



NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32

Romans 3:21-25, 28

Matthew 7:21-27

GATHERING

(Rough rocks, of a size to be held comfortably in the hand (one for each member) resting on a bed of sand, a bible open to this week's gospel and a clear glass dish of water are arranged on a table covered with green cloth.)

This week we are admonished to confront the consequences of making choices. We are challenged to hear God's word and act on it; to build faithful lives on the rock of Jesus' teaching. Last week we were reminded that while life's uncertainties can seem overwhelming at times, God has a plan for us. God knows our needs and will never *forget* us. In what situations this past week did you "lighten up" and remind yourself that God is in control? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to be in touch with God's presence with them. After a time of quiet, members join in singing, "God Be in My Head." The song may be available on the Internet. When the song is complete, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Lord, we see things fairly clearly in these quiet moments here with you. But we gather from a day filled with all the assaulting voices that try to claim our allegiance, or at least our cooperation. Thank you for granting us this opportunity to re-center ourselves in you. Help us not to take as truth what we know is trash. In your Spirit, we pray.

All: Amen.

Adapted from **Daily Prayers for Busy People**, William J. O'Malley, S.J., St. Mary's Press, 1990

Focus Question

- ◆ Recall a time when you felt you were losing your footing.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

Perhaps more so than any other time in recent history, it feels as if the very foundations of our daily lives are being substantially buffeted, undercut or eroded. Relentless waves of failures seem to wash over us continually. The collapse of long respected financial institutions, the downsizing of businesses and resulting unemployment, the lack of expected ecological vigilance by regulatory bodies, churlishness in public discourse, the scandal of pedophilia in the church, deaths in an ongoing war, the question of the civil definition of marriage; all can leave us wondering who and what is reliable anymore. Is anything stable?

This week's scripture readings present no shades of grey: *the Lord is reliable*. Moses' declaration that he is setting before his people a blessing and a curse is a clear admonition. A people and a person is free to obey God's commandments or not, but choosing not to obey will eventually result in problems. In disobeying, we bring the curse upon ourselves. Paul reminds us that all are freely redeemed by faith, not by anything we have earned or deserved, but by God's gift of Jesus to us. The gospel passage from Matthew comes at the conclusion of Jesus' sermon on the mount. Like Moses, Jesus offers an admonition – to build on the rock of his teachings. Saying we accept is not the same as acting on what we hear. We act on

Jesus' words not necessarily to be spared life's storms, but to survive them secure – in him.

For many of us, over time, the storms of living begin to wash away our seemingly reasonable expectations of individuals and institutions. Like sand forced by wind and water into new places and shapes, we can either drift by erosion or be preserved by coming up against the pylons that mark the way. Make the gift of Jesus' teachings your pylons so that whatever you come up against, you remain grounded and directed.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Who or what has provided you with your foundation in life?
- ◆ To what do you continue to cling when you are buffeted by life?
- ◆ What “other gods” beckon you to follow these days?
- ◆ When have you found yourself questioning the soundness of your expectations about things?
- ◆ Recount an occasion when you were aware that you were intentionally choosing to act in accordance with Jesus' teaching.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ This week, share with a younger person a positive lesson you have learned in the midst of the storms of life.
- ◆ With spring's coming, take a reflective drive to one of your state parks. Notice how winter's storms may have reshaped the landscape. Use this experience to reflect on what has changed and what remains firmly in place in your own life.
- ◆ Be supportive of the efforts of agencies that support women who are gaining a foundation in life and work skills so as to become economically self-sufficient.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the gospel of the week is re-read by a member of the community. Following

the reading, the leader poses this question to the members: “What does

Christ say to you/us in hearing this gospel today?” The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful attention to how Christ speaks to them in this gospel. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention just a word or two that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally.

Following this sharing, each member of the group picks up a rock from the table and holds it as the leader and several members lead the community in prayer.)

All: Lord, be my rock of safety.

I: In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

II: In your justice rescue me,
incline your ear to me,
make haste to deliver me!

All: Lord, be my rock of safety.

III: Be my rock of refuge,
a stronghold to give me safety.

IV: You are my rock and my fortress;
for your name’s sake you will lead and guide me.

All: Lord, be my rock of safety.

V: Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your kindness.

VI: Take courage and be stouthearted,
all you who hope in the LORD.

All: Lord, be my rock of safety.

Psalm 31:2-3,3-4, 17, 25

(A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader sprinkles the group with water and prays as follows.)

Leader: Lord, Lord, when life's rains fall and the floods come, help us to remain firmly grounded in you. We thank you for the gift of being together in this small church community. May we draw strength in the week ahead from our deepening knowledge of you and one another. May we depart with confidence in your loving care for us. In the one Spirit, we pray.

All: Amen.

(Members hold their rock in an open palm. Each member chooses a rock from another member's palm and takes it home as a reminder to pray for each other and to act on Jesus' teachings in the week ahead.)

