is also a helper, a defender, and an intercessor. Through the Spirit’s presence, the disciples will be protected and empowered as they continue Jesus’ work.

In the first reading, from Acts, Jesus’ promise is fulfilled as the Spirit arrives in wind and fire and gives the disciples the ability to proclaim the Gospel in the languages of all the nations.

The disciples begin their commissioned task as witnesses to the Good News, as Jesus promised, beginning in Jerusalem and going from there to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Devout Jews from every nation are gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost (Pentecost was a harvest festival for Jews). The Gospel goes, as the apostle Paul reminds us, to Jews first (Romans 1:16); later in Acts, it will go on from there to the Gentiles — to Greeks, Romans, Ethiopians, Syrians, and on and on. To this mighty proclamation, Psalm 104:1 gives the appropriate response: “O Lord, my God, you are great indeed!”

Jesus tells his disciples that he won’t leave them as orphans but will give them the Spirit. The apostle Paul picks up this theme when he describes the “spirit of adoption” that brings us into God’s household as children and even as joint heirs with the Son (Romans 8:14–17). To claim our inheritance, we follow Christ’s pattern through death to resurrection (Romans 8:17; see also Romans 6:3–11).

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

The diversity of God’s people is portrayed in the reading from Acts as the disciples speak in the tongues of those who have gathered from many nations. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis speaks of the Holy Spirit bringing forth a rich diversity of gifts. “Cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit . . . transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God” (117).

Liturgy and Life

(1) What does it mean to you that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (2) What are your responsibilities as an heir of God? (3) How can you pause to reflect on the Spirit working in your life?

Universal Prayer

Lord, send out your Spirit upon us, and give us strength to pray for those in need and act for justice.

For the Church, that the Holy Spirit may continually refresh us in our faith and our ministry, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the world, that the Spirit may renew the face of the earth, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those charged with overseeing change, that they may discern and lead wisely with the gifts of the Spirit, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all people, that we may hope in Christ in all things, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died, may they live forever in the Spirit of eternal life, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**



Photo © John Zich

The responsorial psalm on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity gives praise to God for his wondrous name.

Concluding Prayer

O divine Wisdom,
 your Son gave us the gift of the Spirit
 so that we would have
 your breath of life in us forever.
 Teach us how to share your Spirit with others.
 Enliven and renew all of creation,
 and bring us your everlasting peace.
 Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MOST HOLY TRINITY Readings

What the Father has, the Son also has; and what the Son has, the Spirit takes and declares to us (John 16:14–15). Jesus' words in John's Gospel reveal the unity of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Spirit continually sharing everything with one another, in a loving union sometimes referred to as a dance. The words also show the astonishing generosity of the Triune God to welcome humanity into the divine life. Everything that the Father and Son have is declared to humanity by the Spirit.

Psalm 8 meditates in a different way on a related theme: the glorious place of humanity in God's magnificent creation. In the hierarchy of things, human beings are just a little below the angels, the eternal beings who worship and serve in God's heav-

enly court. But humans are set above everything else, as stewards over all living things (Psalm 8:5–8).

In the first reading, Wisdom meditates on her presence at the creation of the universe, as a joyful craftsman who plays alongside God while the Lord marks out the vault of the sky and fixes the earth on its foundation (Proverbs 8:27–31). What does Wisdom find the most delight in? The human race, those living beings created to mirror the Triune God's goodness and self-giving love (Genesis 1:26–27).

In Christian thought, the Wisdom of Proverbs is a glimpse into the Spirit's presence at creation. And for the apostle Paul, it is the Holy Spirit who pours the love of God, Father and Son, into our hearts (Romans 5:5). For Paul, the "grace in which we stand" is the gift of access to God through faith in Christ. This grace boldly empowers us to boast even in our afflictions, knowing that the patient endurance of affliction produces a hope that will never disappoint, since it comes from God's deep love for us.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

Jesus prepares his disciples for his death and his glory, telling them, in today's Gospel, "Everything the Father has is mine; for this reason he will take from what is mine and give it to you." In the resurrection, the life that Christ has with the Father will be given to his followers. *Gaudium et spes* (the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*) explains, "Christ has risen again, destroying death by his death, and has

given life abundantly to us so that, becoming sons and daughters in the Son, we may cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father! (22).

In the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul tells of our access to faith through Christ. That faith, which brings us hope, calls us to bring the good news of God's love to others. Pope Francis explains in *The Joy of the Gospel*: "The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actually engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus" (120).

Liturgy and Life

(1) Now that we have entered Ordinary Time in the liturgical year, how could you make a practice of looking at God's creation with awe? (2) When has a suffering or affliction led you toward hope? (3) How do you see the union with of the Three Persons of the Trinity modeling the union that we are to seek with God and those we encounter?

Universal Prayer

The Lord finds delight in the human race, and as a community steeped in love let us offer to him the needs of our world.

For our Church leaders, that they may guide us to see with the eyes of faith, we pray: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For leaders of nations, that they make seek to share resources among all peoples, we pray: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For our communities, that we may care for all aspects of creation, we pray: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For fathers who strive to provide for their families with honor and grace, we pray: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who mourn the loss of a child, we pray: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Concluding Prayer

Triune God,
in baptism, we are united to you.
Protect us and bring us more deeply into the mystery of your divine life
so that we may continue to grow in holiness and love.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST Readings

The first reading is a foretaste of the Eucharist. King Melchizedek of Salem serves bread and wine to Abram and blesses him in the name of the God Most High.

Melchizedek appears again in the psalm. The Lord (Yahweh) addresses the Lord Jesus ("my Lord"); the Father addresses the Son (Psalm 110:1). The Lord anoints the Son as "a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). The Letter to the Hebrews explores the meaning of Jesus' priesthood, which is modeled not on the Levitical priests who offer yearly sacrifices in the temple, but after Melchizedek, who offers bread and wine and blesses the one through whom God will bless all the nations.

The reading from First Corinthians recounts the first Supper of the Lord. Paul repeats the words the Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples, who then spoke the words to Paul and others so that we still say the same words today when we celebrate the Eucharist. Jesus takes the bread and wine of the Passover meal that he is eating with his disciples, and he presents them as his Body (broken on the cross) and his Blood (poured out on the cross for the forgiveness of sins).

The readings conclude not with a Eucharist but with a simple meal for a hungry crowd. Seeing that the sun is setting, the twelve disciples tell Jesus to send the crowd away so they can find food. Jesus knows they have the sustenance that the crowd needs, so he sits them down in groups. He performs the same actions as at the Lord's Supper, but this time with bread and fish: he blesses the food, breaks the bread, and gives it to them. Everyone eats until they are full; nobody goes home hungry. Jesus offers both bread and Bread, food for hungry bodies and souls.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

As we listen to the reading from St. Paul, we hear words from the institution narrative. Just as Christ's Body and Blood are offered up today at Mass, so were they in the first century. *Gaudium et spes* notes that in ordinary materials Christ left spiritual nourishment. The Second Vatican Council document states, "Christ left to his followers a pledge of this hope and food for the journey in the sacrament of faith, in which natural elements, the fruits of human cultivation, are changed into the Body and Blood, as a supper of brotherly and sisterly communion and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet" (38).

Jesus responds to the hunger of the crowd by providing food in abundance. In the Eucharist, believers receive the bread of life and are to bring the goodness of Christ into the world. Pope Benedict XVI explains in his encyclical *Deus caritas est* (*God Is Love*) that our union with God in the Eucharist requires that we care for others. "A Eucharist that does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented" (14).

Liturgy and Life

(1) In what ways do you give back to the Lord to express gratitude for what you have been given? (2) How does the Eucharist express God's abundant love for humankind? (3) Where is there abundance in your life that you have not recognized as coming from God?

Universal Prayer

Our faith in the Eucharist sends us to be living loaves of love, bearers of justice, and signs of compassion. Let us offer to the Lord our prayers.

That the Church will nourish the world with justice and peace, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

That leaders of nations ensure that food be provided for those who are hungry, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

That those who have abundance share more generously with those who live with scarcity, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

That volunteers in food pantries and other agencies grow in awareness of Christ's presence in those they serve, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

That those who have died may rejoice at the banquet of heaven, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus,
you feed us with your Body and Blood.
Make us mindful that by sharing
the sacrament of your love,
we become your Body in the world.
Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

STS. PETER AND PAUL Readings

The psalmist declares, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, / and delivers them" (Psalm 34:8). This describes Peter when he was thrown into prison by Herod Antipas, the son of the Herod who tried to have the infant Jesus killed. This Herod continues his father's violent antagonism toward anyone viewed as a threat to the stability of his Roman-endorsed rule. (Later in the chapter, God strikes Herod down for not objecting when people praise him as a god.)

The Church prays earnestly on behalf of Peter. "When the poor one called out, the Lord heard, / and from all his distress he saved him" (Psalm 34:6). God hears the prayers; an angel wakes Peter and escorts him out of prison. In Acts, Peter emerges as a confident leader and eloquent preacher, in contrast to the often-impulsive figure of the Gospel accounts. Matthew 16 recounts a turning point for Peter. The disciples tell Jesus that the people are unsure of Jesus' identity. When Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is, Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus tells him that his insight is from the Father. Peter (whose name means "rock") is the firm foundation upon whom Christ will build his Church.

While the readings show us Peter at the high point of his ministry, they offer a glimpse of Paul at the end of his. In his Second Letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul contemplates the end of his life with a sense of peaceful fulfillment. He has faithfully

finished the race that God gave him to run. Now he looks forward with hope to his reward: eternal life with God. Just as the angel of the Lord rescued Peter, Paul praises God for rescuing him from danger (2 Timothy 4:17–18).

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). Peter responds by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). While Peter offers a powerful confession of faith, each of us is called to make a personal response to the question Jesus poses. Our response is given not just as a statement of our personal convictions, but as our witness to Christ in the world. Like Peter, each baptized Christian is called to proclaim Christ. As the *Aparecida* document reminds us that "the Church . . . has come to a more lively awareness of her missionary nature. . . . Our pastoral service . . . requires proclaiming Jesus Christ and the Good News" (95).

This call to evangelize—to bear witness to Christ—is not, as Pope John Paul II reminds us, only a concern of "pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world" (*Christifideles laici*, 2).

Liturgy and Life

(1) How have you experienced the Lord's protection? (2) What does it "cost" you to witness to your faith in your life? (3) How would you answer Jesus' question to Peter: "Who do you say that I am?"

Universal Prayer

The Lord does not desert his flock but watches over it and guides us along the right path. Confident of his presence, we offer to God our prayers for the needs of our world.

That the Church may continue feeding the sheep and lambs, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That as the United States celebrates her independence this week, we commit ourselves to being models of inclusion, justice, and mercy, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That as Canada also celebrates the day of their nation's birth this week, all leaders and citizens may rejoice in the diversity of their land, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That we may follow Peter and Paul's examples of faithful leadership, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That those who suffer in any way trust in the tender love of God, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

That those who have died may rest in the peace of the risen Lord, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

Concluding Prayer

Almighty and gracious God,
you sent your Son into the world as
the Good Shepherd and Savior of your people.
May the example of Peter and Paul continue to inspire others to
imitate your compassionate love.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Readings

The theme of joy connects the readings from Isaiah, Psalm 66, and the Gospel of Luke. In Isaiah, the Lord calls the people to rejoice and be glad along with Jerusalem. The Israelites had mourned over their beautiful city when she was dishonored and destroyed by the Babylonian empire. Now the healed and rebuilt city will be like a mother to them, offering them comfort and delight. God too describes himself as a mother who will comfort God's children, the chosen people, Israel. When the psalmist, like the Lord, calls the people to rejoicing, he recalls not the exile but the Exodus — God's mighty rescue of the people from enslavement in Egypt.

In the Gospel reading, the seventy-two disciples who had been sent out ahead of Jesus, proclaiming God's kingdom and paving the way for Jesus' ministry, return to him rejoicing. Even the demons bowed to them! Jesus acknowledges that he gave them power over "the full force of the enemy" (Luke 10:19), but he tells the disciples not to rejoice at their authority over the evil spirits. Instead, they are instructed to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. (The idea that God keeps a book of life with the names of the faithful is found in Jewish writings and in Revelation 20:15.)

Likewise, the apostle Paul declares that he will never boast in anything except the cross of Jesus. Paul could rejoice in so many things, given his exceptional ministry and encounter with the risen Jesus. But for Paul, the world has been remade because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that is the only thing that matters to him. He offers a blessing of peace to all who follow this rule and to Israel, God's people.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

As we hear of the account of Jesus sending out seventy-two missionaries two by two, we may consider the need for the good news to be spread during the time in which we live. Indeed, in *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes that the mission of Christ "is still just beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service" (1). Calling for a response "with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time," he states that the Church must pray for the Spirit "to gain strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate" (91–92).

When Jesus sends the disciples out to evangelize, he tells them to live among the people, offering peace and eating and drinking what is offered. While taking part in people's lives, the

Gospel is shared. *Evangelii nuntiandi* explains that the Gospel must be proclaimed by Christians who "show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good" (21).

Liturgy and Life

(1) How can you incorporate praise for God into your daily prayer? (2) Paul states that he will only boast in the cross of Christ. How is humility a necessity for the spiritual life? (3) In the Gospel, Christ sends his disciples out with only the peace of Christ. As a disciple, how can you emanate Christ's peace?

Universal Prayer

As a mother gives comfort to her child, the Lord comforts his own. And so we have the courage to pray.

For the domestic Church, that it may be fruitful and peaceful, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For world leaders, that they may bring the light of justice into the lives of those they govern, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For travelers, that they may find welcome and hospitality, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For the homeless, that they may receive shelter and care, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all who work in the hospitality industry, that they may welcome all with grace, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died, that they may be welcomed into eternal life, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

God of peace,
your Son directed his disciples to give peace to all.
May we too grant peace to all we meet,
and may we accept it from those we welcome.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Readings

"Do this and you will live" (Luke 10:28). Jesus' words echo those of Moses, "Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19), a few verses after today's reading. God's commands aren't mysterious or remote; they don't need a long, arduous journey to discover God's will. God's words are already in their mouths — when they recite the Torah — and in their hearts. Do this, Moses says, entreating the people to keep God's commandments, and you will live. A similar message is in today's psalm refrain, "Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live." In God's mercy and great kindness, God will hear



Photo by Steve Sharp (Unsplash)

The Gospel for the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time beckons us to see every person as our neighbor.

those who call on him for help. Do this, the psalmist says, and you will flourish.

When a scholar of God's law (the Torah) asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus turns the question back on him. The scholar knows the answer; the words, as Moses said, are already in his mouth and heart. He quotes the two great commandments to love God (Deuteronomy 6) and neighbor (Leviticus 19). Jesus tells him that he has answered correctly; the heart of the law is indeed to love God and neighbor. The scholar is not content, so he tries to trick Jesus by asking him who counts as the neighbor (and who does not). Jesus tells his most famous parable, gently showing the scholar that he does not need to wonder who his neighbor is; he only needs to behave as a neighbor by showing God's mercy to those in need.

Why does Jesus have the authority to interpret God's laws? Because, as Paul writes in Colossians, he was "before all things," and "in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). He is the firstborn of the dead, meaning that he has resurrected into new life, where all the faithful will one day follow him.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

Jesus instructs the scholar of the law to act mercifully, just as did the Samaritan traveler. Pope Benedict XVI explains in *Deus caritas est* that our union with Christ is linked to our union with those we encounter. Our communion cannot be with Christ alone. The pope writes: "Union with Christ is also union to all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or will become his own" (14).

Just as the man left for dead in the Gospel account deserved attention, so do people today who are marginalized and alone. Quoting from the Documents of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, *Redemptoris*

missio states: "The poor deserve preferential attention because they have been made in the image and likeness of God and this image has been obscured and even violated. For this reason, God has become their defender and the Church, following the spirit of the Beatitudes, is called to be on their side" (60).

Liturgy and Life

(1) Have you ever considered God's law as something that is within your heart? (2) In light of today's Gospel, should you reconsider your openness to granting mercy to others? (3) Why is it not enough to just obey the law?

Universal Prayer

Hearing the voice of the Lord in the presence of this assembly we offer our prayers for the world.

For the Church, that she will be a living witness of the Lord's love for the poor and the neglected, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For world leaders, that they will enact policies that protect the rights of diverse peoples, cultures, and religions, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who question, that they may find answers — or deeper questions, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For our neighbors, that they may find welcome and love with us, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all indigenous peoples, that they may be shown dignity and respect so that they may have fullness of life, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all young people, that they may have the support needed to develop the gifts God has given them, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

For those who have died in the hope of Christ, that God will bestow on them the lasting riches of Christ, we pray: **Gracious Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Lord, our God,

we try to love you with our whole heart,
being, strength, and mind.

We try to love our neighbors; yet sometimes we fail.

Keep calling us back to this love that we may inherit eternal life.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Readings

In Genesis 18, the Lord appears to Abraham in the form of three strangers. While Jewish rabbis typically understood the men as angels, Christian interpreters beginning with Augustine viewed

them as the Trinity. The author of Hebrews nods to this story — and its Jewish understanding — when he writes, “Do not forget hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained strangers” (Hebrews 13:2).

The psalmist’s portrayal of “one who walks blamelessly and does justice” does not always describe Abraham (as when he lies about his wife Sarah on a different occasion), but it rings true when he quickly provides abundant hospitality to his guests. In the Gospel story, however, a woman is commended for not performing hospitality to her most honored guest.

In Luke 10, Mary sits at Jesus’ feet in the posture of a disciple at the feet of her rabbi. Her sister Martha is upset that Mary is shirking the duties of hospitality, leaving her to do all the work necessary to honor a guest. But Jesus affirms that Mary has chosen the better part, the one thing that matters — listening to Jesus.

For Paul, too, Jesus is the one thing that matters. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians is from prison. Perhaps he is reflecting on his death when he writes that in his flesh he is “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Colossians 1:24). Elsewhere in his letters, Paul connects suffering on Christ’s behalf with following Christ into death (2 Corinthians 4:11; Philippians 3:10–11). All the members of Christ’s Body (the Church), united with Christ, will follow his path of suffering, redemption, and resurrection. Paul repeats the words mystery and glory: What a mystery! What glory awaits.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

With the refrain, “He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord,” the responsorial psalm today acknowledges the necessity of the just life. The psalmist sings that the just person “shall never be disturbed.” The US Bishops’ document *Economic Justice for All* argues for biblical justice, stating: “The rich biblical understanding portrays a just society as one marked by the fullness of love, compassion, holiness and peace” (60).

In the second reading, we hear St. Paul call Christ’s followers “holy ones.” *Gaudium et spes* notes humanity’s special place among creation because “women and men were created ‘in the image of God,’ able to know and love their creator” (12).

Liturgy and Life

(1) How are acts of hospitality a way of doing God’s work? (2) The responsorial psalm speaks of one who “thinks the truth in his heart.” How does a pure heart reflect God’s love? (3) When has the necessary activity in your life challenged your prayer life?

Universal Prayer

Those who do justice live in the presence of God! And so we offer to him the needs of the world.

For the Church, that she will be a merciful hospital healing hearts and wounds, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**



Photo © John Zich

The second reading for the Seventeenth Sunday reminds us of the powerful transformation that baptism effects in our lives.

For leaders of nations, that they will be empowered to sustain and respect the diversity of those they govern, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For our community, that we may hear the Word of God and act on it, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For contemplatives, that they may show us how to listen, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For missionaries, that they may show us how to serve, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For guests, that they may find respite and welcome, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For the sick and suffering, that they may know God’s compassion, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

For all who have died, that they may dwell in the Lord’s house forever, we pray: **Hear us, O God.**

Concluding Prayer

O God,
you call us to hear your Word.
You inspire us to act on it.
May we be inspired by Martha and Mary
to listen to you and serve those in need.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Readings

The Old Testament and Gospel readings illuminate the psalmist’s claim: “The Lord is exalted, yet the lowly he sees” (Psalm

138:6). In Genesis 18, the Lord has heard an outcry against the wrongdoing of two cities, and he intends to investigate. Before he does, the Lord remains standing in Abraham's presence, quietly inviting his new covenant partner to deliberate with him. God, remarkably, involves a lowly human in his plan. Abraham acknowledges his status by referring to himself humbly as "but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27), a phrase Job also used (Job 42:6). Yet Abraham speaks boldly to God, wondering if God might save the city for the sake of fifty innocent people. When God easily concedes, Abraham tries for forty-five, then for forty. God keeps saying yes, so Abraham starts dropping the number by ten — what about thirty, twenty, ten? This is not a bargaining session, for God never makes a counteroffer. He simply says yes to all of Abraham's requests. In fact, Abraham stops asking before God stops agreeing.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he teaches them to pray with Abraham's boldness. First, he teaches the Lord's Prayer. Then he tells them a parable about persistence. The point is not that God needs to be pestered. Just as God remained standing before Abraham, waiting for him to make a request, God is the friend who lies always awake on the other side of the door, eagerly awaiting a knock.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians brings us back to the theme of lowly humanity by reminding us that we, although but dust and ashes, have died and been raised to new life along with Christ. Our baptism reenacts the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, a pattern revealed by the cruciform shape of some early baptisteries.

Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition

When asked to teach the disciples to pray, Jesus introduced them to an intimacy in prayer, directing that they call God "Father." Also in the account, Jesus explains that God will respond to at least the degree as would any friend or father. In its explanation of prayer, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) quotes St. John Chrysostom: "Nothing is equal to prayer; for what is impossible it makes possible, what is difficult, easy. . . . For it is impossible, utterly impossible, for the man who prays eagerly and invokes God ceaselessly ever to sin" (CCC, 2744, St. John Chrysostom, *De Anna*, 4, 5: PG, 63, 585).

Jesus' regular prayer on his own bought the disciples to ask him to teach them to pray. Surely, these disciples prayed with others in the temple, but they wanted to know how one prays individually. Praying both in the community and alone are necessary, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* instructs. The document states: "The spiritual life, however, is not lim-

ited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians are indeed called to pray in union with each other, but they must also enter into their chamber to pray to the Father in secret" (12).

Liturgy and Life

(1) Take time this week to slowly pray the Our Father to realize what each phrase means. (2) What does it mean to ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive others? (3) Are you able to extend forgiveness to the degree that you ask to be forgiven?

Universal Prayer

On the day we called for help, the Lord answered us. So in kindness and truth, we turn to him in need.

Help the Church witness the compassion of Christ, we pray:
Lord, hear our prayer.

Renew the hearts and actions of world leaders, we pray:
Lord, hear our prayer.

Strengthen the spirit of those who assist the poor and the marginalized, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Grant wisdom to those who work for justice and peace, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Enlighten the hearts of those who are blind to injustice, sexism, and racism, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Welcome those who have passed to the heavenly feast, we pray: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Merciful God,
we know that you are there, listening to our pleas.
Make your presence known to us,
and grant us your comfort and welcome.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MICHAEL R. SIMONE, SJ, wrote the Scripture reflections, which were excerpted from *At Home with the Word 2025* (LTP, 2024). The citations in Connections to Church Teaching and Tradition have been excerpted from *Scripture Backgrounds for the Sunday Lectionary, Year C: A Resource for Homilists* (LTP, 2018). The petitions in the universal prayer and the concluding prayer have been adapted from *Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays 2025* (LTP, 2024).