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**Review:** *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

**THINK:** How often do we put conditions on loving others?

**DAY ONE**

Read Romans 14:1-3

**NOTE:** We ended chapter 13 with Paul’s directive for us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and to love one another. Chapter 14 extends those directives by commanding us not to judge others. Paul begins by addressing the problem of differing attitudes toward the Mosaic dietary laws governing what a good Jew could or could not eat.

1. In order to frame Paul’s approach, quickly scan Leviticus 11:1-23. Record a few examples of the “clean” and “unclean” foods prescribed under the Mosaic laws.
2. Some of the Jewish Christians in Rome still regarded the Mosaic laws as important. They avoided Gentile foods and fasted from certain meats (for specifics, refer to the Commentary). They were called “weak” because their conscience dictated that they follow the old ways of eating. Others, including Gentile Christians, disregarded the dietary laws. In verse 1 Paul gives a direction and a warning. How would you relate these two thoughts?
3. According to verse 2, the “weak” follow the law and eat only vegetables while the “strong” believe in eating anything. From the beginning of verse 3, what two admonitions does Paul give them?
4. At the end of verse 3, Paul tells them not to criticize or judge others because “God has welcomed them.” (“accepted them” in some translations) What does this mean to you?
5. We Christians are “recycled people,” both Gentiles and Jews reclaimed through Jesus’ saving power. We have no right to look down on anyone. To despise another Christian, or non-Christian, is to express a false sense of superiority. Read Luke 18:9-14. How does this parable relate to what Paul is saying?

6. CONNECTION: Differences in opinion do not have to mean conflict; they can be cause for growth. This may apply when we courteously and reverently discuss our faith with others and listen with equal courtesy to them. Pope Francis exhorts us not only to listen, but to listen well: “It is only by paying attention,” he writes, “to *whom* we listen, to *what* we listen, and to *how* we listen that we can grow in the art of communicating, the heart of which is not a theory or a technique, but the ‘openness of heart that makes closeness possible.’” Has there been a time when you were able to talk through differences in opinion or faith with another and you both grew as a result? If not, consider how you would approach such a conversation.

Read and record James 1:19. Remember that God created all and welcomes all. Pray for the grace to respect the dignity of each person made in the image and likeness of God.

## **DAY TWO**

### **Read Romans 14:4-9**

7. As today’s lesson begins, Paul continues to speak against judging others. He asks, “Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another?” What is the system of accountability Paul describes in the second and third sentences of verse 4?

8. In verse 5 Paul addresses the Sabbath and other holy days as they were prescribed under the Mosaic Law. Some of the Jewish converts felt obliged to continue these observances. What comment does Paul make about this difference of opinion and how does this show his intent is to instill harmony within the Roman community?

**NOTE:** The sacred days of the Old Covenant calendar, including the weekly Sabbath, were ceremonial times that expired with the coming of the messianic age. For this reason, they are not binding on the Christian conscience, although Jewish converts were still permitted to observe them in the earliest days of the Church. Note that Paul is not indifferent to holy days as such, but only to the ritual feast days of Judaism. According to the Council of Florence in 1442, circumcision and other rites of the Mosaic Law could still be observed in the earliest days of the Church, so long as no one considered them necessary requirements for salvation. *Ignatius Study Bible*

9. In verse 6 Paul says “Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.” What is the common thread in all of these directives and why?

10. Consider Paul's directives and how they apply to you. Jot down some things that you have done for the Lord today or can do tomorrow.

**THINK:** There is no such thing as a Christian life in isolation. From the day of our Baptism we are united to a reality far greater and more expansive than our own existence, incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ, which is another name for the Church itself. The word "incorporate" perhaps sounds like talk about companies established for business. But we should not miss its link to the Latin word *corpus*, meaning body. *Cameron*

11. Paul goes on to tell us in verses 7-8 that it is our job as disciples to live and die for the Lord rather than focusing on ourselves. Record verse 9, which is the reason behind our commitment to Christ.

**NOTE:** In our Commentary, Msgr. Mikesch notes that Paul is recalling that in our baptism we are promised a share in divine life, not only after our physical death, but right here and now in our earthly life. Commentators use the term Realized Eschatology to explain this truth, particularly when interpreting the works of John and Paul (refer to the Commentary for more on this premise).

12. CONNECTION: Paul's desire was for unity within the Roman Christian community, despite the differences in backgrounds and especially between Jews and Gentiles. Pope John XXIII addressed the concern for Christian unity in the decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*). He stated: "Unity in essentials, freedom in doubtful matters, and in all things charity." Spiritual growth and the movement toward Christian unity are intimately connected. Those involved in ecumenism like to say, "In coming closer to Christ we come closer to one another." (*Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski*) Share an example of how your Christian faith has made you more open to another or deepened your love for another.

Read John 17:21 (or 1 Peter 3:8). Write a prayer today for love and unity among all Christians in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

**THINK:** Love does not stop when we lose someone. Ulysses, the hero of Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey," said, "I am part of all I have met." Consider how would his words relate to our interconnectedness with people of the past and present. Remember that Jesus is Lord of our lives whether we are on this earth or have passed into his unique presence in heaven. Jesus continues to be with our loved ones in heaven just as he was when they were on earth.

### DAY THREE

#### Read Romans 14:10-13

13. In verse 10 Paul returns to his theme of judgment, asking us why we pass judgment on or despise our brothers and sisters. What reason does Paul give at the end of verse 10 for not passing judgment on another?

14. Read Luke 6:41. From this verse, what is the question Jesus asks concerning our propensity to judge others?

15. In verse 11 Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” With this verse in mind, record the conclusion Paul presents in verse 12.

16. Many times we can be guilty of imposing judgments on others based on unsupported opinions, personal preferences, unfounded fears, cultural biases, etc. rather than the guidelines given in Scripture. What are a few examples of this you see in the world today?

17. In the first part of verse 13 Paul repeats his admonition that we should no longer judge one another and we are not to put stumbling blocks or hindrances in the way of a brother or a sister. Give an example of how someone could put “a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” on his/her walk of faith.

**NOTE: Paul is concerned that Christians who insist on their freedoms will cause harm to fellow Christians. By acting selfishly and irresponsibly, one believer can position himself as a “stumbling block” in the path of another, causing him to trip and fall, spiritually speaking. Likewise, one believer can make himself a “hindrance” that tempts or entices another to act against his conscience – not because either the weak or the strong are making sinful choices about options on a menu, but because even the appearance of wrongdoing can scandalize another. *Hahn & Mitch***

18. CONNECTION: Talk of God’s final judgment, being “accountable to God,” can be frightening. We don’t stand alone before God to be judged, for Jesus stands with us. If we have lived with Jesus in life, we will stand with him in death. How we have lived, how we have loved, the “stumbling blocks” we have encountered or put before others are all known by God. No matter what we have done, our hope lies in our belief that through Our Lord Jesus Christ we will receive the Father’s mercy. Knowing that tomorrow you just might be standing before God to be judged, what changes should you make or what should you do?

Read and record from 1 John 2:1-2 the words that give you hope. The Lord is merciful. Praise him with confidence.

#### DAY FOUR

Read Romans 14:14-17

19. In verse 14, Paul returns to his thoughts regarding the Mosaic dietary restrictions. Paul is convinced “in the Lord Jesus” that nothing is unclean unto itself. What does he think about someone who believes it is unclean?

**NOTE: Verse 14 reminds us of the traditional teaching on the importance of conscience. CCC 1783-1784 Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings. The education of the conscience is a lifelong task.**

20. Read Jesus’ words in Mark 7:18-19. What connection can you make between Jesus’ words and Romans 14:14?

21. Paul calls on his readers to be more concerned with loving others than with personal rights. He stresses in verse 15 that the community should be sensitive to what offends another. Summarize what Paul says at the end of verse 15 which indicates his reason for respecting each member of the Christian community.

**NOTE: This message reiterates Paul’s earlier directive from 1 Corinthians 8:8-9. The Mosaic commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” which Paul holds up as the overriding aim of all Christian living (see Romans 13:8-10), is draped over the whole Roman controversy. Even our liberty in Christ is subordinate to the law of love. *Hahn & Mitch***

22. Verse 16 is difficult to understand. The “good” refers to the privilege or freedom enjoyed by the Christians of Paul’s time to eat whatever they wanted. Yet Paul warns that this “good” or freedom could cause scandal or misunderstanding leading to another’s loss of faith. Explain in your own words how the “good” or freedom might be “spoken of as evil.”

23. In verse 17 Paul says that the essence of the kingdom of God is not the freedom to eat any food. What three things does Paul list that are the essence of the kingdom?

24. **CONNECTION:** “Scandal is not only a danger for those within the believing community; it is also a danger for the unbelieving world observing from the outside...Should disputes over food and drink descend into serious quarreling among Christians, the gospel itself will come into disrepute in the wider society.” (*Hahn & Mitch*) Christians have freedom, but they also have the responsibility to act in accord with the law of love. Recall a time when, because of another’s beliefs, you may have modified your behavior, even while you retained your own values. Comment on how you were able to balance freedom and responsibility.

Read Proverbs 2:1-5 and write a prayer asking for God’s wisdom to always act in love without compromising your beliefs.

**NOTE: CCC 1785** states: In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord’s Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

#### **DAY FIVE**

**Read Romans 14:18-20**

25. In verse 18 Paul indicates that the one who “serves Christ” in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit receives two benefits. What are they?

26a. One of the major themes in Paul’s theology is the unity within the Body of Christ. In verse 19 Paul directs us to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification. Record the definition of edification.

b. What are some things happening in the Church today that are signs of “uplifting” the kingdom of God on earth today?

**THINK:** Following Jesus and building up His Kingdom is not only a great honor and joy, it’s also a requirement. It’s a command of love from our Lord and one He takes seriously. So, if it’s hard for you to serve Him wholeheartedly and to commit to building up the Kingdom out of love alone, do it at least because it is a duty. And it’s a duty for which our Lord will ultimately hold each of us accountable. (*My Catholic Life*) What am I personally doing to build up the Kingdom?

27. In verse 20 Paul writes: “Do not for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.” Explain what you understand this to mean.

28. Paul goes on to say: “Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat.” Describe a situation you have witnessed that illustrates this concept.

29. Have you ever been criticized for your faith or felt “out of place” because of your Christian or Catholic beliefs? How do you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, handle intolerance?

30. **CONNECTION:** It is sobering to realize that we could either draw people to Christ or drive them away from Christ by the way we act and the choices we make. That is why Paul stresses the message of charity and love. In light of this, we shouldn’t let little squabbles or petty differences of opinion over non-essential issues cause a good “work of God” to fall apart. Are you aware of a religious group or parish-related situation when a difference of opinion among God’s co-workers interfered with the “work of God?” How could words or actions of truth and love help to solve the problem?

Read and record 2 Corinthians 13:11. Pray that the God of love and peace may always be your guide.

#### **DAY SIX**

**Read Romans 14:21-23**

31. In verse 21 Paul repeats his thought about causing others to stumble. List some activities, hobbies or pursuits, not having to do with food or drink, that could be harmful to the faith of another.

32. In the first sentence of verse 22 Paul states the following about the faith that one has: “Hold the conviction that you have as your own before God.” What do you think this means?

33. Verse 23 is addressed to the weak in faith, “those who have doubts.” Refer to the Commentary and briefly summarize the definition of faith that Msgr. Mikesch shares in this instance.

34. For what are the weak, those who have doubts about clean and unclean foods, condemned and why? (verse 23)

**NOTE: Paul's final ruling on this subject is the principle that "whatever is not from faith is sin." Taken in isolation, these words sound like a general maxim that applies to all circumstances. Some interpreters, such as St. Augustine of Hippo, understood it in this way and thus concluded that nonbelievers lacking faith in God are incapable of conducting themselves without sinning in the process. Others, such as St. John Chrysostom, maintained that Paul was speaking directly to the situation in Rome in an effort to dissuade believers from acting contrary to their personal conviction about food. Most modern scholars side with Chrysostom and understand Paul to say that Christians must guard against judging one another, scandalizing one another, giving poor witness to the world, and transgressing their consciences. *Hahn & Mitch***

35. Read Galatians 2:11-14. In this passage Paul rebukes Peter for not acting in accord with his beliefs but instead succumbing to the opinions of others to act in a way he knew to be wrong. In your own words describe Peter's actions and the effect it had on other believers.

36. CONNECTION: While this chapter has revolved around the issue of unity, much of it has dealt with dietary restrictions. But as Msgr. Mikesch tells us, "the issue could have been anything. What Paul stresses is the importance of compassion and self-sacrificing love... The world will only be drawn to Christ if the world sees a community of people who have something to offer and what must be offered is the love of God shared in the daily lives of Christian people." Consider someone from The Cornerstone, or someone else you know and respect, who through their daily life truly shares the love of God.

Read and record Sirach 31:15. Pray for the wisdom and courage to act according to your beliefs regardless of the circumstances.

Read pages 101-106 in the Commentary by Rev. Msgr. Gregory R. Mikesch, M.Div., M.A. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.