

THE DEEPEST YEARNING
WEEK TWO: TO ALL WHO ARE LOVED BY GOD AND CALLED TO BE SAINTS

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we appreciate the chance to learn from your Word and to spend time in prayer and reflection. Thank you for letting us hear your voice call to us and assure us that we are beloved of you. May we find in your word hope and joy and a sense of purpose and direction as we seek to be faithful to you and to our sisters and brothers; we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen

STUDY TIME

A brief word about Paul's letters: What we have received as "letters" from St, Paul and other writers of what we call the Epistles may only be fragments of much longer correspondence to certain communities. scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Some letters may be several letters joined together. Instructions and ideas presented in some of the letters are directed to meet specific issues of their time and may not be applicable to the Church today, while other thoughts from Paul, Peter, James and John speak as clearly and relevantly to us today as they did when written nearly two thousand years ago!

1. Read ROMANS 1: 1-7, 11-12, 16-17

- a) What is Paul saying about himself and about his sisters and brothers in the community centred in Rome as to who they are?
- b) What binds everything together for Paul?
- c) In verses 11-12, Paul hints at one of the marks of community – what is that?
- d) In verses 16-17, Paul declares that he is not ashamed of the gospel. Why would he say this (see also verses 2-3)?

2. Read ROMANS 3: 20-26

- a) What is RIGHTEOUSNESS? What is the basis for our being called a righteous person?
- b) What is GRACE? Why should this concept be of any importance to us?
- c) Why are verses 25-26 important to us in understanding ourselves and our life in community?

3. Read ROMANS 5: 1-11

- a) In verses 1-4, Paul speaks of more marks of the community. What are these to add to what he said in 1: 11-12?
- b) Why are verses 6-8 so important to our understanding?
- c) What is RECONCILIATION? Is it a mark of Christian community? How does this happen in the Church?

4. Read ROMANS 6: 1-11, 17-18, 22-23

- a) What is SIN? Why are we free in Christ?
- b) Paul states that we are no longer slaves to sin but free in righteousness. How should this affect our life in community (see verses 17-18, 22-23)?
- d) Try to summarize what you have learned from questions 2, 3 and 4

5. Read ROMANS 8: 9-17, 24-27 and ROMANS 12:1-2, 4-26 and ROMANS 13:8

- a) How do you interpret Paul's expression, "living by the Spirit"? What implication should this have for our life in community?
- b) Why is the word ABBA in 8: 13-17 so important to us as we seek our roots of Christian community?
- c) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community. What might block the effective work of the Spirit?
- d) In 12:1, what does the term 'living sacrifice' mean to you?
- e) Chapter 12: 4-8 speaks of a powerful image for the community. What is it and why is it important for us to keep this image front and centre today?
- f) In 12:9-12, the basis of Christian service is outlined. List the qualities deemed necessary for our fellowship.

- g) What is the ‘continuing debt’ referred to in 13: 8? Why should this be of any matter to the community?
- h) Summarize what you have learned from these passages.

6. Read ROMANS 14:1, 13, 19 and ROMANS 15: 1-2, 5-7 and ROMANS 16: 17-18

- a) What might be stumbling-blocks to our growth as a Christian community?
- b) What might be our first steps in removing these stumbling-blocks from our fellowship (see 14:9, 15: 1-2, 5-7)
- c) Summarize this to add to the rest of the reflections

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the gift of time to spend with you. As you have embraced us in your love, equip us with your compassion and care and send us out to be your living, breathing community in Jesus’ name. Amen

READING FOR NEXT WEEK: THE LETTERS OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

NOTES FOR SESSION TWO

1. ROMANS 1: 1-7, 11-12, 16-17

- A) Paul sees himself and the community of believers in Rome as being bound to each other through Jesus – Paul as one sent by the Spirit to speak the gospel good news among the Gentiles who have been called “saints” by the Lord.
- B) The word “apostle” is from the Greek meaning “one who is sent” and is a political designation for a representative of either a ruler or a ruling body sent out to speak on behalf the authorities
- C) The word ‘saint’ is from the Latin “Sanctus” which means “holy” and is used by Paul to designate any who follow Jesus and his teaching. It is not yet the title of someone set apart by The Church for special consideration. For Paul and the earliest Church all were saints
- D) Paul sees the ministry as being a shared one of mutual encouragement and enlightening to make both the individuals and the fellowship as a whole strong in their commitment to the teaching of Jesus and the living out of that teaching.
- E) Paul sees his ministry as having been given to him by the Lord himself (see the story of Paul’s conversion in ACTS 9: 1-31) and that, in Christ, there was no distinction to be made between Jew and Gentile
- F) What matters is not the ethnic background of the individual but the commitment and openness of the person to the truth of Jesus’ teachings.
- G) Paul feels no shame – although he is willing to identify himself as a “fool for Christ” in 2 CORINTHIANS 11:21.
- H) Paul has yet to visit the community in Rome and sends this as both an introduction to the fellowship because of the rumours which were circulating about whether Paul was a true follower or someone “under cover” for the Temple authorities – after all, he had been sent to Damascus with letters to arrest and bring followers of Jesus back to Jerusalem for trial as heretics!
- H) FAITH has been defined for me as “betting our life that something is true” and a major undertaking is to answer a question both as individuals and as community, “What am I/we willing to bet our lives on?”

2. ROMANS 3: 20-26

- A) Righteousness is an attitude which is grounded in the search for and commitment to justice and equality for all. This state of being is available to believers because of the generosity and grace Of God.
- B) GRACE is the free, uncalled for, undeserved love which God has and offers to those who turn to the Creator as the Source of life.

C) GRACE allows us to come together in a community to share in the sacraments and the Word. If we do not sense that we are living as a fellowship in a grace-filled environment, then something extremely critical is missing from the foundation of who we are as a people.

D) For the Christian, the Crucifixion is the supreme acting out of God's love and grace. To deny the reality of the Cross because it makes us feel uncomfortable is to deny the very soul of the Christian faith. We care children of God; we are children of the Cross and because of the Cross.

E) We may argue about the details of how Jesus died, but we cannot deny the fact of his death at Calvary.

3. ROMANS 5: 1-11

A) For Paul, the marks of a Christian community include peace, grace, hope and love.

B) Our redemption (being made right with God) as individuals and as a fellowship comes through the Cross of our redemption and reconciliation with the Lord. If we do not see the power and the purpose of the crucifixion, we fail utterly in our understanding of what our faith is all about.

C) RECONCILIATION is the restoration of right relationships with God and with our sisters and brothers, even if they are not of our faith system. It is a definite sign of being a Christian community.

D) We move towards reconciliation in many ways -through being open to celebrating the strengths and the weaknesses of others while not exploiting that weakness to our own advantage, through confession of how we have sinned against others, ourselves and God, in the giving and receiving of forgiveness, through the giving of self (acts of selfishness) to another for the strengthening and nurturing of the whole community.

4. ROMANS 6: 1-11, 17-18, 22-23

A) SIN is any action of thought which causes us to fall short of God's intentions for our being created in the image of the Source of Life. SIN may be an overt act (a conscious decision to act against God) or an unconscious act of omission or commission against God. God knows our hearts and judges what we do by the intention we show.

B) Our salvation from sin comes through our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. By dying on the Cross, Jesus frees us to receive the gift of God's grace and to seek to work towards the perfection which results in our living in complete harmony with our self, others and the One who, when he looked upon humankind in the final act of creation said, "It is very good".

C) Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are born anew into the resurrection of life Jesus and alive once again to God.

D) The community should reflect the joy which comes from knowing that it is alive in Christ. As the community of the reconciliation between God and humanity, As THAT community, we SHOULD embrace joy, love, hope and the power of the Spirit as she moves through our life in community.

E) By embracing this attitude, we will demonstrate to all, and to ourselves, that we believe in the resurrection.

5. ROMANS 8:9-17, 24-27 (A,B,C,D) ROMANS 12: 1-2, 4-16 (E,F,G,H) ROMANS 13:8 (I)

A) "Living by the Spirit" is an idea which would need to be consciously undertaken – to turn the life of the community over to the Spirit for guidance, direction and power. This would involve letting go and letting God which is a very hard thing for institutions (even the Church) to do. It would involve a great deal of two things: prayer for guidance and attentive silence to "hear" the will of God as it comes through the Spirit.

B) To live by the Spirit involves a great deal of trust – in God and in others and the gift of discernment – the conscious "testing of what we think the Spirit is saying

C) ABBA is the Aramaic word used by a child in addressing his or her male parent. Paul tells us that the Spirit allows us to relate to God as His children and, if this be so, then our relationship with one another in community is that of a FAMILY of siblings who collectively call God Abba. Thus, Church becomes much more than a group of like-minded individuals doing stuff together, but becomes a family bound to one another through a mutual love of the Father and commitment to our sisters and brothers.

D) Of course, we also need to both acknowledge that being “family” has its own issues which need to be dealt with in accordance with the Father’s principles of trust, honour and compassion for each other. This becomes possible when we turn our family over to the Spirit

E) To sacrifice means to abandon one’s own desires and needs for the benefit of others and of the community as a whole. To love and serve sacrificially is the greatest act of stewardship we can offer one another.

F) Again, Paul calls us to “test” the Spirit in order that we as family will not only be seen as being one in Christ but we will actually BE that!

G) The image of community as a body is one of the greatest images we have – as we age, we sure understand the idea of each body part affecting all other parts! Paul needs the Romans to see that the health of one person (spiritually, physically, economically, emotionally) will profoundly affect the health of all and that therefore we need to be constantly watching out for the good and welfare of each other, for our very life as a family depends on this

H) 12:9-13 is THE summary for the Romans of the signs of being a true community in Christ and we would do well to ensure that these signs are healthy and alive in our fellowship, for without them, we are less than whole.

I) The “continuing debt” Paul speaks of is that of LOVE: love for the Holy Trinity, love for our sisters and brothers united in that love and love that is acted out in visible and real ways both within the fellowship and in the wider world.

6. ROMANS 14:1, 13-19 ROMANS 15: 1-2, 5-7 ROMANS 16:17-18

A) Each member of the community needs to spend serious time thinking about what might be the “stumbling-blocks” to being the family which the Trinity wants us to be.

B) This is a difficult thing to do with other members because some of these issues WILL be personal in nature because, as we all know, family relationships do not always run smoothly. So, the community needs to have strategies for dealing with conflict in compassionate caring for one another. We should have a ministry of RECONCILIATION as a foundational ministry. This does not necessarily mean “the person wearing the collar” but would be the idea of a “parish elder” whose wisdom and care is respected and honoured by all who would be the sounding board when disputes and issues arise.

C) A fundamental undertaking of the community as a whole is the creation and maintenance of SHALOM as the guiding light – Shalom means more than just “peace” or “hi, how are ya?” but is rather the heart desire for the best for each person who shares life in Christ with us.

D) This is of vital importance because the deeper in love with God and one another we are in the fellowship, the less power and influence negative ideas and persons will have and the stronger the family will be and the more empowered it will be for the work of ministry beyond our walls.

E) The community is only as strong as the membership and therefore, we should be concerned at all times with the health and welfare of our sisters and brothers and be ever alert to signs of disharmony and hurt which need to be dealt with before they can fester and infect our life as the Body of Christ.

READINGS FOR SESSION TWO

ROMANS 1: 1-7, 11-12, 16-17

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle and set apart of the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son who, as to his human nature, was a descendant of David and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints...I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith... I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first, for the Jewish people, than for the Gentiles. For

in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed; a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, “the righteous will live by faith.”

ROMANS 3: 20-26

No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.

ROMANS 5: 1-11

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ., through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us . You see, just at the right time when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will someone die for a righteous person though for a good man someone might dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more will we be saved from God’s wrath through him. For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.

ROMANS 6:1-11, 17-18, 22-23

What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we shall also certainly be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, Than we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ with also believe that we shall live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead he cannot die again, death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness...But now that you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 8:9-17, 24-27 ROMANS 12:1-2, 4-16 ROMANS 13:8

You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God live sin you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in

you. Therefore, sisters and brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a Spirit that made you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”. The Spirit herself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory....Therefore I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If one’s gift is prophecy, let them use it in accordance with their faith; if it is serving, let him serve; if it is in teaching, let her teach; if it is in encouraging, let him encourage; if it is in contributing to the needs of others, let her give generously; if it is leadership, let them govern diligently; if it is in showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere, Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly and sisterly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, hopeful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ... Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another for he who loves his brother or sister has fulfilled the law.

ROMANS 14:1, 13-19 ROMANS 15:1-2, 5-7 ROMANS 16: 17-18

Accept the one whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters...Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put up any stumbling-block or obstacle in to your sister’s or brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean! If you sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy the brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by all. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification... We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbour for their good, to build them up...May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God...I urge you sisters and brothers to watch out for those who would cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching to have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people.