

Encountering Jesus, the Living Word

A form of
*Lectio
Divina*



Prayer Booklet
2017-18 Year A-B

Under the direction of the Most Rev. Richard Smith, Archbishop of Edmonton, this prayer resource has been prepared by a committee of religious education consultants for use in the Catholic school districts of the Archdiocese of Edmonton.

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Why is Scripture important?

The best-selling book in history, the Bible (Scripture) is a library of books containing many types of writing: historical, prophetic, and poetic. The library must be read and interpreted in light of the entire library, not just bits, and pieces. We see in Scripture the “ineffable loving-kindness of God and see for ourselves the thought and care he has given to accommodating his language to our nature.”¹

In Scripture, God speaks to us. In Scripture, God reveals to us everything that we need to know about him.

“God graciously arranged that what he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should last forever in its entirety and be transmitted to all generations.”²

The fullness of this revelation is a Person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Before leaving the apostles, Jesus told them to carry on his mission:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you**. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

~ Mt. 28:19-20

The apostles carried out this mission with their words, their witness, and their lives. They passed this mission and their authority to teach to their successors: bishops. Therefore, sacred tradition and sacred scripture act as a mirror in which we, the Church, contemplate God until the day we meet God face to face.³ Bishops through the centuries have exhorted the faithful to “maintain the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter.”⁴ *Lectio Divina* is one of those traditions.

It is important—as disciples of Christ—to listen quietly and prayerfully to God’s word and to form our lives on it. *Lectio Divina* (Latin for ‘divine reading’) is a way of using Scripture to contact the living God. This practice began more than a thousand years ago in monastic communities. Because this practice is so fruitful, the Church still recommends it today.

¹ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, Second Vatican Council, November 18, 1965;, 13

² *Ibid*, 7

³ *Ibid*, 7

⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio Divina (or divine reading) is a very ancient practice. It is “capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God.”⁵ *Lectio Divina* is a contemplative way of reading and praying with Scripture. The basic steps are shown below.

Step 1: reading and listening

Start with reading (*lectio*) the text. If you are not reading it but hearing someone else read it, listen deeply. Try to imitate the prophet Elijah by listening for the voice of God in the silence of your heart (1 Kings 19:12). What do you hear God’s voice saying to you? How do you feel God touching your heart? Read and listen with an open heart. God will speak personally and intimately to each person gathered here. So in this step, we read slowly, and listen attentively, to hear the word or phrase that is God’s word for us this day.



Step 2: meditating, pondering, ruminating

Once we have heard a word or a passage in the Scriptures which speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and ponder it. Meditate, ruminate or chew on it. The image of cattle, sheep, or goats quietly chewing their cuds is an ancient symbol of God’s chosen people pondering the Word of God. Take in the word; memorize it; repeat it; allow it to interact with your thoughts, your hopes, your memories, your desires. By meditating on it, we allow God’s word to move and challenge us at our deepest levels.

Step 3: pray

Through prayer, we allow that word to transform us. Prayer in this step is multi-faceted. It is dialogue with God—a conversation with the One who has invited us into loving relationship. It is our response to what we heard God say to us in today’s Scripture passage. Prayer is also an offering of parts of ourselves and our lives that we now know God wants us to offer. When we offer those forgotten parts of ourselves to God, we are praying to consecrate them to God’s purposes. In prayer, we allow the word we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves.

Step 4: contemplating

Finally, *Lectio Divina* concludes with contemplation. “We take up, as a gift from God, his way of seeing and judging reality.”⁶ We rest in the presence of the One who has invited us to accept His transforming embrace. There are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. This is true in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of God is called *contemplation*. Again we sit in silence, letting go of our own words, and simply enjoy being in the presence of God.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87

⁶ Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, *Five Stages of Sacred Reading*, a handout from ScriptureFest 2011.

You are invited to engage in a process through which we encounter Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, the Living Word.

Guidelines for this process

1. We share our stories with one another. We share the story of the Christian faith and the Catholic tradition, and we connect that greater story to our own smaller stories. We encounter and live our faith in community with one another. We connect through telling our stories, but everyone shares to the extent they are comfortable. Keep in mind that we learn from each other, and people will learn from your contributions.
2. We balance our own need to talk with respectful listening to one another. Each person needs time to “get their voice into the room.” Also, people deserve our courtesy, even if we disagree. Any message can be conveyed with courtesy for the other.
3. We respect and keep one another’s confidence. Sometimes, participants in this encounter will share at a personal or deeper level. These situations should remain within the group as they will have been shared in confidence. This is part of building an environment of trust and respect.
4. We listen, and we learn. We offer our own experience, strength, and hope to others, discovering new ways to approach our lives by hearing how others have lived a life of faith. We talk about the problems we have encountered and how we have used our faith experience, our relationship with Jesus Christ, and our knowledge of God to help work through them.
5. Challenge yourself. People also have something to learn from you. We listen openly, share respectfully, and we refrain from judging, criticizing, and offering unsolicited advice.

Prayer before reading Scripture:

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Father, open our hearts,
for you are present among us now and always.
Let your Holy Spirit speak to us as we read your Word.
Lead us toward an encounter with you as we delve into the Scriptures.
Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of those gathered here,
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Father, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

We ask all this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Saviour.

Amen. +

Tips for small group facilitators:

- Have a printed Bible available for everyone: the New Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition (or NRSV-CE). One of the learning outcomes of this experience is to have everyone become comfortable with finding Scripture passages in the Bible.
- If you also use a Smartboard, link to www.BibleGateway.com and select the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.
- Your responsibilities as facilitator each month:
 1. To read the Scripture passage, and two pages in this guide, ahead of time.
 2. To lead the opening prayer (provided on page 5).
 3. To keep an eye on the time.
 4. To encourage people to share their insights by sharing your own.
 5. To keep the session focussed.

September 2017

Forgiveness

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. This passage makes a crucial link between God forgiving us and our forgiving others. Peter asks how many times he should forgive another and offers what he regards as a very generous seven times. Jesus' reply means our readiness to forgive should be without limit.
 - b. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A.
 - c. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel aloud, *slowly*: **Matthew 18:21-35**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group **one** of these questions:
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share.)
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - d. The saying about forgiveness employs the number seven which is a symbolic number in biblical terms. The important thing is that Jesus ups the ante by saying that what we consider to be generous, is not nearly enough. We must have no limits on our forgiveness.
 - e. There is a parallel to be drawn to the Old Testament passage where they speak of sevenfold vengeance and seventy-seven-fold vengeance (Gen. 2:24). This story inverts the Old Testament story, which implies no end to the vengeance desired and replaced it with the requirement of eternal, limitless forgiveness.
 - f. It is important to understand that the amount of the first debt is extreme. It is comparable to the national debt of Canada falling on one person (reference). Even though this debt is so great, the king, representing God, shows great mercy and not only accepts the promise of repayment but forgives the debt completely.
 - g. The failure of this forgiven servant to forgive a much smaller, yet not insignificant debt (about 100 days' wages), is what is seen to be the sinful act in this parable.

- h. The Jerome Biblical Commentary gives interesting insights into the seemingly paradoxical response of the king upon hearing of the lack of forgiveness offered by the servant whom he had forgiven:
 - i. “The parable illustrates the principle that details should not be allegorized. The conduct of the king is not a model by which we should learn the providence of God. The detail that is most significant is the difference in the debt owed by the merciless servant and the debt that he claims. The model is the forgiveness of God, which knows no limit; and neither should man’s forgiveness.” (130)
 - i. The use of extremes in Sacred Scripture is a powerful way to enforce a message. Other examples include: Matthew 5:30 “And if your right-hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.” and Matthew 18:8 “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire.”
 - j. There are a couple of particularly disturbing images in the reaction of the merciless servant: “seizing him by the throat” (28) “and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt” (30). It is clear that he has not learned to be merciful and forgiving, even though he has been forgiven.
 - k. The reaction of the king is equally disturbing: “in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt” (34). The negative reaction is as extreme as the loving and merciful reaction was. The message to be drawn from this reaction is not that God gets angry when we do something wrong, but that we are expected to be merciful and forgiving. When we are not merciful and forgiving, we are not acting as God is calling us to act.
6. Read the Gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing, and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment)
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
 - a. In this reading, the king is merciful and forgiving, no matter the size of the debt.
 - b. Although this passage is sometimes interpreted to say that our forgiveness from God is contingent on our forgiveness of our neighbors, this is not the point. The parable is underlining that we are to model the forgiveness of our loving God, which has no limits. This is exemplified through the words of the Our Father: “as we forgive those...”
 - c. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - Why is it so difficult for me to forgive?

- Do I need to forgive and forget or is forgiving enough?
- Is there anyone in my life that I need to forgive?
- Is there anyone in my life that I need to ask for forgiveness?

10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

October 2017

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background with your group:
 - a. This gospel reading follows the Parable of the Prodigal Son when Jesus is answering the priests and elders about his authority.
 - b. The vineyard is used throughout the Old Testament as a metaphor for the nation of Israel. The servants the master sent to obtain his produce are the prophets and teachers of Israel, those who remind the people about their duty to God.
 - c. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Twenty-Seventh Week in Ordinary Time of Year A.
 - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 21:33-43**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions.
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. This gospel represents the history of the Israelite people in parable form. Some have considered it more appropriate to call this an allegory than a parable even, as it draws such a striking resemblance to the Salvation history of our faith.
 - b. One of the saddest statements is the trusting comment of the father “They will respect my son.” How is, Jesus received in our spaces today?
 - c. Jesus takes the image of the image of the vineyard directly from the book of Isaiah, 5:1-7, where it is directly linked to the house of Israel. Readers at the time this was written would certainly be aware of this link.
 - d. Some have likened this gospel to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD by the Romans.
 - e. Consider the care and attention the master gives to the vineyard in verse 33. He builds a winepress, and a watchtower to stand guard. This is indicative of the care and attention God puts into his creation, and the love which God has for his people.

6. Read the Gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. While directed at the priests and Pharisees of the time, the gospel is also directed at us. We are the tenants in the parable. We are provided with many gifts, but ultimately all our gifts come from God.
 - b. This parable is about the resistance to God's intentions in our lives, a denial of his proper role, in other words, sin.
 - c. Ironically, the Son truly comes to share his inheritance but is killed by the self-centred tenants. Jesus comes to grant us a part in his inheritance of the kingdom, yet so often we push him away, or try to take for ourselves, what is freely offered to us as a gift in the person of the Son.
 - d. Consider why Jesus is sharing this teaching with the priests and Pharisees at this time, as he comes towards his death and resurrection. He is still seeking and offering redemption to the lost, giving us all an opportunity to remain in the vineyard of the covenant people who are given the gifts of grace, mercy, and ultimately redemption.
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

November 2017

Christ the King

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. The feast day of Christ the King is a comparatively recent holy day. Blessed Pope Pius XI instituted it at the end of the Jubilee Year of 1925. It was a well-timed and much-needed jubilee for the Church. It came after the destruction of the First World War and the tidal wave of secularism that followed the devastation.
 - b. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Thirty-Fourth or Last Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A.
 - c. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 25:31-46**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions.
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. Often called The Judgment of the Nations, verses 31-46 have also been called The Parable of the Sheep and Goats because of its parabolic twists and turns. Just as a parable surprises us, Jesus surprises the righteous and the unrighteous with his judgment. However, this is not a parable but is instead an eschatological (end of time) vision that describes a real future event.
 - b. The Son of Man comes in glory. Son of Man is Jesus’ favorite way to refer to himself. The phrase has a humble ring to it, but there is no modesty in the description of the Son of Man here. He comes in power and glory.
 - c. Note the contrast between Jesus’ first and second comings. In his first coming, Jesus emptied himself, coming into this world as a servant. There was a purpose in Jesus’ humble beginnings—that he might dwell among us, full of grace and truth and draw us to himself. In his second coming, however, the time for wooing and winning will be passed, so no further purpose would be served by humble circumstances. Jesus, therefore, will come in all of his glory—with all of his angels—sitting on a throne—with all the nations assembled before him.
6. Read the Gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.

7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. This passage includes several Christological titles (titles having to do with Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah—the anointed one—the one sent by God to redeem his people), such as Son of Man, Shepherd, King and Lord.
 - b. Furthermore, Jesus sits on a throne—identifies God as his Father—and pronounces judgment on the world. The humanitarian emphasis—feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and prisoners—grows out of the disciple’s commitment to Christ, the Lord of Lord and King of Kings.
 - c. At the same time, the word “shepherd” is often used in scripture for God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament, and the word “sheep” is a frequent metaphor for the people of God.
 - d. The shepherd has become King, just as the shepherd-boy David (from whom Jesus is descended) became king. Here the Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus whose kingdom has no end.
 - e. Jesus did not invent the idea of service to the needy. Torah law required landowners to leave the edges of their fields unharvested so that widows and orphans might obtain food by gleaning. Again, it is fulfilled in a more generous way through Christ who directs us to give not of the extra, but of what we have.
 - f. The king invites these merciful people to “inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” God prepared the kingdom as a gift from the foundation of the world—from the very beginning. “For I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me”. We should regard these six deeds of mercy as illustrative rather than exhaustive. The possibilities for mercy are boundless, just as human needs are boundless.
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

December 2017

The Annunciation

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. This Gospel passage is Luke's account of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary to announce the Good News that she will give birth to the Saviour.
 - b. This Gospel is proclaimed a few times at weekday Mass during the Advent season as well as at Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in Year B.
 - c. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel aloud, *slowly*: **Luke 1:26-38**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ "Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share."

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. The visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary reminds us of the visit of God to different women of the Old Testament: Sarah, mother of Isaac (Genesis 18, 9-15), Anne, mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1, 9-18), and the mother of Samson (Judges 13, 2-5). All of these women received an announcement that they would give birth to a son with an important mission in the realization of God's plan.
 - b. The Early Church Fathers compared Mary, mother of the Church, to Eve, the mother of all the living. They said that Mary is the new Eve, the one who undoes the damage done by Eve in the Garden of Eden.
 - c. Mary is betrothed "to a man named Joseph, of the house of David" (27). The Scriptures are not clear as to Mary's ancestry (theologians debate whether she, too, was of the house of David), but her betrothal to Joseph connects her to the Davidic family. So Mary is part of a royal family. "The house of David" was the most famous family in Israel's history. David's descendants ruled over the Jews for several centuries. God promised David that his family would have an everlasting dynasty and that his kingdom would never end (2 Samuel 7:13, 16).
 - d. In response to Mary's question, "How can this be?" the angel responds that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, reassuring her that God is at work (34, 35). In her "Yes," Mary acquiesces to answering the call and is taken by God where she cannot go on her own. God is trying to accomplish in us what we can scarcely dream.

- e. Gabriel responds in the way that God often responds to us. After explaining to Mary that the "Holy Spirit will overshadow you," the angel reminds Mary to look for signs of God's promise fulfilled in her life. In other words, to consider the experience of her life and the life of others: "Know that your kinswoman Elizabeth is in her sixth month," he says. "She who was once thought to be barren is now with child. For nothing is impossible with God" (36, 37). Look around you at what God can do and has done in your life already.
6. Read the Gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. In a great leap of faith and trust in the angel's message, Mary gives an unequivocal 'Yes.' She had yet to learn what her 'Yes' would involve, but it was made unconditionally, and it was never withdrawn. Through a life of trials and tribulations, right up to those terrible moments as she stood beneath the Cross and saw her only Son die in agony and shame as a public criminal, she never once withdrew that 'Yes.'
 - b. Pope Francis once said in a homily addressed in Milan, "Nothing is impossible for God.' When we believe that everything depends on our capacities, on our strengths, on our myopic horizons [things can seem overwhelming or impossible], when we are ready to allow ourselves to be helped, to let ourselves be counseled, when we open ourselves to grace, it seems that the impossible begins to become possible."
 - c. Jesus can take flesh because Mary's humanity gives him that possibility. This could only happen with Mary's "Let it be." The incarnation of God in Jesus is not restricted to Mary. Each one of us can stand as the "favoured one," the one with whom God dwells. Each of us is called to grow up to be a God-bearer, to carry the life of God within our humanity.
 - d. Saint Ambrose, in his comment on this Gospel passage, said that God continues to seek hearts like Mary's, willing to believe even in altogether extraordinary conditions.
 - e. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - How open am I to God's life within me even when God seems to ask the impossible?
 - What do the words "Do not be afraid" say to me today? What fears do I need to surrender to God?
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

January 2018

The First Disciples of Jesus

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's gospel from John recounts the story of Jesus calling his first disciples, an important account during these first Sundays of Ordinary Time.
 - b. John's gospel differs in many ways from the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke), where the announcement of Jesus as "Messiah" is the climax. The disciples in John's gospel confess this truth from the beginning.
 - c. By referring to Jesus as the "Lamb of God," John the Baptist is stating who this person is - the Messiah; the Anointed One and the Saviour.
 - d. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B.
 - e. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 1:35-42**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ "Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share."

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. John's testimony, his role as a "witness" to the Messiah, achieves its goal when two of his disciples follow Jesus.
 - a. We see two episodes in the call from Jesus. Firstly, the disciples are invited and follow. Secondly, the disciples bring another person to Jesus, while confessing their faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. We see that the experience with Jesus leads to a response: a call to evangelize.
 - b. Only in the Gospels of John and Matthew is Jesus responsible for Simon's nickname. Cephas means "rock" in Aramaic, also translated as Petros in Greek and Peter in English. This name defines his role in the community.
 - c. The act of renaming was used in the Old Testament by God (Abram - Abraham, Sarai - Sarah, Jacob - Israel) to indicate the beginning of a new life, a new purpose, a new relationship with God.
 - d. The term "anointed" sets up the role of Jesus as priest, prophet, and king.
6. Read the gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.

7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. Leading up to this account in John's Gospel, John the Baptist had stated, "I am not the Messiah" when the Jews asked, "Who are you?" (19, 20). The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and claimed, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (29). There is a clear distinction between the prophet (John) and the Messiah.
 - b. The phrase, "Lamb of God" is a combination of two images; the Prophet Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" (who is led to the slaughter "like a lamb") and the Passover lamb, who gives his life in atonement for our sins.
 - c. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - How have I been called to "Come and see?" What is my response?
 - How might I, like Andrew, bring others to Jesus?
 - How does my life witness, "We found the Messiah!"?
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

February 2018

The Transfiguration

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. The gospel we will hear today tells the story of Jesus' Transfiguration, a significant event in the scriptures as it foretells the glory of the Lord as God, and his ascension into heaven. It anticipates the glory of heaven, where we shall see God face to face.
 - b. Recognizing the importance of this event, the Church has long celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. In Canada, we celebrate this feast day on August 6 every year. St. John Paul II also named the Transfiguration as one of the Luminous Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary.
 - c. This gospel is paralleled both in the Gospels of Matthew (17:1-8) and Luke (9:28-36). We also hear about the event in St. Peter's own words in his second letter (2 Peter 1:17-18).
 - d. This Gospel will be proclaimed at Mass on the Second Sunday of Lent in Year B.
 - e. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Mark 9:2-10**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ "Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share."

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. This is one of the many times in the four gospels we hear that Jesus went to a mountain. Those in the time Mark was writing would have been well familiar with the motif of mountains being places where God visibly reveals something to humankind. In fact, *El Shaddai*, one of the names Jewish people use to refer to God, translates to "God of the Mountains." Here Jesus is revealed in his full glory as the Son of God.
 - b. There is also a clear connection between the Transfiguration and Jesus' baptism. In both events, a voice from heaven identifies Jesus as "my Son, the Beloved" (1:11, 9:7). There can be no doubt in the three disciples' minds that Jesus is exactly who he claims to be.
 - c. This event may also strengthen the resolve of the disciples to continue following Jesus, despite not understanding his full message. They have heard the voice of God claim Jesus as His Son- what a gift!
 - d. Appearing with Moses and Elijah connects Jesus to the very origins of the Jewish faith. Jesus is shown to be the fulfillment of both the law and the prophets- the real Messiah.

- e. It is clear that, despite being present for this miraculous event, the three disciples still do not have a full understanding of all that was to come. They will not fully understand the meaning of Jesus' resurrection until after it has already taken place.
6. Read the gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him up the mountain. In the Gospel of Mark, these three disciples seem to form an inner circle of Jesus' followers. He also takes only them when he heals the daughter of a synagogue leader (5:37) and when he goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (14:33).
 - b. The three disciples are given a glimpse of Jesus' glorified state- how he will appear in heaven after his death and resurrection. Peter wants to prolong this unique and glorious experience, and who wouldn't? However, the event is over quickly, a reminder that the glorious state of heaven has not been achieved yet. There is still much to come here on Earth, both in Jesus' time and in ours.
 - c. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - As Christians, we must ask ourselves, in what ways can we help reflect the Kingdom of God in our time and place? Do we allow ourselves to be transformed because of our relationship with Jesus and the promise of what is to come?
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

March 2018

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's Gospel challenges us to engage in meaningful worship as opposed to an insincere display. John wants to teach that Jesus put an end to the old way of worship (in the temple) and inaugurated a new worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Jesus' death and resurrection were the catalysts for this change. Organized worship and laws for participating in it make sense only if worship is motivated by Spirit and truth.
 - b. The cleansing of the temple is found at the end of Jesus' mission in the other Gospels (see Mark 11: 15-18), which is more likely to be correct historically, since it may have been one reason for his crucifixion. John uses the story here to introduce Jesus' confrontation with the Jewish authorities.
 - c. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed at Mass on the Third Sunday of Lent in Year B.
 - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 2:13-25**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ "Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share."
 - ◆ "Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share."

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. In chapter two, John begins with the wedding at Cana. It is the first of Jesus' "signs." After this, he recounts the cleansing of the temple. We see the word "signs" being used again. "What sign can you show us?" "Many believed in his name because they saw the signs he was doing."
 - b. Passover occurs in March or April (see Exodus 12: 1-13.10; Deuteronomy 16. 1-8). As many as one hundred thousand people might make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this festival.
 - c. Cattle, sheep, and doves were animals used as sacrifices. Money changers converted foreign currency into the coins allowed in the temple. The activity took place in the outer area of the temple, where non-Jews were allowed to go.
 - d. The whip is not mentioned in the other Gospels, nor are the sheep and cattle.

6. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment).
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed)
 - a. Jesus is upset because the merchants and Temple officials have made the Temple a marketplace and have defiled the sacred space. The anger he expressed was not out of control. There are times when it is appropriate to express anger.
 - b. Righteous anger is a reaction to an injustice or something that is not right. Jesus controls his righteous anger and channels it in a civil and religious challenge against the corrupt leaders and the corruption of the truth!
 - c. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - Righteous anger should be expressed in ways that challenge evil and unjust situations but never in a manner that causes violence or injury to another person. What situations in your life or the world might call for a response of righteous anger? How might you express your anger without going out of control?
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

April 2018

“I am the vine, you are the branches.”

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today’s gospel is a parable where the image of the vine underscores Jesus’ union with the disciples and their absolute dependency on him for life and growth.
 - b. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed at Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Easter in Year B.
 - c. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 15:1-8**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. The metaphor of this parable assumes that because the vinedresser (God the Father) seeks an abundant harvest, he creates the true vine (Jesus) and trims back the fruitless branches to invigorate the other branches to become even more fruitful.
 - b. Several times the Old Testament depicts Israel as a vineyard planted and tended by the Lord. When Jesus clothes himself with this same imagery, he is stressing that Israel finds its life and vigour no longer in the Old Covenant but the New Covenant authorized by its Messiah.
 - c. This scripture passage is the second part of the Farewell Discourse which concerns of the church. Jesus continues teaching about the disciple’s communion with himself and with the Father, their present sharing in heavenly life. This participation in the divine communion constitutes the churches inner, spiritual reality.
 - d. The Father must trim away our selfishness to increase our growth in love. Pruning probably refers to the trials and fatherly discipline we experience in this life.
 - e. The fruits of righteousness are born in us by the Spirit (the Gifts of the Spirit we receive at confirmation). Without this life-giving sap, which flows into the branches through the vine, we can do absolutely nothing to please the Father or move closer to salvation.
 - f. The delivery of this sermon during the Last Supper gives it a sacramental colouring. Note how the invitation to “abide” in Christ picks up the theme from the Bread of Life discourse and how the Synoptic Gospels make an explicit link between the “fruit of the vine” and the Eucharistic Meal.

- a. Read the gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
- b. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
- c. Invite any other sharing (words, phrases, images), and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment)
- d. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
 - a. The Father wants us to “bear much fruit” (15:8). He wants us to perform acts of love, whether great or small, in all aspects of our lives, and at all times.
 - b. The key to this kind of living is remaining on the vine, staying in spiritual communion with Jesus and being nourished by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The image of the vine teaches that Jesus provides his disciples with a constant source of life and power to love. We must remain constantly united to Jesus and grow in communion with him through prayer and the sacraments to love others as he commands.
 - d. The more we love and obey Jesus, the more our lives will become conformed to his. We are to become living icons of Jesus such that, when people look at us, they should be able to see God’s love shining in the world.
 - e. Jesus’s words are also a warning to Christians not to abandon Jesus and break communion with him. Cut off from their source of spiritual life; such persons will “wither” and die, and end up in “fire.”
 - f. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - How have you seen God’s “cutting and pruning” process in your life result in a more abundant life?
 - How can we “bear much fruit” in our lives and the lives of others?

10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

May 2018

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for a friend.”

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today’s gospel is a continuation of John’s gospel we have heard the previous Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Easter. Here, Jesus explains that love for the Father expresses itself through obeying God’s commandments.
 - b. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Sixth Sunday of Easter in Year B.
 - c. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 15:9-17**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. Previously in the book of John, Jesus taught that his relationship with his disciples involved an intimate, mutual knowing similar to that between the Father and the Son. Here Jesus teaches about the profound love existing among the Father, himself, and his disciples.
 - b. From all eternity, the Father infinitely loves the Son, poured forth all that he is into the Son and teaching him everything. Jesus loves his disciples with the same infinite, radically self-giving love. He drew his disciples into this unimaginable communion of love between the Father and Son and invited them to remain in this communion of love.
 - c. As the branches are to remain on the vine, the disciples are to stay in communion with Jesus and the Father’s love through loving obedience: keep my commandments. Such trusting, loving obedience preserves and fosters the disciples’ fellowship with Jesus because this is Jesus’ response to the Father as the Son.
 - d. Jesus’ command, “Love one another as I love you” (12), is foundational to the entire Christian life (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1827). It is so simple and yet so challenging. When we look upon the cross in faith, we see the love of God revealed, a love that is self-giving for others good. It is the same love that Jesus tells us we must practice. The Holy Spirit guides us and empowers us to live as disciples.
6. Read the gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.

7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
8. Invite any other sharing (words, phrases, images), and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment)
9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
 - a. “Love” is the essential word of today’s reading. The mutual love of the Father and the Son provides the foundation for both Jesus’ love for his disciples and the love that he commands the disciples to have for one another.
 - b. We need God’s help to love others in this way. To produce the fruits of love, we must remain on the vine and be pruned by the Father and be guided by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Put differently, if we are to love others as God does, we need to remain and grow in communion with Jesus, through such things as prayer, the sacraments, and following God’s commandments.
 - d. One reason why it is so difficult to love as Jesus does is that we are sinners, bound up in prideful selfishness. To love as God does, we must constantly be dying to our sinfulness and selfishness and living for God. When we live for God, we obey the Father’s will and love one another.
 - e. If time allows, pose this question for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - How can Christ’s attitude of love, that took him to the cross, be reflected in our relationships with each other?
10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

June 2018

“Passover and the Institution of the Eucharist”

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. In today’s Gospel, we hear how Jesus takes the Jewish feast of the Passover and allegorically signifies the mystery of his Passion.
 - b. To understand Mark’s succinct account, it is important to read it in the light of its setting as a Passover supper. A Passover supper would include the traditional elements: a blessing by the head of the household, the ceremonial foods and wine, the retelling of the story of the Exodus, and the singing of hymns.
 - c. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on Corpus Christi Sunday.
 - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that you find profound or interesting.

Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Mark 14:12-16 and 22-26**

3. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
4. Ask the group one of these questions:
 - ◆ “Is there a word, phrase, or image that touches your heart today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Is there a person in the passage with whom you identify today? Feel free to share.”
 - ◆ “Does anything in the passage unsettle or challenge you today? Feel free to share.”

(During this time, please do not offer any comment or judgment on what people choose to share).
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. Mark’s careful reference to the Passover is not merely a chronological but also a theological sign. Jesus chose the setting of the great feast, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, for the culmination of his mission. He is the true Paschal Lamb that is about to be sacrificed and the unleavened bread about to be given. In him, the Passover of Israel is fulfilled as revealed in its deepest meaning.
 - b. The combined feast of Passover and unleavened bread began with the late evening Passover meal. In preparation for the feast, each family’s Passover lamb would be brought to the temple. After passing inspection, the lamb was sacrificed, and its blood was sprinkled on the altar. It was then returned to the family to be roasted.
 - c. Jesus’s initial actions are typical of the host at a Jewish banquet, and are identical to what he had done in the two miracles of the loaves: he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. The customary blessing was a prayer of thanksgiving to God for having provided for his people. The sharing of one loaf was a sign of the fellowship the banqueters were enjoying. Mark implies that even Judas is included in this fellowship since he has said nothing about his departure.
 - d. According to custom, the host at Passover interprets each of the ceremonial foods by relating them to the Exodus. But Jesus brings the meal to an entirely new level. “Take it;

- this is my body.” With these simple words, the Last Supper becomes a prophecy in gesture, anticipating and interpreting the Passion that was to occur the next day.
- e. Jesus identifies the broken bread with his own body about to be broken on the cross. In Hebrew thought, “body” is not merely the flesh but the whole person. Jesus is revealing that his death will be a gift of himself to them. By asking them to “take,” that is, to eat the bread that is his body, he is inviting them to receive this gift of himself into the depth of their being.
 - f. Just as the Passover was not complete without eating the Paschal Lamb, Jesus’ sacrifice is complete only when his disciples consumed his body and blood by inviting them to share the one bread that is his body. Jesus is drawing them into a union with himself and one another that is far deeper than any earthly table fellowship.
 - g. Eucharist, the church’s name for the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper, comes from the Greek word for gives thanks (*eucharisteō*). In the Eucharist, Jesus invites his disciples to drink from the cup. Like a shared loaf, wine from a shared cup is a sign of fellowship. However, Mark suggests another level of meaning: the cup that Jesus will drink is his passion which he willingly accepts. Drinking from his cup means to participate in his atoning sacrifice, to willingly share in his sufferings and to receive their benefits: restored communion with God.
6. Read the gospel aloud a second time, *slowly*.
 7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
 8. Invite any other sharing (words, phrases, images), and allow the dialogue to move and develop. (Again, facilitators are encouraged to refrain from passing judgment or comment)
 9. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
 - a. The preparations for Passover not only supply a ritual context for Jesus’ action at the Last Supper but also exemplify Jesus’ ability to foretell what will happen.
 - b. Jesus’ words over the bread and cup reveal that his death on the cross is an atoning sacrifice, fulfilling the Passover and all the sacrifices of the old covenant. He is both the sacrifice and the high priest who offers it. At the same time, Jesus transforms his last supper into a memorial that will make his sacrifice present in the Church until the end of time. He instructs his Apostles to continue to offer his once-for-all sacrifice and distribute it to the people of God as he had to them.
 - c. As the old covenant between Yahweh and Israel was sealed through sacrificial blood at Mt. Sinai, the new covenant between Christ and the church is sealed through his blood poured out in the upper room on Mount Zion. This new and perfect sacrifice enables us to enter the covenant of communion with the Father through the forgiveness of our sins. The blood of Jesus is forever a sacrament meant of his divine life for those who received him in the Eucharist.
 - d. If time allows, pose these questions for discussion or for silent reflection:
 - How important is the Eucharist in your life? For you, is it a memorial of Christ’s death or is it food for the soul?
 - What does this tell you about God’s desire to be with us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist?

10. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or Hail Mary.

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