

# Identity of Jesus in the Sunday Lectionary Readings

One of the easiest way to incorporate an exploration of the identity of Jesus into programs and gatherings is by reading and reflecting on the Sunday Lectionary Readings. Here is a simple process you can use by reading the Sunday Gospels throughout the year. The readings of Easter Season (Spring) and Ordinary Time (Winter, Summer, and Fall) are highlighted

## Prayer

Light a candle recalling its symbolism of the presence of Jesus, Light of the World, in our midst and then pray:

As we light this candle let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you came among us to show us how to live. Your words and deeds are recorded in the Scriptures and have been passed on to us through the ages by people of faith who have gone before us and by the traditions that we practice. We believe that you are with us now. Help us to be open to your Word today so that we may hear the message that you intend for us. May we be both affirmed and challenged by your Word. Amen.

## Reading

Read the Sunday Gospel reading. Ask each person to repeat words or phrases that struck them as they listened. Think about what Jesus is telling us about who he is through this Gospel reading. After a few minutes, share your reflections.

## Reflection

Take time to reflect upon and discuss these questions:

- What are we learning about Jesus in this Gospel reading?
- How will this understanding of Jesus help us to follow him more closely?
- What is Jesus challenging us to do?

## Prayer

Pray the Our Father and then conclude with the following prayer of thanksgiving.

Lord Jesus we thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit to lead and guide us according to your Word. Be with us as we strive to put into practice the example you gave us by your life.

## Gospel Readings Focusing on the Identity of Jesus

Fourth Sunday of Easter-A: I am the Gate for the Sheep: John 10:1-10

Fourth Sunday of Easter-B: I am the Good Shepherd: John 10:11-18

Fifth Sunday of Easter-A: I am the Way and the Truth and the Life: John 14:1-12

Fifth Sunday of Easter-B: I am the True Vine: John 15:1-8

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Healing the Leper: Mark 1:40-45

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Healing the Paralytic: Mark 2:1-12

Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Healing the Centurion's Slave: Luke 7:1-10

Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Healing the Son of the Widow of Nain: Luke 7:11-17

Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Calming the Storm: Mark 4:35-41

Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Who Do the Crowds Say that I Am?: Luke 9:18-24

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-A: Take Up Your Cross: Matthew 10:37-42

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Healing the Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with Hemorrhages: Mark 5:21-43

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Who is My Neighbor?: Luke 10:25-37

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: I am the Bread of Life: John 6:24-35

Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: I am Living Bread: John 6:41-51

Twenty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time-A: Who Do You Say I Am: Matthew 16:13-20

Twenty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Humble Yourself: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Healing a Deaf-Mute Person: Mark 7:31-37

Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Who Do You Say I Am: Mark 8:27-35

Twenty-Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Son of Man to Be Handed Over; Be Servants of All: Mark 9:30-37

Twenty Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time-A: Deny Yourself: Matthew 16:21-27

Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C: Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31

Twenty-Eight Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Sell What You Have and Follow Me: Mark 10:17-30

Twenty-Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Son of Man Came to Give His Life as a Ransom for Many: Mark 10:35-45

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B: Healing Bartimaeus: Mark 10:46-52

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time-A: Great Commandment: Matthew 22:34-40

Thirty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time-A: Be a Servant: Matthew 23:1-12

# Many Names for Jesus

Jesus asked his disciples this question: “Who do you say I am.” In the New Testament, there are many responses. Fill in the blanks choosing a word from the list below.

Messiah	God	Teacher	Word	Lord
Beloved	Prophet	Son of David	Master	King

1. Paul called Jesus the ‘image of the invisible \_\_\_\_\_.’ (Colossians 1:15)
2. You are the \_\_\_\_\_, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16)
3. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the \_\_\_\_\_ was God. (John 1:1)
4. You are my Son, the \_\_\_\_\_; with you I am well pleased. (Mark 1:10-11)
5. This is the \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. (Matthew 21:11)
6. You call me \_\_\_\_\_ and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. (John 13:13)
7. Bartimaeus cried out even more loudly, ‘\_\_\_\_\_, have mercy on me!’ (Mark 10:47)
8. The lepers called out, saying, ‘Jesus, \_\_\_\_\_, have mercy on us!’ (Luke 17:13)
9. Thomas answered him, ‘My \_\_\_\_\_ and my God!’ (John 20:28)
10. They asked, ‘Where is the child who has been born \_\_\_\_\_ of the Jews?’ (Matthew 2:2)

Answers: 1-God; 2-Messiah; 3-Word; 4-Beloved; 5-Prophet; 6-Teacher; 7-Son of David; 8-Master; 9-Lord; 10-King

# I Am

Consider these Jesus statements from John's gospel:

"I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).

"I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)

Take a moment to meditate on each statement. Now, complete the following statements. Share your responses with someone who knows and loves you.

- Jesus, you are the bread of life for me because . . .
- Jesus, you are the light of the world for me when . . .
- Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life for me by . . .

# I Am the Bread of Life

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

To further ponder Jesus as the bread of life, why not prepare a loaf of bread from scratch? As you prepare each ingredient, read together what the ingredient contributes to the loaf of bread (see below). What connections can you make to Jesus' statement about being the bread of life?

Bread making also demands patience, for it takes time for it to rise and bake, so while you are waiting, why not nourish each other by reading together this magazine together.?

## A Simple Bread Recipe

### Ingredients

- **2 tsp. dry yeast.** Yeast makes the bread rise. As Catholics we are called to be leaven in the world, yeast in the world, that we might help the kingdom of God rise to fulfillment. How are you yeast?
- **1 1/2 cups warm water.** Water dissolves the yeast and helps the ingredients to mix. When we are baptized we are immersed into water that cleanses, refreshes, and plunges us into the life and death of Jesus. How are Christians like water in today's world?
- **1 tsp sugar.** Sugar helps the yeast to grow and sweetens the bread. What helps you to grow in your faith?
- **1 1/2 tsp. salt.** Salt brings out the flavor of the bread. How do you flavor the world, bring out the best in the people around you?
- **1 tsp. melted butter or vegetable oil.** Fat helps the bread to stay moist. What do you do to keep your faith from becoming stale?
- **3 1/2 cups unbleached white flour (or 2 1/2 cups white and 1 cup whole wheat flour mixed).** Flour provides substance and weight to the bread. What brings substance and content to your life as a Christian?

### Directions

1. Place the warm water (bath tub comfortable temperature) into a medium-sized mixing bowl, stir in the sugar, then sprinkle the yeast on top. Wait about five minutes until the yeast has dissolved and begun to foam.
2. Add the melted butter/oil and the salt.
3. Stir in the flour with a wooden spoon until it becomes too difficult to manage.
4. Turn the dough out onto a well-floured board and let it rest--absorbing more of the flour--while you clean out and oil the bowl using a piece of paper towel that you have dipped into some oil.
5. Knead the dough, working in additional flour as needed, until it is smooth and elastic, and just beyond feeling sticky (about 5 minutes).

6. Return the dough to the bowl and cover with a damp towel. Leave it to rise for about 1 1/2 hours until it has doubled in bulk.
7. Punch the dough down with floured hands.
8. Form the dough into a loaf and place in a greased bread pan.
9. Let the loaf rise until it is double in size.
10. Put the loaf in a preheated 425-degree oven, for the first 15 minutes, then turn the oven down to 350 degrees for another 15-20 minutes.
11. Take the bread out of the oven and gently tap it out of the pan; it should sound hollow when tapped on the bottom. Allow it to cool thoroughly on a rack before slicing.

# Stories of Jesus and His Friends

1. Choose a favorite or well-known Gospel story.
2. Read the story silently. Close your bibles, and sit quietly for a moment, allowing the story to seep into your memory.
3. Now, as a group, retell the story in your own words. The first person begins the story with a line or two and then stops. Someone else chimes in with the next line or two. Continue until the story is told. Don't worry if the re-telling is not complete or accurate or in the right order. Each person remembers the parts that mean the most to them.
4. When the story is told, take another moment of silence, and then discuss as a group what it was like to re-tell the story. What was emphasized? What was missed? What did you learn about Jesus?
5. Conclude with this simple prayer. Jesus, thank you for all the great stories you bring us, and thank you for teaching us something new every time we hear them. Amen.

# Empty Yourself

Have you ever stopped to think what the Second Person of the Trinity gave up when he was incarnated as the person Jesus? He had it made in heaven, hanging with the Father and the Spirit in perfect love and perfect community!

But St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians,

“who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross” (Phil. 2: 6-8).

If Jesus could empty himself of his divinity to live like us and show us how to live, we can't help but respond. We can look at how Jesus lived his human life and try to follow his example. What did Jesus *do* as a human person?

- He prayed to his Father a lot.
- He challenged people not to sin but forgave them unconditionally.
- He criticized the powerful who used their power to hurt others.
- He stood for the poorest of the poor.
- He loved everyone he met with no strings attached.
- How can you do each of those things in your life?



# Stained Glass Windows

Does your church have stained glass windows? Do those windows depict scenes from the Gospels? Many older churches have elaborate and beautiful windows showing scenes from famous Gospel stories. If not your church, perhaps there is a church in your town. Make a visit to that church with your family or your faith-sharing group. Or go to the library and find a pictorial book on stained glass windows.

Look carefully at the windows. Allow your memory of Gospel stories come to the forefront of your mind until you can identify the story in the window. Talk with each other about what you see in the windows—the faces of Jesus and others, their emotions. Place yourself in the story. How would you have felt? How would you have acted?

After your visit, make an attempt to create your own “stained glass” picture. What gospel story do you want to depict? Read the story. Draw the picture and color it in. Share it with someone.

# Describing Jesus

Studying and learning about Jesus is called *Christology*. We know that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. Think of words to describe Jesus' divinity and words to describe Jesus' humanity. List them in the appropriate column. The first one in each column is done for you.

<b>Jesus is fully divine.</b>	<b>Jesus is fully human.</b>
Jesus healed people.	Jesus felt pain.

# A Jesus Cinquain

A cinquain (pronounced "sin-cain") is a special type of poem. Think about what Jesus means to you. Following the directions, write a cinquain about Jesus. A sample cinquain is done for you.

Jesus  
divinely human  
teaches me love  
offering himself in exchange  
Savior

---

a one word title

---

---

two words describing your title

---

---

---

three words (verbs) describing an action related to the title

---

---

---

---

four words describing a feeling about the title, a complete sentence

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---

one word that refers back to your title

# Be the WORD

John's Gospel proclaims that Jesus is the Word of God. Webster's Dictionary defines a word as "a speech sound or series of speech sounds that symbolizes and communicates a meaning . . ." How can you convey the meaning of Jesus to those around you?

- You can talk with family members, classmates, and friends about Jesus, his undying love, his suffering, death and resurrection, his miracles and teachings. Set aside a few minutes at the end of each day to describe for each other how Jesus has been present in your life over the last 24 hours.
- You can read the Word in Sacred Scripture to learn more about Jesus. Choose a time each day to become immersed in the Word of God. Select passages which fit your current needs, or read through the different books of the Bible chapter by chapter.
- You can witness to Jesus at work or at school. This might be silent witnessing—being an example of Jesus' kindness and care for the "least of our brothers and sisters." It might be wearing a cross, a bracelet, a T-shirt or another item of clothing or jewelry with a religious symbol on it. Remember—this means you take on the responsibility of living the meaning of the symbol you are wearing! And it might be sharing the Good News of Jesus with your co-workers or fellow students.

# Incarnation

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes Incarnation as “the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation” (461). The Catechism uses Paul’s description in Philippians 2 to capture the awesome self-giving of the Second Person of the Trinity:

“. . . Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross” (Phil. 2: 5-8).

How do we as followers of Jesus respond to this perfect act of self-giving?

What else can we do but give of ourselves to others like he did?

How can we be anything but humble when the Second Person of the Trinity emptied himself of his godliness to be with us and show us how to live as human beings?

## Relate to Jesus

When you think of Jesus what image comes to mind? One of the amazing things about Jesus is that while totally divine, he experienced our humanity. The gospels are full of stories of Jesus experiencing life much in the same way that we do right now. Think about this: how can you connect what you experience with the life of Jesus?

When you experience the loss that comes from the death of a friend, think about Jesus and how he reacted when he learned that his friend Lazarus had died (John 11:1-44).

Has anyone ever betrayed you? You thought they were your friend and they ended up stabbing you in the back? Imagine how Jesus felt when Judas betrayed him, and with a kiss no less (Luke 22:47-53).

Have you experienced anger when something important to you is treated with disrespect? Jesus got angry too when the money changers and the merchants turned the temple into an opportunity to exploit God's people (Matthew 21:12-17).

What other personal experiences can you think of that Jesus could relate to? When you pray, talk to Jesus about how you feel, read the gospel stories to uncover how Jesus felt during his time on earth. Jesus' experiences are another opportunity to enter into a deeper relationship with him.

## What *Would* Jesus Do?

Incarnation means God became *one of us*. He entered our human condition and showed us how to live. Our response to the Incarnation must reflect the way Jesus lived as a human being. We can measure our lives by Jesus' example. Consider the following:

- Jesus had total integrity. You demonstrate integrity in your life by being true to yourself—as a person created in God's image and likeness. You speak the truth even when it's risky. Your outer actions match your inner values.
- Jesus had a vision which he called the "Kingdom of God." You are visionary when you have a long-range plan for your life which includes perfect union with God in heaven. You set goals which reflect your baptismal call to be a disciple of Jesus.
- Jesus had compassion. You care about people who are suffering. You donate money for relief for victims of famine, war, and natural disasters. You volunteer time at a local shelter or other agency which strives to alleviate injustice. You speak out on behalf of those who have no voice.
- Jesus served others. You give someone who is tired or anxious your place in line. You pick up after others without complaint. You take seriously Jesus' teaching that the last shall be first.

# Keeping the Dream Alive

Jesus set an example for us by the way he remained true to his dream—a dream of a world in which everyone would have enough. Jesus gave people hope for a future which doesn't include hunger, homelessness, or fear. He shared his dream, which he called the kingdom of God, as he taught his followers how to live.

As disciples of Jesus, we are also called to make his dream a reality. Every time we pray the Our Father, the words “thy Kingdom come” are a commitment to help realize Jesus' dream.

Rosa Parks dreamed of a world in which she could take her rightful place on the bus as a *person*. She imagined a world where the color of her skin wouldn't determine her status or cause degradation. Her courageous stance contributed to the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Jonas Salk dreamed of a world free of the crippling effects of polio. His discovery of a vaccine to combat polio helped the world come close to eradicating this terrible disease.

What is your dream for the world? What gifts has God given you to realize this dream? What steps can you take today to make your dream one step closer to reality?



# Christian Acronym

Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Using each of the letters in the word CHRISTIAN, create an acronym that describes the way Christians are to live their lives. One has been done for you as an example.

C  
H  
R  
Inviting and welcoming others into our faith community.  
S  
I  
I  
A  
N

## “The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me”

The “end times” referred to in many Advent Scripture readings are also called the eschaton, the second coming of Christ, or the reign of God. Under any title, the Kingdom of God is one in which justice, love and peace are prevalent, God’s will is perfectly realized and evil is vanquished forever.

This Kingdom was Jesus’ goal when he proclaimed his mission on earth:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ (Luke 4: 18-19)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* instructs that “Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of Christ’s kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil.” (CCC 680) In the meantime, we disciples are challenged to make the reign of God real by living the way Jesus did—caring for the poor and vulnerable in our midst and sharing the Good News of Jesus with all whom we encounter.

# Examination of Conscience

John the Baptist called the people to repentance in preparation for the advent of Jesus in their lives. We, too, are called to repentance when we fail to be the people God created us to be.

During Advent, participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a profound and appropriate way to demonstrate our desire to be “ready” for the birth of our Savior in the world. In preparation for the sacrament, a simple examination of conscience can help us enter into the experience of repentance and forgiveness in a deeper, more meaningful way. We can ask ourselves the following questions to prepare for Reconciliation:

- Does my life reflect the example which Jesus set for me by his life?
- Does my life bring joy into the lives of others?
- Do I share the blessings which God has bestowed on me with those in need?
- Am I a person of peace as Jesus was, or do I cause conflict and division by the way I live?
- Do I pray regularly so that I am in touch with God’s will for my life all the time?

Preparing for Reconciliation is one way to keep our promise to God—to be people who try to lead sinless lives and follow the way of Jesus.

# Messenger of Hope

One of the great Advent/Christmas themes is hope. Jesus' entry into the human condition, his acts of love, his suffering, death and resurrection, teach us that there is hope for a better world. The end of the story has already been written, and we *will* live "happily ever after" because our God has redeemed us by the sacrifice of his Son.

How can you be hope for a world filled with suffering, war, hunger and despair? During this holy season, can you commit to:

- Being optimistic and positive when those around you are being negative?
- Looking for the good in each person you encounter?
- Making a donation to an agency like Catholic Relief Services to bring hope to those in the most desperate living conditions?
- Examining your conscience at the end of each day by asking if the world is a little bit better because of your presence in it today?

# Jesus' Anointed Ones

Messiah means anointed one. Just as Jesus was the anointed one of God, we are called to be Jesus' anointed ones.

Take a small dish, fill it with scented oil, and then bless it, praying the following words while making the sign of the cross over the dish:

We (I) bless this oil in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May it remind us that we too are blessed in a special way by God's presence in our lives through his Son and his Spirit.

Take the oil and make the sign of the cross with it on each person's forehead, saying, "You are blessed! Be a blessing to others."

# Are You Happy?

Are you a happy person? Do you love being alive?

One of the most precious gifts of Jesus' resurrection is that of joy. We disciples know that our faith story has a happy ending: love really *is* stronger than death, and goodness triumphs over evil—all proven by Jesus' resurrection. That gives us reasons to celebrate and be happy.

Do you share the joy of the resurrection with other people? Do you make your parents, brothers and sisters, teachers and classmates, co-workers and people you meet on the street happy? Here are a few ways you can spread the joy of our faith to others:

- Practice random acts of kindness.
- Make eye contact and smile at strangers.
- Laugh daily.
- Think of three things for which you are grateful before you go to bed each night.
- When you do feel down, talk to someone who can help.
- Remind yourself daily that God loves you with no strings attached. There is nothing you can do to make him stop loving you!

# Discernment

Our lives are touched, shaped, and changed because of the people we love and the people who love us. This was true for the disciples who walked with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus. Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, and the apostles recognized him. Immediately they knew the feeling of being close to Jesus. This breaking of the bread, which we share in Eucharist, sent them to share their experience with others. They were forever changed.

The Easter season provides each of us with a chance to discern what we will do because of our experience of the risen Christ.

- How will I seek out Christ's presence through prayer and participation in the sacraments?
- How will I seek out Christ's presence through my relationship with the poor, through generosity to those in need, and through service?
- How will I share Christ's presence to those who need a sign of hope in their life?
- How will I let Christ's presence call me to something new in my life—new community, new relationships, new way of sharing my time and talents, new way of sharing my life with the world?

# Meet Us in Our Questions

Jesus walked with the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus and joined them in their questions. Acknowledge your questions by gathering with family members for a simple prayer and sharing.

Begin by reading Luke 24:13-27.

Ask members to share: What would you ask Jesus if he was walking on the road with you today? Record the questions without discussion.

After everyone has shared, pray together:

Loving God, bless our questions and our wanderings towards you. Meet us in our questions and guide us to know your heart more closely so that we can understand your will and serve your people. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who walks with us. Amen.



# People of Hope

In a holiday appeal from a soup kitchen, a homeless man described his conversion in this way: “I used to be a hopeless drug addict, now I am a drugless hope addict.” What would it mean to be a hope addict? It means persisting in hope when that notion is ridiculous, naïve, and contrary to the evidence.

Easter calls us to be people of hope. The disciples, despite their doubts and misunderstandings, saw the risen Christ. There must have been a flicker of hope that sustained their faith from the garden, to Calvary, to the empty tomb, and to the upper room. This hope and faith allowed their eyes to be opened and their lives to be changed.

As Christians, our lives should be a sign that God’s love is more powerful than any situation, any crisis, and any tragedy that we may encounter. Take a moment to reflect on hope in your life.

- What do I hope for? For myself, my loved ones, my community, and the world we live in?
- How is my life a sign of hope? With whom do I share my hope?
- What helps me to be more hopeful? What robs me of hope?
- What is one concrete thing I can do to be an Easter sign of hope for others?

# Feed My Sheep

In Jesus' encounter with Peter on the lakeshore (see John 21), he asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus tells him, "Feed my sheep." In this conversation, Peter is reconciled with Jesus, whom he had betrayed.

How do our lives feed sheep? We are called by the Gospel to make choices about how our lives are part of the healing of the world.

One way that our lives put Jesus' command into practice is through the sharing of our financial resources. Take a moment this Easter season to reflect on how you can share what you have with those most in need. Research local agencies or consider national Catholic agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, and Jesuit Relief Services USA.

# Celebrate Your Baptism

Mark the anniversary of your baptism, or the baptisms of family members.

To prepare for this ritual, place a lit candle, a piece of white cloth, a small vial of scented oil, and a clear dish of water on the table. Then pray the following prayer:

Loving God, today we remember that we were baptized into your family. We became your children. We pray today for the grace to be open to your call and to embrace this call with joy. Help us to bring your good news to those who despair.

Help us to bring Jesus, the bread of life, to those who hunger for you.

Help us to love others as you love us, to forgive others as you forgive us, to heal broken hearts as you heal our own hearts.

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus and in the Spirit, whose presence in our lives gives us the courage to live as your children.

Amen.

# Disciple Acronym

Jesus calls each of us to follow him as a disciple. Using each of the letters in the word disciple, create an acronym to help you illustrate or define what you think the word disciple means.

**Doing the will of God, like treating people nicely.**

**I**

**S**

**C**

**I**

**P**

**L**

**E**

# Attitude of Gratitude

At the heart of discipleship is gratitude. It is not guilt or fear that produces a committed disciple, but gratitude. A true disciple of Jesus develops a deep realization that all is gift, that we never deserve the graces God bestows upon us, and that our best response to God's gifts is gratitude.

A deep sense of gratitude has the power to transform our hearts and our world. Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life, turning what we have into enough and more. Discipleship is a grateful response to the gifts and blessings God places before us daily.

This attitude of gratitude is for all moments in our life, not just when life is trouble free. The ability to find something grateful in every situation in which you find yourself is the ability to be a disciple that understands both the cross and the resurrection.

How can we nurture this attitude of gratitude?

1. Reclaim the ancient art of writing thank you notes or cards to anyone who gifts you; not just with a physical gift but the gift of time, teaching, coaching, and so on. Be specific about what you are saying thank you for.
2. At one point during each day—at the supper meal, at bedtime, and so on—name two things that you are grateful for on this day.
3. Create a gratitude box to read each year at Thanksgiving. Throughout the year, write down the things you are grateful for. On Thanksgiving Day open the box and read all the slips. Start a new collection for the following year.
4. Host an annual affirmation gathering in which family and friends are given a means to share the gifts they have seen in each other over the past year? Or, as a family, host a monthly meal in which everyone says something they have appreciated about each family member that month.

# In Thanksgiving for God's Word

Try this simple ritual. You will need a bible and a candle.

Light the candle and open the bible to Isaiah.

Begin by saying:

We gather to celebrate God's word. Words are important. They can praise or hurt someone, sell or buy something. They teach, nurture, and warn us. They help us feel elated or put down. God sent Jesus as His Word to the world to show us the power of love and forgiveness. When we celebrate Eucharist, Jesus is as present to us in the scripture being proclaimed as he is in the consecrated bread and wine.

Discuss together this question:

What is your favorite Scripture story or passage?

Read aloud the passage from Isaiah 55:10-11.

Pray together:

Jesus Christ, Word of God, we believe in the power of your word to take root and bear fruit in our lives. Bless our hearts and minds to be open to your word. May it empower us to live out your words in the world. Amen.

# Pick a Parable

People of all ages love stories. Children can learn a great deal about the Gospels when told the stories contained therein.

Try this activity at the dinner table each time your family eats together. Pick a parable in advance and read it over once or twice. When all are seated and eating, tell the story in your own words, as best you can remember. Then sit back and see what conversation follows. If a teaching moment arises out of the story, seize the opportunity. But don't force it. Sometimes, children and others will just want to enjoy the story.

Pick from any of the parables noted in this magazine, or choose from this list:

The Two Debtors, Luke 7:41-42

Mustard Seed, Mark 4:30-32

The Gold Pieces (parable of the talents), Luke 19:12-27

The Lost Sheep, Matthew 18:12-14

The Faithful and the Wicked Servant, Matthew 24:45-51

The Sower, Mark 4:3-20

The Unjust Steward, Luke 16:1-13

Wise and Foolish Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13

The Weeds and Wheat, Matthew 13:24-30

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18:9-14

# Understanding Parables

In Jesus' day, his listeners easily understood his parables because the images and analogies that Jesus used were common place: baking bread, fishing, planting, herding sheep. Through his parables, Jesus challenged the powerful and educated people, Pharisees and others, but was also understood by common people.

Most of us today can only imagine what it's like to fish for our food, or herd sheep, or raise crops, or even bake bread. Yet the parables still have important lessons for us. We just need to translate the images and analogies to things in our own experience, such as preparing meals, commuting to/from work and school, going to meetings, tending the yard, and so on.

If Jesus taught in your town, what images and analogies would he use in his parables?

Who are the people Jesus would challenge?

Who are the rejected ones whom he would seek to include?



# Conversion Through Parables

Jesus used parables to help his listeners realize their personal resistance or blindness to the Good News he was proclaiming. We are given two important tools to help us read the parables and to understand the conversion to which we are challenged.

Put the parable in context. Prior to the parable, who is Jesus talking with, and what are they talking about?

Become aware of your own judgments as a result of the parable. That usually means something within ourselves that needs changing.

Let's use these two tools to help ourselves revisit what we are called to as disciples.

## **The Parable of the Tenants**

- Step One: Read Mark 12:1-12
- Step Two: Prior to the parable, who was Jesus speaking with, and what were they talking about?
- Step Three: Who do you identify with in this parable? What do you think Jesus is trying to tell his listeners? What behavior and attitudes is he challenging? What is the parable challenging us to do as disciples?

## **The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

- Step One: Read Matthew 18:10-14.
- Step Two: Prior to the parable, who was Jesus speaking with, and what were they talking about?
- Step Three: Who do you identify with in this parable? What do you think Jesus is trying to tell his listeners? What behavior and attitudes is he challenging? What is the parable challenging us to be and do as disciples?

## **Parable Three: The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**

- Step One: Read Matthew 18:21-35.
- Step Two: Prior to the parable, who was Jesus speaking with, and what were they talking about?
- Step Three: Who do you identify with in this parable? What do you think Jesus is trying to tell his listeners? What behavior and attitudes is he challenging? What is the parable challenging us to be and do as disciples?

# Pearls of Grace

Try this simple ritual as a family, a small group, or as an individual.

Light a candle. Take at least one full minute of silence.

Invite participants to bring to mind “Scriptural Pearls of Grace.” These are phrases, passages, verses, or references to stories from the Bible that you carry in your mind and heart. Invite participants to voice these pearls, in soft tones, as they come to mind. No order, just fill the room with sounds and images of the Scriptures.

When the pearls have been voiced, one person can pray aloud: “Lord Jesus you have given us pearls of great price through your Word. We thank you for sustaining us through your Word.

Keep the spirit of quiet and invite participants to bring to mind the people in their lives whom they love, and who love them. Take one full minute of silence. Like before, invite participants to voice the names, in soft tones, of loved ones as they come to mind. No order, just fill the room with names.

When the names have been voiced, one person can pray aloud, “Lord Jesus, your love comes to us through those who love us. Your love goes to them in our love for them. Thank you for loving life into us through all those we carry in our hearts. Amen.

# The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses ordinary examples to teach about the kingdom of heaven. Fill in the blanks choosing a word from the list below.

Sea	Landowner	Flour	Seed	Treasure
Yeast	Merchant	Mustard	Fish	Vineyard

1. The kingdom of heaven is like \_\_\_\_\_ hidden in a field. (Matthew 13:44)
2. The kingdom of heaven is like a \_\_\_\_\_ in search of fine pearls. (Matthew 13:45)
3. The kingdom of heaven is like a \_\_\_\_\_ that was thrown into the sea and caught \_\_\_\_\_ of every kind. (Matthew 13:47)
4. The kingdom of heaven is like a \_\_\_\_\_ seed that someone took and sowed in his field. (Matthew 13:31)
5. The kingdom of heaven is like \_\_\_\_\_ that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of \_\_\_\_\_ until all of it was leavened. (Matthew 13:33)
6. The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good \_\_\_\_\_ in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. (Matthew 13:24b-25)
7. The kingdom of heaven is like a \_\_\_\_\_ who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his \_\_\_\_\_. (Matthew 20:1)

Answers: 1-Treasure; 2-Merchant; 3-Net, Fish; 4-Mustard; 5-Yeast, Flour; 6-Seed; 7-Landowner, Vineyard

## For Me, the Kingdom of Heaven is . . .

Through the parables we learn about the Kingdom of heaven and what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. Think of examples from your own life to describe the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is like

because

The kingdom of heaven is like

because