

Our Sunday Readings

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
10:25-26,34-35,44-48
PSALM 98:1-4
I JOHN 4:7-10
JOHN 15:9-17

Bearing Fruit

ACTS 10:25-26,34-35,44-48

Reading closely

1. How do you envision Cornelius?
2. What all might Cornelius feel as he meets Peter?
3. How do you think Peter feels when Cornelius falls at his feet in worship?
4. Who all do you think Peter counts among those who *fear God and act uprightly* (v.34)?
5. How do you imagine the Spirit manifesting itself?
6. How do you imagine Peter and his fellow Jews reacting to the Spirit's presence?
7. Do you think all of Peter's companions are pleased with what's happening?
8. What all might Cornelius and the others who live with him be thinking and feeling?
9. In what ways could this experience change Peter and his companions?

Living the word

10. Are there people you praise for their holiness? How do they react?
11. Do you ever try to control the Spirit?
12. What individuals or groups would you exclude from God's kingdom? Might God decide differently?

THE FIRST READING

To the Gentiles

After showing God fulfilling his promises to the Jews, Luke shows God offering salvation to Gentiles. The story of Cornelius transitions us from the apostles' ministry to the Jews to their mission to Gentiles. Cornelius isn't Jewish, but he is *devout and God-fearing* (10:1-2).

Astounded by the gift

Peter and the other Jewish apostles didn't know that God planned to offer salvation to everyone. Peter's words reflect his new understanding and acceptance of God's plan (vv.34-35).

The Jewish followers of Jesus are again taken by surprise when the holy Spirit comes upon Cornelius and his household before these Gentiles are baptized. The presence of God's Spirit reveals that God accepts these Gentiles who have accepted Jesus.

Becoming one

When Cornelius and his household are baptized, they become part of a community that fulfills God's promise of peace. Jews, Samaritans, and now Gentiles are unified by the Spirit.

JOHN 15:9-17

Reading closely

1. How do Jesus' other commandments all flow from the one given here?
2. How has Jesus kept his Father's commandments?
3. Do you think of Jesus as joyful?
4. How is Jesus' relationship with his Father similar to his relationship with his disciples?
5. What all does Jesus want for his disciples?
6. What all does Jesus expect of his disciples?
7. What are all the ways a disciple *bears fruit*?
8. How can disciples know their prayers will be answered?

Living the word

9. Would you describe yourself as a joyful person?
10. How is your joy incomplete?
11. Are there things you think Jesus hasn't shared with you?

THE GOSPEL READING

Interconnected

This passage comes right after the one we heard last Sunday. It continues the theme of remaining in Jesus. The Father's love flows through Jesus to us. Our love for Jesus flows back through him to the Father. Thus, through Jesus, we are all united to God and share in God's love. We only enter into this loving union with God, however, when we strive to love as faithfully as Jesus did.

Love one another

The only commandment Jesus gives in John's Gospel is *love one another*. Before giving it, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples (13:1f). He assumes the role of a *slave* (or *servant*) in order to help his followers understand the self-giving love to which he calls them. His startling gesture points ahead to his crucifixion.

The love we are to have for one another is thus all-encompassing. Hopefully we won't risk death as we strive to be perfectly loving people, but we will have to set aside our personal preoccupations and embrace the needs and concerns of others.

No longer slaves

Slaves couldn't ask why their master was giving them a particular order. They simply had to obey. By taking the time to help his disciples understand his mission, Jesus treats them as those who can now freely and knowingly participate in it.

Jesus revealed God's love and how it is brought into the world. The task of those who believe in him is to bear that same selfless love (the *fruit*) to others. In the end, only this fruit – perfect love and all the good that comes from it – will remain.

Complete joy

Earlier in his farewell discourse Jesus promised *peace* to his disciples (14:27). Now he promises them *joy* (v. 11). He's about to demonstrate perfect love. Jesus is thus the answer to the longing in people's hearts for lasting peace, joy, and love.

Fruit of the vine

In the other three Gospels Jesus tells his disciples during his last meal with them that he won't drink wine again until he drinks it from within the fullness of God's reign (Mark 14:25). Like the references to vines and fruit in John's Gospel, this statement evokes God's promise of an eternal feast enjoyed in the company of friends (Proverbs 9:1-6, Isaiah 25:6, Amos 9:13-15, John 2:1-11).

PRAYER

author unknown

Lord Jesus,
 I give you my hands to do your work.
 I give you my feet to go your way.
 I give you my eyes to see as you do.
 I give you my tongue to speak your words.
 I give you my mind that you may think in me.
 I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.
 Above all, I give you my heart
 that you may love in me
 your Father and all humankind.
 I give you my whole self that you may grow in me,
 so that it is you, Lord Jesus,
 who live and work and pray in me. Amen.