

“ To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...”

OPENING PRAYER: Slow me down, Lord! Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind; steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal rest of time; give me, amidst the confusion of this day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tension of my nerves with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations, of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend or to pat a dog; to read a few lines from a good book. Remind me each day of the fable of the hare and the tortoise – that I may know that the race is not always to the swift and that there is more to life than measuring speed. Slow me down, Lord! Inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life’s enduring values. Amen (Orin L. Grain)

1. READ Philippians 1:4-6, 27-30 (A)AND Philippians 2: 1-18 (B, C,D) and Philippians 3: 10-14 (E), and Philippians 4:1-9 (F, G))

A. What partnership might Paul be speaking of in relationship to his work among the Christian community in Philippi? It seems that Paul might not have been the first to gather followers of Christ in Philippi – how does he seem to feel about whoever it was that came before him? What might that say about how we think of the generations which have preceded us in our parish?

B. The community has come under some attack and Paul writes to them about what it means to be a family in Jesus. What does he say about the attitudes which should be at the heart of the community? What does Paul think of the idea of Christians being servants? Is Paul hinting about the issue of power in the fellowship do you think and if so, how does he see the use of authority in the community?

C. What for Paul should be the motivating “drivers” of a Christian community? How do we see these being acted out in our own parish situation?

D. Am I “strong enough in the Lord” to wish, like Paul, to be willing to suffer for the faith – how far am I willing to go?

E. What does Paul want to see happen in Philippi when there are strong opinions and disagreements ?

F. Paul speaks of the women who “contended” at his side – why would this have been a revolutionary thing to say in his generation? Has the situation changed in two thousand years?

G. Paul talks a lot about ‘rejoicing’ in Philippians 4 – is that something that would be a mark of our fellowship and if so, why so AND if not, why not ?

H. Summarize what you think Paul is describing in these brief moments from his letter to the Philippians.

2. Read COLOSSIANS 1:9-23(A. B. C)and COLOSSIANS 2:6-10 (D) and COLOSSIANS 3: 1-2, 9-17(E).

A. Paul speaks of the people in Philippi and Colosseae as being “saints”. What is a saint? Are only those called by that name by the church the only saints around?

B. For Paul, what is a life lived “worthy of the Lord”? How can a congregation reach that place?

C. Is Christ the head of your community and if so, how is that shown? If not, why not?

D. How are we able to distinguish between the Word of the Lord and the words of the world?

E. How, according to Paul, are we to live in community? What has no place in our fellowship as followers of Jesus?

3. Read 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1, 3-12 (A) and 1 THESSALONIANS 5:5-8, 11-26, 28 (B and 2 THESSALONIANS 2:15

A. What does it mean to “love” our sisters and brothers in the Lord and how can we demonstrate that as a community?

B. How do we “build one another up”? What are we doing in our fellowship that works against this idea of encouraging one another?

C. Paul speaks of the Spirit’s fire – what does he mean by that? Do you feel that in your community? Does the way we worship shape how we feel the movement of the Holy Spirit ?.(C)

4. Summarize what Paul is saying to the Thessalonians and to us.

5. For next week, the last week of our study, please think about these questions:

A. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY?

B. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST TO YOU?

C. WHERE DO WE AS A FELLOWSHIP AND AS INDIVIDUALS IN THAT FAMILY GO FROM HERE ?

STUDY AIDS FOR WEEK FIVE

1. PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6, 27-30 PHILIPPIANS 2: 1-18 PHILIPPIANS 3: 10-14 PHILIPPIANS 4: 1-9

A. Our partnership in the gospel comes through our recognition of the talents and skills possessed by EVERY member of the community regardless of colour, creed, age or orientation. Each person has been blessed with gifts and power to share with the whole family and everyone has been called to the community so that their light may shine and they may help to build up the body of Christ.

b. Our dealings with those who are intent upon the destruction of our fellowship must be in accordance with the example and teachings of Jesus. We need to be very aware of the differences between the will of Christ and the ways of the world.

C. The real life of fellowship comes in the bearing of each other's burdens and joys and sharing in the fullness of life in Christ. The community should strive to be united both internally and in the face she turns to the world. When there is dispute, the way in which these are handled must be handled in such a way that people will continue to say, as a Church Father (Tertullian) once did, "See how these Christians love each other".

D. Paul's ultimate goal for the church and for himself is that we may know Christ and share the resurrection light and power which God offers to all through the gifting of the Holy Spirit.

E. Paul calls the church to be a haven of peace and prayer. Our life in and as community must be about shalom – making and peace – building in order that we might be able to take the gospel into all the world once we have done that in our own small community.

2. COLOSSIANS 1:9-23 COLOSSIANS 2:6-10 COLOSSIANS 3: 1-2, 9-17

A. Christ is the head of the body, the Church. As the living Son of the Father, Jesus is the Source, the Fountain of new life and living water and the full incarnation of God the gospel while being pulled.

B. To "live in Christ" is to act as "little Christs" to one another. Rooted in Jesus, the community draws her strength and acts from her common faith in the One Lord, One Saviour through whom the world will live in harmony with the Creator. That is the call and the mandate of the Church.

C. The Church's struggle is to be consistent with the gospel while being pulled by the world to accept and bow before its' standards . The Church struggles to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus while being firmly "in the world but not of the world" (see John's Gospel).

D. God wills that we engage the world, not create a little hideaway for ourselves. We are called to confront the powers that be and name evil for what it is while pointing to the light of Christ in our own lives and in the life the fellowship.

E. Our priorities as a community must be set within the context of prayer and reflection, struggling to be consistent with the gospel message of love and hope

**3. 1 THESSALONIANS 4: 1, 2-12 1 THESSALONIANS 5: 5-8, 11-24
2 THESSALONIANS 2:15**

A. When we become complacent about something (a faith, a relationship, the life of a community), then we lose the sense that there is value in what we are engaged in. The moment that we begin to think and say that everything is fine and that we no longer need to be vigilant about the quality of our life together, that is when the community is in danger of either falling apart or becoming something other than the Body of Christ.

B. We must always be in the process of refining and redefining who we are so we may remain constant to the One whose we are!

C. The community must always be vigilant and awake because it does not know the timing of the return of Christ. Jesus in many of his parables spoke of the need to be found “ready” and celebrated for being about the Lord’s business.

D. If we are the children of light we claim to be, we must ensure that the light of Christ is constantly shining in the fellowship and that this light will draw others into communion with us.

E. Paul speaks of the signs and marks of the Christian community and our task is to work towards having ALL of these visible and present in both our individual lives and in the ongoing life of the community.

READINGS FOR WEEK FIVE

**PHILIPPIANS 1: 4-6, 27-30 PHILIPPIANS 2: 1-18 PHILIPPIANS 3: 10-14
PHILIPPIANS 4: 1-9**

In all my prayers for you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ

Jesus...Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then when I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ to not only believe in him, but to suffer for him since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now I hear you have...If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any

fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life – in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad, and rejoice with me...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Sisters and brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Therefore, my sisters and brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yeas, and I ask you loyal yoke-fellows, help those women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near! Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

COLOSSIANS 1: 9-23 COLOSSIANS 2:6-10 COLOSSIANS 3: 1-2, 9-17

Since the day we first heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to both fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and

understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the domination of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you have heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant... So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. See that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Put to death therefor whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming! You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Don't lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Syrian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

THESSALONIANS 2:15

Finally, sisters and brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. It is God's will that you be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his or her own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God; and in this matter, no one should wrong another or take advantage of anyone. The Lord will push them for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, the one who rejects this instruction does not reject humankind but God, who gives you the Holy Spirit. Now about brotherly love we do not need to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers and sisters in Macedonia. Yet we urge you to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life might win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anyone. You are all sons of the light and daughters of the day. We do not belong to the night nor to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night; and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. May sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks on all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to what is good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all the sisters and brothers with a holy kiss. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. So then, stand firm and hold on to the teachings we passed on to you whether by word or by mouth or by letter.