



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

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 13, 2015

Introduction to the Word:

This Lord's Day Weekend we begin a four week Message Series called "A Way Forward". Any journey, long or short, is just a series of steps which we take seeking to find a way forward. Faith, as is often said, is a journey and it all comes down to simple steps moving us in His direction. We think there are basically four steps that the Bible teaches us to take toward greater maturity in our Catholic faith. To kick off the 2015-2016 year we're offering an all-new series taking a fresh look at those steps as we seek to discern *A Way Forward*. It's all about doing what disciples do and, in the process, finding our way to more successful living

There are so many different responses to Jesus, the **Messiah**, and many of them are firmly rooted in our religious tradition. This very fact causes much of our misunderstanding and explains our inability to relate to the person of Jesus. The people of Jesus' time held various views as to who he was. They commonly expected Him to act in a certain way, and almost always misunderstood him. Even the disciples were confused by what he said, and they too misunderstood him. Can we be so sure that we have the kind of insight they lacked? Can we claim to understand him? Or are we more like the people in James' community (2nd reading): people who professed faith in Jesus but who did not always live it out; people who often spoke pleasant *words* to others and said the right things but often failed to back up their words with how they lived their lives—their *good works*?

Warm-Up: Today's readings identify a number of questions. A few that deserve serious reflection:

- *Is your faith a real living faith in the person Jesus? An energizing faith? A life-giving faith? What might we be missing?*
- Today's readings and reflections are meant to help us consider seriously: **Who is Jesus?**

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: Today we will hear a message that reminds us that our connection to Christ is not so much a private relationship between me and God but one that necessarily involves our manner of relating with other people— our ability to trust others, to show compassion for others.

Lord Jesus, you are the word who keeps challenging us,

Christ Jesus, you are the prophet who speaks to us today;

Lord Jesus, you help us to hear your call and heed your word,

Lord have mercy.

Christ has mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you send us forth to make disciples of all nations and to give witness of your love for all people, help us be aware of those in our parish, community, city and world who need your mercy. Amen



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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 (Isaiah 50:5–9)

The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?
The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (James 2:14–18)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If brothers or sisters are without clothing and lack daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.
The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 8:27–35)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**
Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Jesus asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and



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take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.”

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:

[At this point please use the video Message for this series – Week # 1](#)

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

The fruit of silence is PRAYER. The fruit of prayer is FAITH. The fruit of faith is LOVE. The fruit of love is SERVICE. The fruit of service is PEACE. –Mother Teresa.”

Our focus on this first week of our message series is to remember that our call is foremost to be “Of God”. St James is saying as much in today's Second Reading: "*Faith without good works is dead.*" It is one thing to make a verbal declaration of faith weekly, to pray piously daily but if both are not backed up by a lifetime of authentic service and charitable outlook then it becomes – well odd! Our mission as Christians to build up the reign of God; it is quite clear what God requires of us: to be compassionate as Jesus was, to take care of the poor, to forgive each other, to welcome your enemy as a brother or sister. In other words, all our religious behavior is intended to get us to *the starting gate of good works*. But it must not end there!

When the journey of faith seems too difficult, when we are prone to experience to fatigue before the sea of human suffering, it seems that there are times when we really struggle to believe in the person of Jesus. At such times it is good for us to remember the wrenching struggle of the apostle, Peter in the Gospel.

Peter heard Jesus’ words about suffering and that is all they could comprehend. Hence Jesus for the moment became a stumbling block for them. Jesus knew their thoughts; He turned to them and sharply rebuked Peter in the hearing of everyone. “Get behind me, Satan!” By trying to dissuade Jesus from the cross and death, by trying to deflect Him from His divinely appointed purpose, Peter was renewing the vicious temptations Jesus had experienced in the desert. Jesus reacted to this TEMPTATION as He had done elsewhere to temptation with a fierce and determined reflex: “Get behind me, Satan!” Peter, and eventually all the disciples, must proceed to a deeper and holier understanding. Jesus wins for them the grace to realize the folly and the glory of the mystery of the cross. It is only then that they are truly able to say “You are the Messiah, the very Son of God.” In today's Gospel Jesus, asked the disciples "*Who do you say that I am?*" Peter then makes a great act of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This is precisely what Jesus is now asking of us!



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As we continue to give answer to the question: “Who is Jesus for us?” let us recall certain facts about Jesus’ background, identity and mission that have prepared the mission of the Church in the world today: Jesus bonded Himself with the unclean, the sick and dying, with sinners, and those living on the fringes of society. Through His life, Jesus puts biblical justice into practice in proclaiming the Beatitudes. Authentic justice is a bonding of one’s self with the sick, the disabled, the poor and the hungry. But He did not neglect others as well. He dined with the rich and the mighty as well as with the poor and downtrodden. He befriended sinners and the wretched of His times- never condoning their behavior, but inviting them to an alternative lifestyle. He teaches us that by “being with people” He also teaches and heals. His human solidarity with the unclean, the unjust and sinners also saves.

No matter what we try to accomplish, during our Way Forward, or how we try and answer the question of who He is for us - there’s no path marked “Easy.” Perhaps we want to be a doctor, a lawyer, a good speaker, an inspiring teacher, or a great athlete. All of these things have a common thread. They all require hard work, as well as desire. Wanting or wishing accomplishes nothing but disappointment.

That’s the message we hear in all our readings today. It’s more than just believing. Isaiah tells us things are going to be tough. That’s not a new revelation. It’s one we’ve heard frequently, but perhaps the message never really sunk in. James tells us that just believing is not enough. We must also “do”— do good works.

Then Jesus makes the message even clearer on the Way Forward, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Another call to action; another call to do something. Anything worthwhile takes hard work and perseverance. It’s no different with our faith. Why should it be? The prize is greater than anything we can accomplish here on earth.

So who do you say I am? How do we move forward? In order for us to answer we must be willing to trust, even in the confusion, to testify even in the moments of doubt, to set our face toward Him even in the times when the path seems unclear. We must remember we are Of God – and that this means He is holding us, but it also means we must act as if we are being held and testify to this confidence that all will be fine – we are His.

The Message this week – Are you of God? To you belong to Him in your actions, in your reactions, in your values, in your charity toward others (inside and outside of Church)?

*(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)



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“Who do you say that I am?”

- a) Who is Jesus for you today? Can you answer *personally* without using conventional religious answers? Give Jesus a name in your life: Is he Lord, Saviour, or King? Friend, Teacher, or Healer? Or something else? Share your opinions.
- b) Do you ever try to image Jesus as a human person? Describe the image of Jesus that you find most compelling. Describe the image you find most compelling and endearing.
- c) Do you think you would recognize Jesus if you saw him? Is it possible that you may have encountered Jesus in ways you never dreamed of? Comment.

“Go in peace, eat well, and stay warm.”

- a) Reflect briefly on situations where you witness people in dire circumstances, people who desperately need help. What is your typical response in such times? Would you agree that there is always *something* you can do? Share your thoughts.
- b) Do you ever find yourself frustrating your deepest values by investing time and energy in things and projects that really are of minor significance or importance? Share your experiences.

Closing Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to “outreach” to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

- Have each person in your group take a piece of paper and write their name on it. Place the sheets in a basket, tin. Each person take one as the tin is passed along. That person is now your “prayer partner” for the year. Do little surprises for them this year, pray for them each day. *(if someone new arrives in your group next week don’t forget to try and include them too)*
- Consider together as a group a social outreach which connects to our parish – our Haiti Mission, commitment to sponsoring a family at Advent, bringing “Canadian Tire Dollars”, making quilts.

Group Action:

- Address Jesus this week with different names. Each day choose a new answer to Jesus’ question: “Who do you say that I am? Try to live out the relationship for that day. Make note of what you learned about who Jesus is and next week discuss as a group.

Looking for More:

Consider the following background and resources as follow ups for your group, or individually

- [Tuesday Night Together](#) begins on October 6th. The title is “Me, Myselfie and I”. It is about discovering our life meaning as we seek to discover that we are here to Love God, Belong to Family, Serve, Go and Tell Others. [Sign up today](#)



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- *Bible Study: A Biblical Walk Through the Mass:* Do you understand the meaning behind the parts of the Mass? Dr. Edward Sri will explore the roots of the words and gestures we experience at Mass and explains their profound significance in this video-based Bible Study. Dates soon.
- *Looking for a good book?:* Archbishop Charles Chaput wrote a book “Living the Catholic Faith: Rediscovering the Basics. Written in 2001, it is still very much in mode with the questions and needed answers of today.

Let us pray - (together)

*Not in easy words, O God,
but in selfless deeds is the faith we profess
made real and the love our Master commanded made present.
Give us the strength to take up the cross and wisdom to follow where Christ leads,
losing our lives for the sake of the Gospel. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favors on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one,

OUR FATHER...

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