



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
February 9, 2017

Introduction to the Word:

“If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you” (James 1:5).

We live in the most technologically connected culture in the history of the world. And yet, polls and studies show that loneliness is one of the greatest struggles and problems of our age. God created us to be in relationship with one another; yet, loneliness still affects each of us at one point or another.

Even though loneliness affects our human condition, the fact is that we are never alone. God is always present and with us. God did not make us to be alone, but to be full of purpose and joy through meaningful relationships with God, other people, and even our own self. To counteract our feelings of loneliness and lack of identity, Jesus tells His followers they are the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world.”

Salt in the ancient world was a valuable commodity. We get our English word “salary” from salt because soldiers were often paid with this commodity. It served as flavoring for food but, more importantly, it was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling.

Jesus says that lights are always put in strategic places to illuminate a house. In the same way, God has put each of his followers in a strategic place to shine his light, to illuminate his ways. God wants to use you at work or at school, on the lacrosse field, or in your social circles to see him better. And while often we think our environments are somewhat accidental or random, they never are. God has placed us strategically to be a light for others.

For us to be salt and light for a world that desperately needs it, we must live in right relationship with others, God, and ourselves. Ultimately, it is living with that purpose that helps us to overcome loneliness.

This Lord’s Day, a bigger message is shared. Jesus tells His followers — who, for the most part, lacked any kind of political or social influence, lacked any major material resources, and lived in the backwater of the Roman Empire — that they are to be the preservative of culture. By living out the values of Jesus and following Him, they are to preserve their environments from the decay and the corruption that comes from sin.

Warm-Up:



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Today, spend some time in prayer asking God to strengthen your relationships and give you grace to be hopeful and at peace even when you feel alone.

Name a person from whom you have felt disconnected recently. Pray for that person and ask God to help you start seeing how to reconcile your differences.

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: The Lord Jesus invites us to turn to God and seek the true wisdom that can only come from God, wisdom that is peaceful, gentle and merciful.

Lord Jesus, for the times we have sought earthly wisdom over divine, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, for the times we have sought wisdom without prayer, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, for the times we have not seen the true wisdom of the cross, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Sirach 15:15-20)

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and they will save you. If you trust in God, you too shall live, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. The Lord placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, good and evil and whichever one chooses that shall be given. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every human action. He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and he has not given anyone permission to sin. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)

Brothers and sisters: Among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret



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and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. As it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 5:17-37, short version)

Jesus said to His disciples: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that the one who is angry with their brother or sister, will be liable to judgment; and whoever insults their brother or sister, will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you: Do not swear at all. Let your word be 'Yes,' if “Yes,' or 'No.' if 'No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one. The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

[You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord's Day Message](#)

The Scribes and the Pharisees were considered the most righteous people in that culture. They maintained this regard because they obeyed and enforced a complicated list of religious laws meant to govern every aspect of the people's relationship with God and others. While the religious leaders knew and followed God's laws and the Old Testament Scriptures, they had missed out on the main point: They had become focused more on externals than the heart of the law. The culture of the Scribes and Pharisees had come to promote righteousness or right living that was superficial and only skin deep.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. His goal is to change and transform people from the inside out, not add more laws. “Surpassing” the righteousness of the religious leaders did not mean obeying more and harder laws, but rather being transformed from the inside out. As our hearts change, our actions will naturally follow because our character is being formed.



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The first reading today, from the Book of Sirach, a wisdom book, tells us this: “If you trust in God, you too shall live.” In the second reading, from the First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul tells us: “We speak a wisdom to those who are mature.” And the Gospel from Matthew today reminds us that it is not external behavior that determines everything, but what is more important is what is happening in our hearts and the external behavior that flows from what is happening in our hearts.

God’s Word is challenging us today to deep conversion in our lives. God’s Word reminds us over and over that to follow God is not only about external behavior but about the conversion of our hearts and our way of living because of a deep, personal relationship with God. To follow God is a commitment to a living relationship with God and from that relationship comes our external behavior.

The Book of Sirach tells us: “Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.” Life and death! We choose one or the other with our daily lives. We know that we can talk a lot about God and not do His will. We can observe rules without giving our hearts to the Lord. But our God is a consuming fire and wants us to give ourselves completely to Him. We cannot fool God!

The First Letter to the Corinthians continues this teaching, asking us to be wise people because God will give us His life if we give God our lives. Again, to be clear, we must know that we cannot fool God. God wants us to give ourselves to Him completely. God is not interested in good actions that lack our commitment to Him. God wants every bit of us.

Matthew’s Gospel tells us the same lesson: doing good actions that look good in the eyes of the world and yet which do not contain our completely commitment to Him is not enough: “Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’” We cannot fool God. God wants us to give ourselves completely to Him. May we give ourselves to God today and every day. He will give Himself to us beyond all that we can imagine!

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: *(15-20 minutes)*

- How would you define loneliness?
- Why do you think loneliness is an issue in our society?
- What are your thoughts on being alienated from yourself?
- How does being alienated from self, lead to loneliness?



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- Read aloud Genesis 3:8. What does this verse tell us that sin does with our relationship with God?
- How does blaming others for our mistakes, lead to loneliness?
- Jesus came to save us from our three-fold alienation: God, self and others. Where do you sense your greatest alienation in your life now and need Jesus' help?

Intercessions:

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

For our Holy Father, all bishops and priests, may the Lord continue to grant them every blessing they need to continue their important ministry as Shepherds of God's people. We pray to the Lord.

For the Lord's blessing and grace to touch the hearts of those who are discouraged and disheartened in life; may God increase their faith and inspire others to be a source of support and help. We pray to the Lord.

For our brothers and sisters throughout the world - The needy, afflicted and oppressed - especially in our parish missions in Haiti, Jerusalem and Kenya. May they know the love of Christ through the efforts of those who minister to them. We pray to the Lord.

For couples preparing for Marriage and for those living out the call to Married Life. May the Lord strengthen their bond of commitment and love. We pray to the Lord.

For those visiting our parish, those re connecting with faith, and all of us as a family of faith, may we continue to welcome and support each other in our walk of faith. We pray to the Lord

For those who are sick in body, mind or spirit: May they know God's healing presence in their lives. For those who have died, and for the intentions written in our parish book of prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: [Hail Mary](#)

Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT



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Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually –for the intentions of Pastor, our Pastoral Team, in their work to build up our parish.

A few weeks ago you were invited to choose one of the Beatitudes each day of the week, and try to concentrate on that virtue and how to exemplify it to the people in your life that day. How did that go? Share your experience with the group.

Consider this week committing to the “Nightly Examen” mentioned in our message this Lord’s Day – where did I see God today? Where did I miss God’s presence today?

Lent is not far off. Discuss as a group your plan for service, prayer, action during the upcoming Lenten Season.

GROUP ACTION:

- ✓ Is your small group helping with our commitment to aide St Patrick Parish, Hamilton and their downtown outreach? Remember any of these items can be placed in the Adoration Chapel Hallway – mark them “Hamilton.”
- ✓ How have you responded to God’s ardent love this week? Set aside a few minutes each day during this coming week to “waste time” with your loving God.
- ✓ Spend some time this week reflecting upon how God's grace is actively visible within you, within your family and friends, within the stranger you encounter on the street, within the sick and dying, within all people.

Let us pray (together)

*Lord Jesus Christ, we offer you our continued praise
for revealing to us on the cross that you truly are the Lord of Glory.
Grant us the wisdom to believe this in our minds and feel it in our hearts,
so that we may courageously proclaim it to the world.
We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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