



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

***TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME***

***October 1, 2017***



**Introduction to the Word:**

Living a faith centered life, is not always easy. It requires us to keep our eyes open to see the constant unfolding of God's grace upon us. The challenge to hear, absorb and respond to this message in the readings today is a constant, life-long journey. The Prophet Ezekiel, Saint Paul and Jesus all present us the Word of God and its call to live lives that accept God's love – are we listening?

Our Fall series is called [“We Are Better Together”](#) because in order to be successful at the task which is before us – and make sure we are listening – we need to travel in the same direction. It's easy to lose sight of the basics; it can happen in our family, at work, or even in school, and in the process we become confused about our purpose, mission and vision. This is why we're returning to the basics, taking a closer look at some of the foundational beliefs of our faith as well as the mission, vision, and strategies to serve our faith that we have developed as a parish.

Let's review together where we have been for the last few weeks, and as we launch our Small Group Season with this edition, let us move forward on a common pathway with the principles of the past few weeks in mind with one single chant which we must be about as a parish family: **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus.**

**Warm Up Activity:**

Let us spend some time reviewing the last few weeks:

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - September 9/10, 2017

Some 59 times in Scripture we hear the words “One Another.” We were reminded of the story of St Teresa of Calcutta who cared for a Muslim man, even though she was a Christian woman. She was drenched with a bucket of water by others who were disgusted, but used the water to hydrate the man in his last hours. She modelled knowing that it is *not about ourselves*, our interests, our



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ministries, what we think is “our spot, ministry or place” in the church – but welcoming and making room for “One Another.” This takes perspective.

As a parish family, we must ensure that by being a light on the hill with the Eucharist as our Core, and Hospitality, Evangelization and Faithfulness as our pillars we are seen to care for and serve one another. Thus we can live out our call **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus.**

### 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 16/17, 2017

Life tends to repeat itself it seems. Not only do several events seem to come around again, but sometimes some phrases repeat themselves. Maybe a phrase you have heard is: “I just don’t get him.” It might refer to a person, but sometimes it refers to God and the events of the world. With eclipses, hurricanes, earthquakes and senseless shootings in the news everyday it seems – it’s a repeatable phrase for sure. Yet the core reading this Lord’s Day becomes Paul’s letter to the Romans “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord.” (Romans 14:7-9)

This reminds us of our sense of purpose – what it is all about. That God did not create us to struggle. He is not dismissive of the pains going on in our world and in our lives, but He too is not the generator of them (original sin is). In His permissive Will, He will the events to bring us ever closer to His reality. Thus trials need not shift us – they can sanctify us. Tensions need not disturb us, they can delve us deeper toward Him. Trouble need not shock us, it can sail us in His direction. God should be inclusive of all going on in our lives. We don’t block Him out when trouble comes, but we bring those realities, needs and repeating events (and questions) to Him especially when we gather – thus the reason for the power of community. For if we tackle it in isolation then we live for ourselves. But with one another (a friend in faith) we live for the Lord. Thus why small groups become important and why we are better together.

### 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 23/24, 2017

Let us focus on the cross, or more specifically, the crucifix. Without it we are lost. But sometimes people choose not to look at it because they claim “it’s not fair”. Some remark – “A good man died that day.” Yet as the Gospel of the landowner and workers (Matthew 20:1-16) found a few people saying “its not fair” when they didn’t get what they thought they deserved, it became a parable to remind us once again that its not about credit, but Christ and seeking to be like Him – even by accepting the Cross!

This Lord’s Day we are asked if the mission matters. That it is not about credit – (eg “being publically thanked” or getting “what we deserve”) but that it is about not allowing the enemy of the human race to lead into our minds the game of distraction. He loves to preoccupy us with trivia, muttering (gossip), drama and fussing about what doesn’t matter – but the mission matters more - and we must not allow the enemy of the human race allow us to forget that we have the



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privilege to help find the lost - **offering every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus.**

Many organizations can feed the hungry, care for the sick (and we should too) but only the Church has the primary mission of paying forward what Christ did for us on the cross – that it is why it is central for us. And though all of us are imperfect to the task, all of us need only rely on His Grace to make it happen. And when we choose His Grace and are open to (in spite of storms in our life) in our lives (seen by faithfulness to His Will and Way) then we are better together.

Ok - *“What do you think?”*

- What stands out to you about the last few weeks of our series?
- What principle do you take with you as we enter this week and continue to move forward?

### **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** (Ezekiel 18:25-28)

Thus says the Lord: “You object, O House of Israel! You say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O House of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

“When the righteous person turns away from their righteousness and commits iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die.

“Again, when the wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. Because that person considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die.” **The Word of the Lord.** Thanks be to God.

#### **SECOND READING** (Philippians 2:1-11)

Brothers and sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, then make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.



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Let the same mind be in you that was in 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.

Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God of the Father.

**The Word of the Lord.** Thanks be to God.

### **GOSPEL** (Matthew 21:28-32)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I am going, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father?” They said, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.”

**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:**

#### **Consider hearing again the Sunday Message**

Today's gospel from Matthew, which takes place shortly after Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, presents us with the parable of the two sons, one who is obedient, the other, not so much. The parable of the two sons compares the chief priests and elders to the son who says he will obey the father, but ultimately does not. Jesus concludes by proclaiming that those who believed in John the Baptist (outcasts and sinners) will enter the kingdom of God before those who did not believe (chief priests and elders – the very people Jesus is addressing in the gospel today). If you were a religious leader hearing Jesus say this to you, how would you have responded to this “insult” by Jesus? The reason that Jesus said this to them was because they had an image of God which did not allow them to be faithful to their word. Their “Yes” was not a healthy one and in the end they did not fulfil the will, or walk in the way, of God.



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Sometimes what prevents us, and those that we know, from truly being faithful and being better together is our image of God. At times that image is rooted in the past. We relive our mistakes, replay our short comings, re-enact our hurts and those who have hurt us, we revisit the sounds of yesterday. This leads to the chant of self-rejection instead of the ballad of self-reflection. For so many people this self-written song not only becomes the theme music of their life, but it becomes an incredibly wrong song playing a self written voice of God in their lives.

Our God is not interested in our past – it was our past for which His Son died on the cross. God loves us without limits and desires to draw us near to Him – ready to forgive us for our failing and to move on toward the resounding echo of love, not judgement. This does not mean that God is deaf to our behaviour, or the events of the world, or the trials of life, but that He knows it for what it is – original sin – and desires us only to get past it – try again and live in His will.

This is where our “Yes” becomes crucial. The “Yes” we utter at Baptism, at Confirmation, and each time we approach the Altar for communion. It is at those moments that the we say our image of God is one who loves me, accepts me, forgives me and seeks to strength me to live in this world as I seek to, by my example, **to offer every person in our community a life changing encounter with Jesus**. Here too is where the Church – and a parish – becomes such an important instrument because it is not only allows us to know we are not attempting to do this by ourselves, but also it keeps “in check” our image of God and with “friends of faith” we are kept spiritually healthy and not inwardly focussed.

So will you say “yes” to God and not do anything? Will you say “no” to God and yet in the end at least try? Will you say “yes” to God live not in a “silo” of you, or in the “clammer” of the past or mutterings from others – but embrace the fact that we are better together!

*(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)*

Who are people in your life you can “invest in” and eventually invite to church? What about your relationship with them or their life makes you want to help them get connected with God?

Who is one person in your life you can disciple? Even if you don’t have anyone, talk about who you might hope to influence positively in your life?

Do you believe Jesus wants an intimate relationship with you? Explain. What is one step you can make to deepen your relationship with Jesus?



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### Intercessions:

**Leader:** Our response: Lord Hear us

- For the Church throughout the world, may we deepen our love and reverence for the gift of Jesus really and truly present in the Holy Eucharist. We pray to the Lord.

- That all Christians may we give witness to Christ by reaching out in kindness with our neighbour and share the gift of faith that has been placed in our hearts. We pray to the Lord.

- For our parish community, may we continue to strive to be place of acceptance, welcome and a home where we feel connected to the Love of God, and each other, with the Eucharist as the centre of our lives. We pray to the Lord.

- That all married couples may they deepen their commitment to Christ and to one another, and for families, may they continue to be examples of God's mercy and love. We pray to the Lord.

- For our youth, and for young adults attending college and university, may the gift of faith grow in their hearts and may they come to know how much they are loved by Christ. We pray to the Lord.

- May the sick and suffering members of our parish and our families. For areas of the world in anguish, for those dealing with struggle and strife in their lives - may we all unite our struggles to the cross of Christ and experience the power of His compassionate care. We pray to the Lord.

- For those who have died, and for those grieving the loss of a loved one, and for those we have promised to pray for. 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:**

As we begin the Small Group Season together are there actions in deed or prayer as a group you could commit to?

### **GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT**

- Consider together as a group a social outreach which connects to our parish – our Haiti Mission, doing a Service Saturday activity together, bringing "Canadian Tire Dollars", making quilts, helping the Outreach program at St Patrick Parish in Hamilton.



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- Sometimes we are reluctant to share our faith – to be a prophet even in our home town. Discuss and come up with a list together on how faith can be shared without having to knock on anyone's front door. These witnesses are quiet references to Christ as our reference point. (e.g. saying grace before a meal at a restaurant).
- Consider making a Holy Hour for the intentions of our parish community this week.

**Marian Pilgrimage:** Join us as an individual or as a small group on October 14<sup>th</sup> for this wonderful day of prayer – check your calendars and our bulletin or website for details.

**Tuesday Night Together:** Come join us on October 17<sup>th</sup> for our TNT night – but it's important to bring someone who has wandered away from faith or our parish.... Gentle way for them to reconnect....

**Looking for More:** Have you heard about [Starting Point?](#) Check out details and consider helping someone who has wandered away from faith or our parish to come back home.

**Let us pray** (together)  
*Almighty and ever-living God,  
through the power of your Word and Sacrament,  
may we be co-heirs in glory with Christ, to whose suffering we are united  
whenever we proclaim his death.  
Who lives and reigns, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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