

Reflecting

On Sunday's

Readings

July—2025

The following series is **free, downloadable small-group materials** based on each week's Mass readings and 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 minutes 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. 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.** (The booklet *A Facilitator's Guide*: is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)
3. 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.
4. 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?"
5. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.
6. 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.
7. 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,

Richard A. Cleveland
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THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 6, 2025

Introduction: Evangelization and witnessing is often a fearful prospect for many Catholics, yet it is the Christian mandate and one of the highest callings we can pursue. This week's Gospel Reading can help remove that fear by showing us that witnessing for Jesus is simply living and relating to others in such a way that they comprehend that "the Kingdom of God has come near." For many in this world that is the beginning of hope; the realization that God and his life is accessible to them. This passage from the Gospel of Luke is pregnant with principles of evangelization which when applied can remove the anxiety associated with evangelization and contribute to the effectiveness of our witness. These principles include:

METHODOLOGY—The Lord "**sent them on ahead of him, two by two.**" Evangelization always works best when it is a joint effort of two or more people. A companion in Christ reduces the stress of relating and talking to someone about Jesus and it more than doubles the creativity and wisdom that can be brought to the process of revealing the Kingdom of God to others. Having another with whom we can pray for people's conversion is very empowering. Together you can seek the Holy Spirit's intervention to soften and prepare the hearts of pre-believers so that they will be ready to welcome the Good News of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice for them.

ATTITUDE—The Lord said, "**I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.**" One reason witnessing has received such a bad rap, and causes many Catholics to shy away from it is that we know and, in many cases, have experienced, the abuses of overzealous witnesses who did not have the attitude of a lamb. Lambs are gentle and meek, humble of heart if you will. It would be totally out of character for a lamb to beat the wolf, or any creature, over the head with the truth. As witnessing lambs, we, with confidence, tell others the Gospel truth of which we have become certain, but we must not attempt to overpower them into the Kingdom. If we are praying for them, if we are romancing them with the loving words of truth, accompanied by a humble spirit of service, they will frequently be wooed into saying "Yes!" to Jesus' offer of redemption and union.

RELATIONSHIP—The Lord instructed them to "**remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide ... heal the sick in it**" Evangelization should not primarily be an onslaught of religious words and challenges but rather an incarnational dwelling among those without Christ. The witness must be willing to dwell among them as a visual aid of God's love within their environment, embracing their culture, and carrying their concerns. In this way Christ comes to dwell among people again, in the form of the witnesses who lend their bodies to Christ so that he can convey his love through them.

MOTIVE—"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this ... rejoice that your names are written in heaven." There is great joy in observing someone's passage from darkness to light. We are thrilled to see someone unite with Christ with whom we have been instrumental in communicating the Gospel, yet we must not be motivated by a trophy mentality. Our relationship with Christ must be the motivating factor for all we do. It must be so meaningful to us that the reason we are witnessing is not for personal glory, but so that others might also experience the joy we know in Christ. He is our motive.

Christ desires to reach the world, beginning with *your* world and *your* witness. **It's unreasonable that a witness should have to be sent from half-way around the world, or even from across the city, to bring the Gospel to *your* neighbors or *your* acquaintances.** That is why he has you there.

First Reading — Isaiah 66:10-14

¹⁰ "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹ that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory." ¹² For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip, and dandled upon her knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

¹⁴ You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies. ..."

1. What would motivate a person to keep this good news to himself?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 66:1-7, 16, 20

¹ Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; ² sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! ³ Say to God, “How terrible are thy deeds! So great is thy power that thy enemies cringe before thee. ⁴ All the earth worships thee; they sing praises to thee, sing praises to thy name.” [Selah]

⁵ Come and see what God has done: he is terrible in his deeds among men. ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land; men passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in him, ⁷ who rules by his might for ever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves. [Selah]...

¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. ...

²⁰ Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!

Second Reading — Galatians 6:14-18

¹⁴ But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

¹⁶ Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

2. What is the primary point of verse 15?
3. What are some other false standards of spirituality?
4. What are some areas of life where you have seen evidence of this “new creation” in others?

Gospel Reading — Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.

⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house.

⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹² I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town. ...

¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

5. To what extent have you recognized the appointment or calling of God to participate in evangelization?
6. What joys and/or fears do you have about sharing Christ with others who are not yet believers?
7. How do you think someone recognizes that the Kingdom of God has come near them?

Scripture text is from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, (New York: The National Council of Churches) 1997, c1994.
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THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 13, 2025

Introduction: Some years ago, I read a book that discussed the deterioration of the legal system in western society. It rightly pointed out that the majority of people in the legal profession have become more concerned with what is legal rather than with what is just. By way of support it pointed out how often criminals who are knowingly guilty of horrendous crimes are being set free from prosecution due to legal technicalities. Are they legally being set free? Certainly. Is it just and right that someone who is knowingly guilty does not have to account for their crime? Certainly not!

The lawyer who confronted Jesus in this week's Gospel Reading, in a similar way, was not concerned about what was just and right, but about what was legal. His question had to do with what was the legal minimum requirement necessary to get into heaven. There is a difference between what is legal and what is just and Jesus did not get trapped into playing the "legality" game. His answer provided the Scripture's legal minimum, however the Scripture's legal minimum is a broad, all encompassing, statement of heavenly justice; "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*"

This answer points out that the legal minimum is total surrender to loving God and loving people. So in an attempt to avoid the uncomfortable position of examining the wholeheartedness of his love, the lawyer endeavors to change the subject by asking Jesus to clarify the legality of, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan once again points out the difference between a legal definition of "my neighbor" and a just definition. Each of the participants who passed by the injured man undoubtedly could have given a legal excuse as to why they couldn't stop and render aid, but they couldn't justify their indifference. Your love for God cannot end at the steps of your neighbor, and your love for your neighbors cannot end with the exclusion of strangers. **The love of God, of which Jesus speaks, encompasses all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and when present will of necessity overflow and touch all whom we encounter.**

Neither the lawyer, nor we, can meet the legal demands necessary to "inherit eternal life." It is beyond our capacity. So the Father provides a Sacrificial Lamb, the Lord Jesus, not primarily to meet only the legal requirement of our redemption, but rather to make "just" the nature of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Only when he redeems us, and brings about that inner change, can we love God with *all* our being. Only then will his love in us flow over into unselfish love for our neighbor. When our thinking shifts from concern about what is *necessary* as good Catholics to escape perdition and attain heaven, to what is *possible* for good Catholics to express our love through Christ, only then will we see our love for God growing and overflowing from our life to others.

"Neither of these two kinds of love is expressed with full maturity without the other, because God cannot be loved apart from our neighbor, nor our neighbor apart from God. Hence as many times as Peter was asked by our Lord if he loved him, and as he attested of his love, the Lord added at the end of each response, 'Feed my sheep,' or 'feed my lambs,' as if he were clearly saying: 'There is only one adequate confirmation of wholehearted love of God—laboring steadily for the needy in your midst, exercising continuing care of them.'" (Bede, from *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol II, Mark*, page 165.)

First Reading — Deuteronomy 30:10-14

...¹⁰ if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹¹ "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' ¹⁴ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

1. How does this passage help define what it means to obey God?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 69:13, 16, 29-30, 32-33, 35-36 (Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36-37 NAB)

¹³ But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of thy steadfast love answer me. With thy faithful help. ...

¹⁶ Answer me, O LORD, for thy steadfast love is good; according to thy abundant mercy, turn to me. ...

²⁹ But I am afflicted and in pain; let thy salvation, O God, set me on high! ³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. ...

³² Let the oppressed see it and be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. ³³ For the LORD hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds. ...

³⁵ For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah; and his servants shall dwell there and possess it;

³⁶ the children of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it.

Second Reading — Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

2. Which characteristic of Christ is the most compelling reason for you to make him pre-eminent in your life?

Gospel Reading — Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, ³⁴ and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

3. Where do you see yourself in this encounter?

4. Which area of your life do you find is easiest to wholeheartedly love God? Which is the most difficult?

5. If a person found themselves lacking in compassion toward others, how would you suggest that they develop a compassionate heart?

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THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 20, 2025

Introduction: For those of us who are doers, this week's Gospel Reading provides both a point of identification and a point of challenge. Many of us can see ourselves in Martha. Like her, we get up each morning with a do-list a mile long that we developed during the night as we lay abed. We are so committed to serving God and others, and need to do so with such a high standard of excellence, we hit the ground running. Mostly, we feel it is easier to do it ourselves than it is to get someone else to do it at a level up to our standards, so the do-list never gets shorter. Though we love to serve and to do, at the same time, with a degree of self-righteous satisfaction, we are critical that others are not as committed and/or as efficient as we are. Deep in our heart we love to do, and love to do it well.

Interestingly, Jesus never condemns Martha, or us, for our commitment to work, especially work for him. What he does endeavor to do is to help us realize that when our do-list or proclivity to serve becomes excessive, starts creating anxiety in our heart, and distracts us from enjoying him, it is time to re-evaluate. He helps us do that by telling about two wonderful, godly women, Mary and Martha his friends, who sought to serve him and his ministry.

This passage tells us nothing about Mary's proclivity to serve, or her plans for ensuring that Jesus and his disciples had something to eat when they visited her and Martha. What it does tell us is that in the midst of a busy life and a full agenda, Mary chose to come apart from her duties to spend time listening to and talking with Jesus. No doubt she was just as fully conscious of all that needed to be done as was Martha, but she undoubtedly was also conscious of how important and essential is Jesus' life and teaching.

We assume, because of Jesus' comment about Martha's "anxious and troubled" spirit that Mary was calm and peaceful in spirit. Two wonderful women, servants of God, both subjected to the same busy environment, yet with very diverse conditions of inner peace. One, Mary, who chose to set apart time to visit with Jesus, and one who did not, Martha.

Did one love him more than the other, probably not. But one understood her priorities more clearly in Jesus' opinion because she chose to listen to and talk with him. Jesus said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*" Our inner peace is directly connected to Jesus the giver of peace, and the primary way we daily access that peace is through his presence.

Years ago, Robert Foster began challenging Christian men who were too busy to spend time in Jesus' presence through sacred Scripture and in prayer, to simply set aside "7 Minutes Alone With God." Only seven minutes, not very much time, and no one expected such a little amount of time to make a difference. It was such a little bit of time that men could hardly come up with an excuse why they couldn't find time for seven minutes. As you can guess the seven minutes of reading sacred Scripture and praying became so vital that it went from seven minutes, to fifteen, to thirty minutes, and became an anchor for their daily life and gave peace in the midst of a busy life.

"We live in a worry-filled world. We find ourselves occupied and preoccupied with many things, while at the same time feeling bored, resentful, depressed and very lonely. In the midst of this world the Son of God, Jesus Christ, appears and offers us new life, the life of the Spirit of God ... A hard struggle is required. It is the struggle to allow God's Spirit to work in us and recreate us. But this struggle is not beyond our strength. It calls for some very specific, well-planned steps. It calls for a few moments a day in the presence of God when we can listen to his voice precisely in the midst of our many concerns" (from *Making All Things New* by Henri J.M. Nouwen)

What about us, can we find a measly seven minutes each day to read the Scriptures and pray? **We, like Mary and Martha, do have the freedom of choice and can either choose each day to pause in his presence, or not to—let's choose the good portion.**

First Reading — Genesis 18:1-10

1. ¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, ³ and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight do not pass by your servant." ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

1. Why is hospitality such a vital ministry?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 15:2-5

² He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;

⁴ in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

⁵ who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Second Reading — Colossians 1:24-28

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.

2. What are the characteristics of a person who is becoming spiritually "mature in Christ"?

Gospel Reading — Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house.

³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; ⁴² one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

3. Are you more like a Mary or a Martha? Explain.
4. How would you feel if you visited in Martha's house, and both she and her sister Mary left you alone to prepare the meal?
5. In what way do you think Jesus meant that it was "needful" for Martha to follow Mary's example?

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THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 27, 2025

Introduction: Prayer is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith and one of the most difficult, yet most fruitful disciplines. It requires simple faith, not great faith, but simple faith. If it required great faith it would only be available to a few. Faith, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, ...*” is the ability to believe God for things which we do not currently see. Consequently, prayer is both our first line of offense and the first line of defense in spiritual warfare, for spiritual warfare is the unseen battle for the souls of people.

Rightly so, did the disciples recognize early in their relationship with Jesus that his life was marked by prayer, and that power and union with the Father was somehow linked to this discipline of prayer. They did not hesitate to ask, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The disciples were not religiously ignorant men. They were schooled in the prayers and praying of their Jewish faith, but they recognized that somehow Jesus’, and also John the Baptist’s, level of praying, exceeded that with which they were familiar. So they asked, “Lord teach us to pray.” Perhaps that is the first lesson of this week’s Gospel Reading; **when we recognize the ineptness of our prayer-life we need to humbly ask Jesus to teach us to pray.** Imagine what would happen if for a month or two you daily asked him to do this.

Ask another to teach you to pray and they probably will take you to their bookshelf or the local religious bookstore to find one of the myriad how-to books on the subject. Jesus simply taught them a useable format, so powerful that it has had enduring value for centuries both as a learned prayer and as a valuable pattern for praying. You can learn some things about prayer by reading about it, but you really learn to pray by praying. Imagine what would happen if along with your request to Jesus to teach you to pray, you began praying the Lord’s prayer daily for a month or two, not simply as a prayer but also as a pattern for other prayer.

Interestingly, in response to the disciple’s request, the other two things Jesus taught regarding prayer were to be persistent (“*Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you,*”) and to have confidence that God will do better than we ask (“*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father ...*”) Prayer takes discipline, it is spiritual warfare and requires faith, we need to learn to never give up. This message is especially vital in our culture of instant gratification where delay is not an option, and *having it now* is expected.

What could possibly entice us to be persistent when our prayers are not instantly answered? It could only be the conviction that God is really hearing us when we pray and that he has promised that his solutions will exceed our needs. If we perceive the Father to be like the man Jesus talked about, one from whom we have to wrestle help, we won’t persist. But Jesus shows us that the Father is not that way, rather he is more loving than the most caring parent. He will respond to our requests with answers that exceed our needs. If we believe he is the Gracious Giver we will persist in prayer.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of the Lord’s prayer says, “Now, I make bold to add a little to what Scripture says; for the present congregation needs instruction not so much on how to pray, as on the necessity of praying at all, a necessity that has perhaps not yet been grasped by most people. In fact, the majority of men grievously neglect in their life this sacred and divine work which is prayer. In this matter, therefore, I think it right first of all to insist as much as possible that one must persevere in prayer ... secondly, that we must listen attentively to the Divine Voice which proposes to us the manner in which we should offer prayer to the Lord.”

So let us begin afresh by asking, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

First Reading — Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰ Then the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

²² So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham drew near, and said, “Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are

in it? ²⁵ Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶ And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷ Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

1. What can we learn about prayer from Abraham's experience?

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 138:1-3, 6-8

¹ I give thee thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing thy praise; ² I bow down toward thy holy temple and give thanks to thy name for thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness; for thou hast exalted above everything thy name and thy word.

³ On the day I called, thou didst answer me, my strength of soul thou didst increase. . . .

⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he knows from afar.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou dost preserve my life; thou dost stretch out thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, and thy right hand delivers me.

⁸ The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; thy steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of thy hands.

Second Reading — Colossians 2:12-14

...¹² and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

2. What purpose or motivation for prayer do you find in this passage about our salvation?

Gospel Reading — Luke 11:1-13

¹ He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread; ⁴ and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

3. What aspect of the Lord's prayer is most meaningful to you?
4. What aspect of your prayer life would you most like to have Jesus help you change?
5. Describe how you think God is viewing you, and your requests, when you pray?

Scripture text is from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, (New York: The National Council of Churches) 1997, c1994.
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