

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE A

Hosea 6:3-6
Romans 4:18-25
Matthew 9:9-13

(A candle and a small bowl of water rest on a table in the center of the community.)

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and the facilitator invites the community to pause to allow itself to become aware of God's presence.)

Leader: The light of the sun nurtures the trees, the plants and all of God's creatures. It illumines our lives, gladdens our hearts. By water we are baptized into Christ. It is above all the light of Christ that gives meaning to our lives. Our candle points to Christ, our light, to whom we are united by faith. The water recalls our baptism, our hope for eternal life. The bonds of love in our midst tie us as well to all of God's people. *(Pause.)*

Leader: Lord of all, we gather in your name because you promised to be with us.

All: Wash away the stain of our sin with your love.

Leader: Let your light shine within the leaders of your church that they will bring your good news to all your people.

All: And within us, too.

Leader: Open the hearts of the leaders of the world that they will act with love for their people and others that they touch.

All: Open our hearts as well.

Leader: Bring sustenance and love to those who lack hope.

All: Lead us to them.

Leader: We ask you, Lord God of all, to lead us by your word, strengthen us with your courage and move us by your love. We ask these things, Father, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, who leads us by your Spirit.

All: Amen.

(Members join in singing, "Bathed in the Waters of Life," The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the leader presents the bowl of water to each member to sign him/herself with the sign of the cross.)

COMMENTARY

Water sustains; water also destroys. In many parts of the world these days, it is probably very difficult to really appreciate the metaphor that Hosea offers us. "He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth!" We have seen the world inundated with water this last winter: the tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, the mud slides that killed innocents in California, the flooding rivers that sent many fleeing from their homes in the Midwest.

To the Middle Eastern mind where the land is often parched, water is life. Water is hope. Rain is a blessing from God. In this reading from Hosea, the people yearn for the blessing of God, like a rain that waters the earth. "What a blessing," we say about this and that. When we *count our blessings*, what are *we* counting – our paychecks, the latest labor saving devices?

Blessing is rooted in relationship. "[I]t is love I desire," says God, "not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocaust." Abraham's blessing is rooted in his fidelity to God, his "hoping against hope" in God.

Jesus echoes Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifices." This is the path to God and to sharing God's life with others. Jesus is mercy offered. Jesus is mercy shared. Seeing Matthew at the customs post, mercy calls to him, "Follow me." Tax collectors and sinners find forgiveness in Jesus, with Jesus. Our deepest blessing is in our relationship with him.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ When have you shown mercy to someone?
- ◆ It has been said that forgiveness means letting go of every hope for a better past. What might that mean in your life?
- ◆ Recall a time when you were not able to forgive yourself?
- ◆ When have you surprised someone by your act of forgiveness?

RESPONSE IN ACTION¹

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for quiet reflections and prayer. Count your blessings before God.
- ◆ Identify a hurt that you still hold in your heart. Take a step to be reconciled with someone who has hurt you or someone whom you have hurt.
- ◆ Write to one of your elected officials on the local, state, or national level. Address some concrete issue of the common good about which you are passionate. Ask the official to support this issue so that justice may fall like the rain on all God's people.
- ◆ Take stock of your use of water. Take concrete steps to conserve.

CLOSING PRAYER

(The community stands in a circle and joins hands. After a few moments of silence, the leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. After each prayer, members respond, "May your mercy fall upon us like the rain, O Lord." When the individual prayers are completed, the leader prays as follows.)

Leader: We bring you our prayers, O God. We ask you to hear them. We unite ourselves with all who pray to you. Hear them also, O God. Fill us with your mercy that we may show mercy. Make a refreshing rain for those who are parched or barren. Fill us with your light that we may be light to those around us. In Jesus' name we pray.

(The leader again takes up the bowl of water. With a flick of the fingers she/he sprinkles each person with water while saying, "**Show mercy like te rain.**"



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