



EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Isaiah 49:14-15
Psalm 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Matthew 6:24-34

Gathering

(A single fresh flower in a vase rests on a table covered with green cloth.)

This week Jesus challenges us to look at the flowers, birds, and grass of the field and to mirror their simplicity and beauty in our lives. He calls us to abandon ourselves to God, our loving creator, in child-like love and trust. Last week the gospel challenged us to love even those who have not *earned* our love. How did you manage with that this past week?

Prayer

(Members are invited to take a moment of quiet in order to acknowledge themselves in the presence of God. A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, members pray as follows in two alternating groups.)

I: Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights.

II: Praise him, all you his angels;

give praise, all you his hosts.

I: Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all shining stars.

II: Praise him, highest heavens,
you waters above the heavens.

I: Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all the deeps of the sea;

II: Lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds.
storm wind that fulfills his command;

I: Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars;

II: Animals wild and tame,
creatures that crawl and birds that fly;

All: Young men and women too,
old and young alike.

Psalm 148:1-4, 7-10, 12

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or a phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites the members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

Reflection

Look at the simplicity of a flower. All it seems to do is just stand there. It is beautiful. All of its grace and beauty radiate from its existence. It is a flower; nothing more and nothing less. It would be a tragedy if it *were* any more or less than what it is – a flower.

Jesus uses the images of flowers, birds, and even the grass of the field as he invites us to consider. He invites us to learn from and imitate them. What is the lesson that we learn? Simply, that we are most truly alive when we are acting – *being* – what we are created to be. It would be pitiful for a flower to try to be something other than a flower. Even more so is it lamentable for a human being to try to be something other than human.

The simple, beautiful reality of human existence is that we too are part of this creation – we are sons and daughters of God. We thrive like a flower in the sun when we live as God’s children. Yet, even though we are children of God by nature, we are surrounded by the tragedy of people, friends, family (and ourselves at times) trying to be something more or less than this.

When we try to be something other than simply a child of God, our relationship with God is hurt. The good news is that God remains faithful in love, even more so than a mother who would never forget her own child. No matter what damage is done, healing is always held out to us. Our wounded relationships with God and each other are healed not through a complex remedy; but rather by imitating the flower, opening ourselves to the warmth of God’s love, being a child of God.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ In what ways is your life beautiful?
- ◆ What do you feel when you hear that yourself spoken of as a child of God?
- ◆ How “anxious about clothes” are you?
- ◆ How much of a worrier are you?
- ◆ How deeply do you trust in God’s care for you?
- ◆ How easy is it for you to see your life being as free and simple as a flower growing in the sun?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader poses these questions: "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action

- ◆ Take a walk in nature some day this week. Spring is approaching. Observe the wonder of God's creation and take pleasure in it.
- ◆ Evaluate your possessions. See what you have that you do not need which is cluttering up your life. Prepare these things for donation to the St. Vincent de Paul mission or some other such service in your area.
- ◆ Consider your relationships with your family, friends, and neighbors. Choose one that needs a little attention. Be as simple, direct and child-like toward that person in the week ahead.
- ◆ Give some beautiful flowers to someone you do not know well.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the prayer continues as follows.)

All: O God, we abandon ourselves into your hands;
do with us what you will.

Whatever you may do; we thank you.
We are ready for all. We accept all.
Let only your will be done in us,
and in all your creatures.
We wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands we commend our souls;
we offer them to you with all the love of our hearts,
for we love you, Lord,
and so need to give ourselves, to surrender ourselves
into your hands, without reserve,
and with boundless confidence, because you are our God.

Adapted from Charles de Foucauld. *Prayer of Abandonment*.

(Members join in singing, "We Will Serve the Lord." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, members join hands to pray the Lord's Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)

WE WILL SERVE THE LORD

- Verse 1: Wealth can be an idol, built of gleaming gold,
bringing dreams of paradise, futures bought and sold.
Some will choose to gather it, all that they can hoard,
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!
- Verse 2: Pleasure is a siren, promising the flesh,
brief relief from emptiness, a hiding place from death.
Some will choose to chase it until it leaves them bored,
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!
- Refrain: As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,
we will serve the Lord, we will serve the Lord!
As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,
we will serve the Lord, we will serve the Lord!
- Verse 3: Power is a hunger, burning in the breast,
to walk among the mighty and trample on the rest.
Some will choose to gain it by lie or guile or sword,
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!
- Verse 4: Father of all mercy, giver of all life,
here we speak our covenant above the noisy strife.
Hear us shout in glory above the pagan horde:
as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!