

# SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## LECTIONARY #111

READING I Genesis 18:20–32

### A reading from the Book of Genesis

In those days, the LORD said:

**“The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out.”**

While Abraham’s visitors walked on farther toward Sodom, the LORD remained standing before Abraham.

Then Abraham drew nearer and said:

**“Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?”**

The LORD replied,

**“If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”**

Abraham spoke up again:

**“See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes! >>**

The outcry comes from the victims of injustice. As defender of the weak and the poor, God must respond. Speak with strength, not vindictiveness.

God will “go down” to verify if the “outcry” is justified.

“Abraham’s visitors” are the three (divine) visitors Abraham hosted in his tent who announced he’d have a son within the year.

Abraham is alarmed at what might happen and immediately intervenes! His tone is bold at the start.

Abraham speaks to God as if God were an earthly king worried about his reputation. He also appeals to God’s sense of Justice.

Abraham becomes more apologetic and deferential as he pushes for greater indulgence.

Abraham is clever, but not insincere.

### READING I

Among God’s first promises to Abraham was that “all the communities of the earth shall find blessing you” (Genesis 12:3). In the scene in today’s reading, Abraham asks God for blessing even on the sinful city, Sodom. In his pleading, Abraham becomes a model of intercession for sinners. Later in the desert, Moses will similarly ask the Lord, “If you would only forgive their sin!” (Exodus 32:32). The prophets will also intercede for the people: “Forgive, O Lord God! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” (Amos 7:2).

While Abraham became a model for intercession as well as a standard of righteousness, Sodom became a symbol of widespread sinfulness. The prophet Jeremiah, preaching against the sinfulness of Jerusalem’s prophets, used Sodom as a well-known example: “Adultery, living in lies, siding with the wicked, so that no one turns from evil; To me they are all like Sodom” (Jeremiah 23:14). All of Sodom’s sins, whether against their fellow citizens or against the visitors to their city, were ultimately abuses “committed against the Lord” (Genesis 13:13).

Abraham mediates for such a sinful city for the sake of the righteous people living within it, using language that is both boldly insistent and deferential. He seems shocked at the notion that God would act unjustly: “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty.” Should the fifty innocent people be unfairly punished? Or forty? Thirty? Abraham stops his questions when he gets to ten innocent people, leaving the Lord who is just to make the decision.

The Talmud will later see Abraham as a model for how all of Israel is to relate to

Quicken your pace in order to sneak in one more request.

Imagine a conversation with your employer asking for a larger and larger raise and the finessing you would need to do to keep pushing for more. God's tone can remain consistent throughout—even and without overt emotion. Read at a brisk pace without belaboring the exchange between Abraham and God.

Carefully set up the final request, then spring the surprisingly small number of ten.

Pause after he replied and solemnly announce the Lord's final response.

For meditation and context:

What if there are five less than fifty innocent people?  
Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?"  
He answered, "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five there."  
But Abraham persisted, saying "What if only forty are found there?"  
He replied, "I will forbear doing it for the sake of the forty."  
Then Abraham said, "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?"  
He replied, "I will forbear doing it if I can find but thirty there."  
Still Abraham went on,  
"Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?"  
The LORD answered, "I will not destroy it, for the sake of the twenty."  
But he still persisted:  
"Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time.  
What if there are at least ten there?"  
He replied, "For the sake of those ten, I will not destroy it."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8 (3a)

R. Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,  
for you have heard the words of my mouth;  
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;

I will worship at your holy temple and give thanks to your name.

Because of your kindness and your truth;  
for you have made great above all things your name and your promise.  
When I called you answered me;  
you built up strength within me.

The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,  
and the proud he knows from afar.  
Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me;  
against the anger of my enemies you raise your hand.

Your right hand saves me.  
The LORD will complete what he has done for me;  
your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;  
forsake not the work of your hands.

God: "I deeply love you, for even when I gave you abundant greatness, you make yourselves small before Me. I gave greatness to Abraham, and he said *I who am but dust and ashes*." Abraham's fatherly role has implications for future generations, as the Lord declared, "I have singled him out that he may direct his sons and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Genesis 18:19). Both Abraham and the Lord God show future generations what justice entails.

**READING II** In the short reading from Colossians, Paul provides a succinct explanation of the meaning of Baptism. The terminology he uses, similar to that of another baptismal passage at Romans 6, is distinctively Pauline. Paul created new vocabulary to describe a new reality, using a series of compound verbs with the prefix *syn*, meaning *with*; his new vocabulary can be translated as *co-buried*, *co-raised*, and *co-living*. The experience of being immersed into Christ at Baptism means that the baptized participate in the

Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection.

Those who are baptized into Christ have no need of the ritual of circumcision. Just before today's baptismal instruction, Paul tells the Colossians that they were "circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand," but rather "with the circumcision of Christ." In Paul's understanding, Baptism can be regarded as a spiritual circumcision that accomplishes what the physical ritual could not. Those that Paul describes as "dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of the flesh"

Colossians = kuh-LOSH-uhnz

Begin slowly and continue slowly or this text will become a blur. Remember, you are announcing Good News.

Your *faith* in the power of God who raised Christ brought about your own Resurrection.

Despite our sinfulness, God reached out to save us.

God raised us to life together with Christ.

Don't rush the powerful image of our debt being nailed to the cross.

Be sure to highlight that Jesus is in prayer.

Moved by Jesus' ability to pray, they ask for instruction.

Keep the prayer upbeat. Each intercession stands alone, so end one before beginning the next.

Pause briefly before beginning the following narration.

are probably the Gentile members of the community. Though some of the Christian preachers had demanded circumcision for Gentile converts, Paul vehemently rejected the practice, particularly in his letter to the Galatians. God brought the uncircumcised Gentiles to life and forgave all their transgressions through their Baptism into Christ.

Paul develops his baptismal teaching with another comparison: a bond of debt. He presents the image of a legal document that lists an account of debt to be paid because of transgressions. Unpaid debts can result in punishment or condemnation.

## READING II Colossians 2:12-14

### A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

**Brothers and sisters:**

**You were buried with him in baptism,**  
in which you were also **raised** with him  
through **faith in the power of God,**  
who **raised** him from the dead.

And even when you were **dead**  
in **transgressions** and the **uncircumcision** of your **flesh,**  
he **brought** you to **life** along with him,  
having **forgiven** us all our **transgressions;**  
**obliterating** the bond **against** us, with its **legal** claims,  
which was **opposed** to us,  
he also **removed** it from our midst, **nailing** it to the **cross.**

## GOSPEL Luke 11:1-13

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

**Jesus was praying** in a certain **place,** and when he had **finished,**  
one of his **disciples** said to him,  
"**Lord, teach us to pray** just as **John** taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you **pray,** say:

**Father, hallowed** be your **name,**  
**your Kingdom** come.  
**Give** us each day our **daily bread**  
and **forgive** us our **sins**  
for **we ourselves** forgive **everyone** in debt to us,  
and do **not subject** us to the **final test.**"

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a **friend**  
to whom he goes at **midnight** and says, **>>**

But Christ's death has cancelled that debt! Paul envisions the document listing the debt owed as nailed to the cross. Unlike the mocking inscription the Romans nailed on Christ's cross, God has nailed onto the cross the notice that debt due to sin has been erased.

**GOSPEL** As Jesus and his disciples make their way to Jerusalem, he has been teaching them by word and example how to follow him on the way. At one point on the journey, they see Jesus praying, prompting one of his dis-

ciples to ask that Jesus teach them to pray as John the Baptist had taught his disciples. Jesus gives them a threefold teaching. He begins by telling them simply, "When you pray, say," followed by a brief prayer addressed to the Father. Next he presents a parable illustrating the need for persistence. Then he concludes with sayings that further develop how a loving father responds to a child who asks.

The prayer that Jesus teaches is communal in nature, with believers together addressing God as Father. In teaching this prayer, Jesus is also outlining how his