

# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

May—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.** (An excellent small-group training resource is *A Facilitator's Guide* which is available through the Emmaus Journey website.) (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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# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER—May 4, 2025

**Introduction:** This week's Gospel Reading tells of Jesus' third appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. The first and second appearances were recorded in the passage we reflected on in last week's Gospel Reading. In the first post-resurrection appearance Jesus breathes on his disciples the Holy Spirit and gives them the Great Commission. In the second post-resurrection appearance he dispels Thomas' doubts and welcomes him into a full faith. This third appearance which we read about this week re-emphasizes Jesus' power and authority, it re-institutes the basis of communion, and re-affirms the command to "follow me."

Seven disciples, Peter, Nathanael, the two sons of Zebedee, Thomas and two others, return from an unsuccessful night of fishing just as the sun is rising. As they near shore they encounter a man who calls to them and tells them to cast the net on the right side of the fishing boat, which they do. Surely, there must have been something unusual and commanding about Jesus for these tired fishermen to pay any attention to him. Having been raised in Maine near the harbor, I can assure you that if you or I stood on the shore and similarly instructed tired professional fisherman who had spent the early hours in fishing failure, how to fish we would quickly discover how little attention would be given to us. But Peter and the disciples did as they were instructed and surprisingly hauled in a potentially net-breaking catch of 153 large fish. The significance of this event was immediately obvious. John instantly recognized that it was Jesus, and Peter knowing who had orchestrated this miracle, dove into the water and swam to shore, abandoning everything to once again experience Jesus' presence. Jesus was recognized by the power and authority that resides in him.

Previously, the last meal they ate with Jesus was the Passover meal which he hosted for them on the night in which he was betrayed. We must keep in mind that Jesus was betrayed not only by Judas' notorious act, but also the notorious abandonment of Jesus by all his disciples, though John later stood with him at the cross. It was there in that upper room, that Jesus prepared a meal within the meal, for he took the common bread and wine of the Passover meal and offered it as the meal of his body and blood, the body and blood of a new and everlasting covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Surely, experiencing a little bit of residual guilt, the disciples must have rejoiced to see on the shore that their Lord had prepared another meal for them, provided the substance of the meal, and invited them to partake. As he broke the bread and distributed it to them how they must have rejoiced remembering that previous meal and the assurance of forgiveness. In spite of past sins and failures communion with Jesus was made possible on the basis of his provision and grace.

Then the focus uncomfortably shifts to Peter. We wonder if Jesus did not detect in Peter doubts regarding the full extent of Jesus' forgiveness toward him. Luke's Gospel tells us Jesus warned Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren." Did Peter and the others recall both Jesus' words of warning and the words of hope, or did Peter simply recall in his heart his three-fold denial of Jesus?

In any case, Jesus three times asks Peter the same question, "Do you love me?" With each assurance by Peter Jesus affirmingly replies, "Feed my sheep." Jesus further assures Peter of the significance of his future contribution by indicating how Peter would die in service to God's glory. Lastly, Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me," once again offering to Peter a lifetime of companionship as he fulfills Jesus' call to follow him. Communion was now complete for Peter, forgiveness fully experienced, and purpose fully restored.

No doubt we can see ourselves in the lives of these ordinary men who became Apostles of the Church. Were they so very much unlike us? No. Rather we find that we have much in common with them. We too have tasted the joy of Jesus' fellowship. We too have denied him, all too frequently. He also offers us forgiveness and

a lifetime of companionship. He too calls to us, “Follow me.” Consequently, these events in their lives were written for our example that we might learn from them and follow their Lord, and ours, with our whole heart.

For the texts corresponding to this Sunday’s Readings please either consult with your New American Bible, or the USCCB (United States Council of Catholic Bishops) website.

**First Reading — Acts 5:27-32, 40-41**

1. At what point should we be willing to suffer, and if necessary, even oppose authority in order to be witnesses?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13**

**Second Reading — Revelation 5:11-14**

2. If you could do one thing in your life, or with your life to show that you believe, “Worthy is the Lamb,” what would it be?

**Gospel Reading — John 21:1-14 (Short Form)**

3. What lessons does this passage teach about dealing with people’s failures?
4. What do you think was the motive that led Peter to a lifetime of service to Christ?

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# Reflecting

On Sunday's

## Readings

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—May 11, 2025

**Introduction:** In a world noted for divisions between people, Jesus' statement that, "I and the Father are one," stands out in stark contrast. Whereas "oneness" is the hallmark of the Divine relationship, disunity is the hallmark of humankind's relationships. Wherever we look in the world, division and its accompanying hostility is rampant; nation against nation, culture against culture, race against race, party against party, individual against individual, husband against wife, sibling against sibling, child against parent, and unfortunately even Christian against Christian. Everywhere we look people are attempting to establish their value by devaluing others, and to establish their prosperity at the cost of others. In the midst of all this hatred and conflict Jesus stands in stark contrast declaring that unity and oneness define his eternal relationship with the Father.

From the beginning Christ offered the world a chance to unite as one, bringing individuals from "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues" into one united body of love. Though Christianity was born from within Judaism, Christ had forever intended to be a "light for the Gentiles" as well. Finally, people who previously would have had little or nothing to do with one another are made "one" in Christ. Jesus did not do this by making the Gentile, Jewish, nor by requiring the Jew to become like the Gentile. Rather, as it points out in Ephesians 2, he brought about this unity by making of the two, one new being. When either Jew or Gentile puts their faith in Christ and accepts salvation through him they become citizens in spirit, of a New Kingdom whose benefits and demands require a higher allegiance than any they may have previously held. The Trinity's distinguishing characteristic of unity offers hope of peace to a world of fractured relationships—however the world can only learn the reality of this oneness by observing the unity that exists within his body.

Unfortunately, the way Christians relate to one another is often more of a scandal than a testimony of hope, and often functions as a detour sign rather than a signpost pointing clearly to Christ. The roots of this disunity are planted in the soil of fear, and nourished by the manure of pride and self-righteousness. In disunity our gaze is focused primarily on the differences of others, and upon the supposed perfection of our own position. However, the roots of unity are planted in the Holy Spirit, and nourished by the light of the Father's love, and the reality of Christ's passion. Consequently, in everlasting gratitude our gaze should be shifted both from the differences of others and from our own supposed perfection. Instead, we should focus on Christ's dwelling within the other believer, and on the reality that Jesus values the other members of his body so much, that he willingly died for them. To speak and act hatefully toward a believer of a different theological persuasion than our own is to speak and act hatefully towards the temple of the Holy Spirit, and is more representative of the Pharisees treatment of Christ than of Christ treatment of us.

We collectively are his sheep. We may have wool coats of various colors and textures but his Spirit dwells within each of us, and that is what makes us sheep. Let's determine to hear his voice and follow him, and to not focus on our non-essential differences. In so doing we will both experience and manifest that perfect unity which the Son has with the Father, consequently, we will not only provide a living message of hope for the world but also find ourselves more unified in our beliefs. "In effect, this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion. The faithful are one because, in the Spirit, they are in communion with the Son and, in him, share in his communion with the Father. 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3)." (from *Ut Unum Sint* by John Paul II).

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**First Reading — Acts 13:14, 43-52**

1. What do you think Paul and Barnabas meant by urging them “to continue in the grace of God”?
2. What role did the Word of God play in this conversion process?
3. What would it take for the Word of God to spread throughout all of *your* region?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 100:1-3, 5**

**Second Reading — Revelation 7:9, 14-17**

4. What principles or conditions for unity do you discover in this passage?

**Gospel Reading — John 10:27-30**

5. Why do you think Jesus uses the analogy of sheep to describe us, his followers? How sheep-like are you?
6. What have you learned about listening to his voice, and following him?
7. What is the relationship between following Christ and dwelling in unity with others?

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## On Sunday's Readings

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—May 18, 2025

**Introduction:** A group of professionals asked several children, ages 4-8, “What does love mean?” The answers they received were both humorous and insightful, for instance;

- “I let my big sister pick on me because my Mom says she only picks on me because she loves me. So, I pick on my baby sister because I love her.”
- “If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate.”
- “When you tell someone something bad about yourself and you’re scared they won’t love you anymore, but then you get surprised because not only do they still love you, they love you even more.”
- “Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.”
- “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.”
- **“God could have said magic words to make the nails fall off the cross, but he didn’t. That’s love.”**

These responses are in some ways the down-to-earth simplicity of Paul’s love list in 1 Corinthians 13. These children, unconfused by the sophistication of maturity, were able to accurately perceive the presence of real love. This is what Jesus refers to with his comments in this week’s Gospel Reading —“By this all men will know that you are my disciples.” Jesus was ever aware of his mission and calling to not only bring about man’s salvation, but also to usher in his Kingdom by spreading the awareness of it throughout the world. Consequently, he was concerned that after he was physically gone from the earth, there should remain a real physical witness of salvation and its power. Christ intended that witness to be—disciples who love.

Love began with the incarnation. The Father, motivated by love for us, sent his Son to live and dwell among us. The Son in complete agreement with the Father’s love laid aside his divine rights and humbly accepted the mission when he was implanted in Mary’s womb as a vulnerable babe. “The very Son of God, older than the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the incorporeal, the beginning of beginning, the light of light, the fountain of life and immortality, the image of the archetype, the word of the Father: he it is who comes to his own image and takes our nature for the good of our nature, and unites himself to an intelligent soul for the good of my soul, to purify like by like.”<sup>1</sup> This is what is meant when John says, “God so loved the world that he gave his only son.”

Love came to completion through Christ’s passion on the cross. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified.” When Judas went out to confer with Jesus’ enemies and to betray Jesus, the process of his passion on the cross began. As the child recognized **“God could have said magic words to make the nails fall off the cross, but he didn’t,”—that’s love.** Sacred Scripture explains it this way, “Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friend.” Love culminated with Christ’s passion on the cross, it defines and establishes what true love really is—sacrificing your well-being for the well-being of another so that the Father is glorified.

That which makes Jesus' statement to "love one another" so powerful is the qualifying phrase, "as I have loved you." Jesus was not talking only of the way he related to these disciples while walking on earth, but also of his ultimate act of love, his sacrifice on the cross. That is the way they, and we, are to love one another. Jesus is building his Kingdom. People, though they may not know it, are deeply longing to be loved by God and to be a part of his Kingdom. They are looking for evidence that Jesus and his Kingdom are real. We, by our love for one another, are the witnesses as to whether these things are true.

1. Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, bishop, from *The Liturgy of the Hours, Vol II: According to the Roman Rite*, 1975 edition, "Tuesday Office of Reading," page 161.

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**First Reading — Acts 14:21-27**

1. What was the process God used to build his Kingdom in these early days of the church?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 145:8-13**

**Second Reading — Revelation 21:1-5**

2. What do you conclude regarding the statement "Behold, I make all things new"—new heaven?, new earth?, new Jerusalem?, new what? What newness has Christ brought to your life?
5. What aspect of the new heaven and new earth is most appealing to you?

**Gospel Reading — John 13:31-35**

6. When the disciples looked back on Jesus' love for Judas, how do you think it clarified and magnified his command to love "as I have loved"?
7. Why do you think Jesus was concerned that people know that these disciples were his?
8. What should we do if our manifestation of love for another person is refused and rejected?

# Reflecting

## On Sunday's Readings

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—May 25, 2025

**Introduction:** As we read this week's Gospel Reading we need to keep in mind that Jesus is not only talking to us but was first of all talking to his disciples, the future apostles of the Church. Though there is definitely a corollary message and application for us, the immediate message was for these future leaders. Jesus had spent his ministry years being continually harassed by the scribes and Pharisees who, much like an annoying little dog nipping at one's heels, constantly nit-picked Jesus' message, totally missing the heart and spirit of his words. Jesus did not want the path of his followers to go down into a similar quagmire of spiritual legalism. So on this last evening with them he explained how they can avoid this trap.

As so often with Jesus, we see that an emphasis on knowledge alone is superseded by an emphasis on knowledge applied. Twice Jesus repeats that if we love him, we will "keep" his words. The spirituality of a person who knows only a little of Jesus' word yet reveres and does what he says, far exceeds that of the person who knows much, but applies little. Keeping his word is so important that Jesus promises that the Father will reward that person by making his home with them. A desire to keep his word will lead us to focus on the heart and intent of Jesus' teachings—what did **he** mean for us to **be** as a result of them. When we **become like Christ**, we automatically **do** the right thing. Whereas if we simply become a present-day Pharisee our focus will be on making sure that we externally do the right things, frequently missing the internal transformation of spirit which should take place.

The other significant factor in avoiding this quagmire of legalism is yielding to the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have sacred Scriptures today because of this truth: "the Holy Spirit...will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." When the Holy Spirit indwelt these disciples, the Apostles of the early Church, he enabled them to remember the words and incidences of Jesus' life and to record them for posterity. In addition, he gave these Apostles spiritual insight that enabled them to sort through the theological issues of the emerging Church and discern and define truth. That is illustrated in the First Reading. Judaizers were following Paul and Barnabas' ministry and creating dissension by focusing on a legalistic form of Christianity, rather than on the spirit of Christ's teachings. On this point you may recall Peter's comment, that "no prophesy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." That is where the Judaizers got off base. They developed a doctrine in isolation that said, "Unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved." Had they consulted with the apostles in Jerusalem prior to preaching this doctrine they could have avoided disrupting the peace of these early believers. When they did not do so, Paul and Barnabas turned to the apostles in Jerusalem for clarification of this sticky issue. The promised Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to discern the truth, clarify the doctrine, and encourage these new Gentile believers in the faith.

What is the application for us today? It really is not that different, but nevertheless there are some very crucial lessons to understand. First, we too should strive to live the Word, and to not simply accumulate knowledge of it. Second, we should recognize and rely on the Holy Spirit to both enlighten our understanding

and enable us to live Jesus' Word in truth. Third, we should recognize the value of consulting with the Church's spiritual leaders for clarification of critical issues. *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, a pastoral plan for adult faith formation published by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, provides seven excellent guidelines in this area. The first three speak directly to what we have been thinking about:

- *Recognize communion with Jesus Christ as the definitive aim of all catechesis.*
- *Explore the Scriptures so that adults may be hearers and doers of the Word.*
- *Become familiar with the great teachings of Christianity... and their place in the hierarchy of truth...*

When we apply these principles to our lives we will contribute to the life, peace and witness of the Church.

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**First Reading — Acts 15:1-2, 22-29**

1. What lessons can we learn from the early Church about maintaining doctrinal purity?
2. Why do you think the apostles included "unchastity" in this list of three things to avoid?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8**

**Second Reading — Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23**

3. What should it mean to us that the twelve apostles are described as the foundation of the holy city's walls?

**Gospel Reading — John 14:23-29**

4. Illustrate what it means to "keep" Jesus' word.
5. What are some ways in which the Holy Spirit fulfills verse 26 in our lives today?
6. How is the peace Jesus gives, different than the peace the world gives?

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