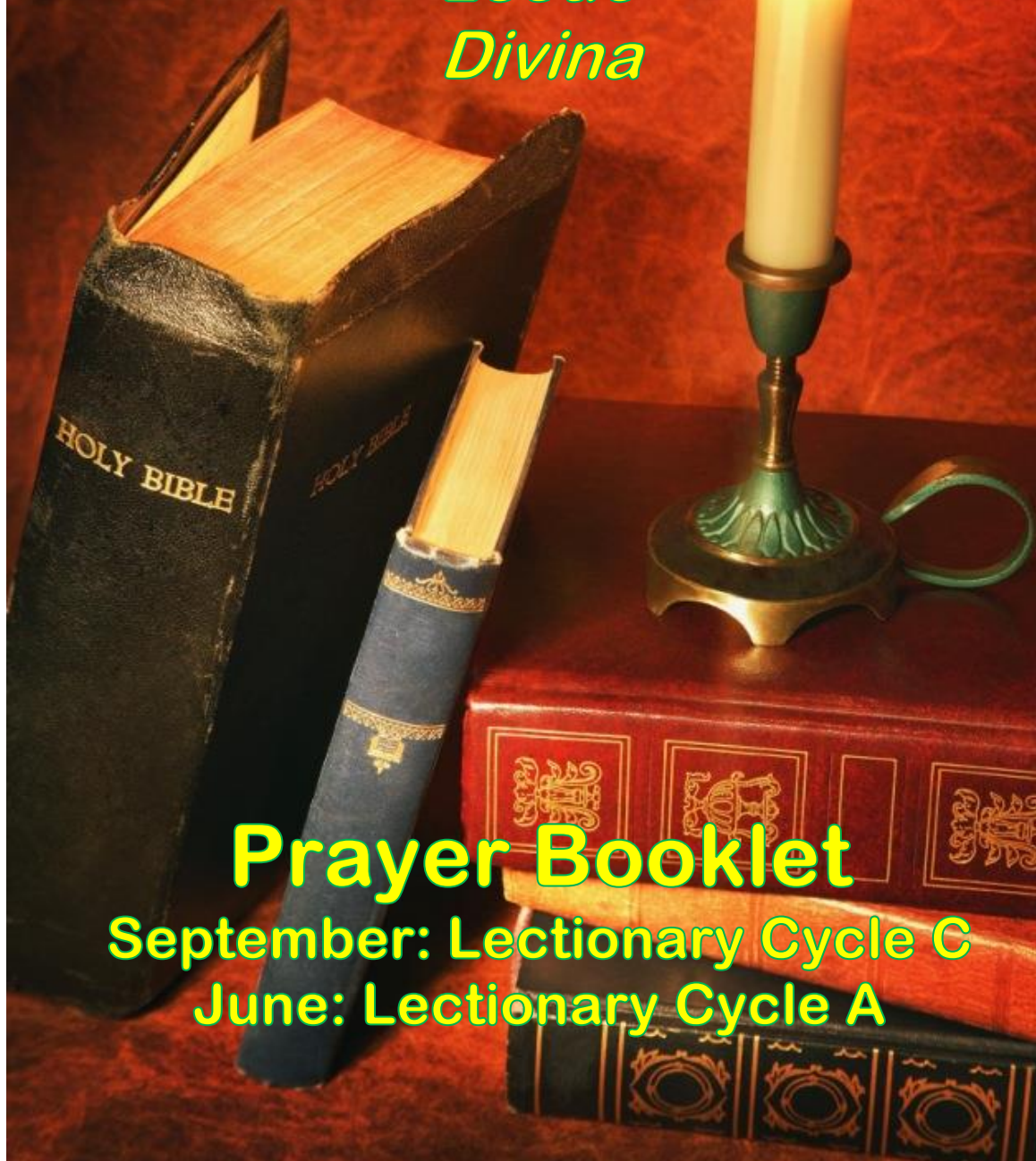


# Encountering Jesus, the Living Word

A form of  
*Lectio  
Divina*



**Prayer Booklet**

September: Lectionary Cycle C

June: Lectionary Cycle A

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 and archdiocesan staff 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 actually 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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.”<sup>2</sup>

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 own authority to teach to their successors: bishops. Thus 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.<sup>3</sup> Bishops through the centuries have exhorted the faithful to “maintain the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter.”<sup>4</sup> *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.

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

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>4</sup> *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.”<sup>5</sup> *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 own way of seeing and judging reality.”<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87

<sup>6</sup> 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 ourselves 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:**

+  
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](http://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

### Parables of the Lost

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's gospel recounts three parables about 'the lost' which explain why Jesus associates with sinners: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The linkage is evident in the terms *lost* and *found* and *rejoice* and *celebrate*. All three parables end with similar statements.
  - b. Jesus used parables to reveal convey powerful, often hidden messages or truths about the exact nature of God and God's relationship to humanity.
  - c. These parables illustrate Jesus' particular concern for the lost and God's love for the repentant sinner.
  - d. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
  - e. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 15:1-32**
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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.)
  - c. Definition of 'prodigal' = extravagantly wasteful.
  - d. Jesus tells these parables to tax collectors and sinners. Therefore, the stories offer them comfort, especially in the face of the Pharisees' and scribes' grumbling that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.
  - e. The fact that tax collectors and sinners listen to Jesus while the leadership does not is the opposite of what was expected in Jewish culture.
  - f. Jesus begins the parable with a familiar pastoral scene in Palestine. A shepherd has a hundred sheep—a count that would indicate he is modestly wealthy since the average flock ranged from 20-200 head. At day's end, he counts them and realizes one is missing. He goes to find it. The search is successful; the shepherd finds the sheep, lifts it onto his shoulder to bring it home, and then he celebrates with his neighbors.
  - g. The second parable parallels the first. At the most basic level, they make the same point. The second one stresses the search a little more than the first does. Recovering the lost sinner can take diligent effort. But the effort is worth it in the end.



- h. The third parable offers a more elaborate treatment of the seeking-of-sinners theme.
  - i. The popular title “parable of the prodigal son” possibly puts the focus of this parable in the wrong place. The story actually gives more attention to the father, and to the father’s whole-hearted reaction, than to the son’s return. The father’s response to the elder son’s resentment also shows how central a character the father is in the parable. So a better title might be “**the parable of the forgiving father.**”
7. Read the gospel aloud a second time, slowly.
  8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
  9. 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)
  10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
    - c. Asking for his inheritance before his father has died was the most insulting action a son could take. The youngest son was basically saying, “Father, I wish you were dead.”
    - d. The listeners would have been surprised at the father’s actions. The father complies with the son’s request and actually gives him his inheritance. This shocks the listeners because they know that the father was impoverishing himself.
    - e. Even the food of the pigs looks good to the younger son (cf. Luke 15:16). He has been reduced to the level of the swine—he is among them, one of the “unclean.” By working for a foreigner—who likely did not honor the Sabbath command given to Israel—he is completely cut off from his God, his family, and reduced to servitude. He is living outside of God’s family.
    - f. Then we hear that the man “came to himself.” He has come to his senses by realizing that even his father’s *servants* are better treated than he is. So he comes up with a plan. He will go back and beg his father to take him back—not as a son—but as one of his servants.
    - g. Note the dichotomy between *sonship* and *servanthood*, because it is a key to the story. The son realizes that he renounced his ‘sonship.’ However, even the servants of his father are better off than he is in his present state.
    - h. Note the father’s joy at his son’s return, and that the father restored sonship privileges to the younger son. The son has come from destitution and utter poverty to complete restoration. That is what God’s grace does for a penitent sinner.
  11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## October

### The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - b. Today's gospel recounts a parable told by Jesus to his disciples as he journeys to Jerusalem.
  - c. Jesus used parables to reveal convey powerful, often hidden messages or truths about the exact nature of God and God's relationship to humanity.
  - d. *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector* is not found in any other gospel; it is unique to Luke.
  - e. This is the gospel you will hear at mass on the Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
  - f. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 18: 9-14**.
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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. Tax collectors worked for the occupying Romans. They were considered traitors to their own people, since they also often overcharged or cheated them. Their dealings with the Romans (who were pagans) also rendered tax collectors ritually impure. By their occupation, they excommunicated themselves from their fellow Jews. There was nothing honest or holy about tax collectors in Palestine.
  - b. Pharisees, however, were experts on the Law, followed it strictly, and respected it to the letter. The Pharisees practiced fasting as encouraged by the prophets, and tithed as required by the Law. The problem was not the acts of praying, fasting, and tithing, but rather the attitude with which they carried out these activities.
  - c. Both the Pharisee and the tax collector were praying in a standing position. This was a common prayer posture then and still is now. For example, we always stand to pray during Mass when the priest says, "Let us pray."
  - d. Certain themes are predominant in Luke's gospel:
    - i. *Prayer* – this Gospel passage is about prayer. Just before this parable, Jesus told another parable about the persistent widow and an unjust judge (Luke 18: 1-8).

- ii. *Jerusalem* – another theme in Luke’s gospel is Jerusalem and, specifically, the temple there. The setting for today’s story is the temple area of Jerusalem.
  - iii. *Social justice* – Luke talks often about social justice, and Jesus’ compassion for the lost, the poor, the underdogs, and the marginalized. The tax collector would have fallen into one or more of these categories.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. 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)
10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
  - a. Jesus condemns the Pharisee because the Pharisee presents himself as sanctimonious and self-righteous, as well as critical and judgmental of others. Jesus says the tax collector went home justified because he humbled himself before God.
  - b. Jesus was not criticizing or discouraging devout or pious practices; he was criticizing the self-satisfied, show-off behavior of the Pharisee. In prayer, we should center our attention on God, rather than on ourselves, as the Pharisee does in this parable.
  - c. Prayer is how we speak with God. Our model for prayer is Jesus. Jesus relied completely on God in all he did and said. We too must depend wholly on God, and on his grace and mercy. In prayer, we must bring our authentic selves to the relationship.
  - d. Those who engage in showy prayer, almsgiving, or fasting, have already received their reward: empty praise and admiration from human admirers. Christ’s disciples (who include us) must pray, fast, and give alms to do what is good and right, to bring about God’s kingdom, to enter into deeper communion with God, and to prepare for an eternal reward.
  - e. Typical to Luke’s gospel, Jesus tells parables where the opposite of what might be expected is the point. The pious Pharisee is condemned, while the dishonest tax collector is justified. This reversal was shocking to the people then, in the same way that it may be to us today. Jesus explains why when he says, “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (v. 14).
  - f. Mary says the same thing in her *Magnificat*, during her visit with her cousin, Elizabeth: “He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.” (Luke 2: 51-52)
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## November

### Jesus' crucifixion between two criminals

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's gospel recounts the story about Jesus' crucifixion and specifically the exchange between Jesus and the two criminals. Its theme is forgiveness and mercy.
  - b. Luke provides us with a fascinating conversation between Jesus and one of the criminals. He is the only Gospel writer to record this life-changing exchange.
  - c. You will hear the reading at Mass on the last Sunday of the Church year—the Feast of Christ the King.
  - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 23: 35-43**.
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. Share the following information with your group:
  - a. Crucifixions were reserved for the worst criminals (slaves, subject populations, and the lowest criminals) and took place outside the city of Jerusalem.
  - b. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the criminals are referred to instead as ‘bandits.’
  - c. One of the criminals joins the taunts deriding Jesus and his claim to be the Messiah. The other criminal rebukes the first. He recognizes two vital things:
    - i. Firstly, that Jesus ‘has done no wrong’ (verse 41), that he is innocent and doesn't deserve this punishment—something the Jewish leaders failed to see.
    - ii. Secondly, that this wasn't the end, that Jesus would be returning, and when he did it would be as King (verse 42)—which was something the disciples were desperately hoping was true.
  - d. The second criminal accepted that, unlike Jesus, he deserved to be punished for his actions, expressed faith in Jesus, and threw himself on God's mercy—knowing God's mercy was his only hope.
  - e. Catholic tradition since about the 4<sup>th</sup> century has referred to “the good thief” as Dismas. The name is adapted from a Greek word meaning ‘sunset’ or ‘death.’
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.

9. 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)
10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
  - a. This story speaks about the mercy and forgiveness God extends to all who are truly repentant. One of the characteristics of Luke's Gospel is that it develops a complete understanding of Jesus' identity as the son of God who offers redemption to all.
  - b. Jesus responds to the second criminal, as he always does to genuine faith and cries for mercy, with the gift of salvation.
  - c. Through mockery, Jesus' true identity is revealed in this gospel. Jesus is identified as the chosen one, the Messiah, the King of the Jews; first, by the rulers; next, the soldiers, and finally, the criminals. Posted above Jesus's head on the cross was an inscription in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek that read: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The Latin letters are most often depicted in paintings: **INRI** (Iēsus Nazarēnus, Rēx Iūdaeōrum).
  - d. The Gospel presents Jesus of Nazareth as the true shepherd-king who fulfills the hopes of Israel and the nations. A unique king who reigns on the cross, Jesus triumphs over the power of sin and death.
  - e. Jesus is a descendant of David (second king of Israel and "a man after my [God's] heart" [Acts 13:22]). Jesus was anointed by God to reconcile sinners and gather them into his eternal kingdom.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## December

### Jesus and John the Baptist

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. This Gospel passage is the story of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah. This is the same John who, in the gospel of Luke, was the first to recognize Jesus as the son of God. He leapt for joy in his mother Elizabeth's womb when Mary's greeting reached her ears (Luke 1:40).
  - b. John's preeminent greatness lies in his function of announcing the imminence of the kingdom of God. But to be in the kingdom is so great a privilege that the least who has that privilege is greater than the Baptist.
  - c. This Gospel will be proclaimed at Mass on the Third Sunday of Advent.
  - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.

3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 11: 2-11**.

4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.

5. 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.)

6. 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. Matthew wrote for a primarily Jewish audience.
  - b. In Scripture, the prophets served as models of faithfulness to God in spite of undergoing hardship and persecution.
  - c. John is the last and greatest of the prophets of the Old Covenant. He fulfilled the essential task of all prophets: to pointing to the Messiah. John prepared the way for the Messiah, and he pointed others to Jesus, the Messiah, at the River Jordan.
  - d. John saw from a distance what Jesus would accomplish through his death on the cross—our redemption from sin and death, and our adoption as sons and daughters of God, and citizens of the kingdom of heaven.
  - e. John the Baptist sets the stage for the coming of Jesus. We Christians, who are "born into God's reign," can reflect with awe and joy today on our own calling to share in same charism as these prophets: to tell others about Jesus Christ, the sacrament of God's love for us.
  - f. Jesus praises John the Baptist as the greatest person born, yet in the same breath Jesus proclaims that the least in the kingdom of God is even greater than John. This sounds like



a contradiction, unless you understand that what Jesus was about to accomplish for our sake would supersede all that the prophets had done and foreseen in the past.

- g. Today's passage also focuses on the qualities of mercy that mark the Messiah's reign. He brings healing to the blind and lame, to lepers, and to the deaf. He raises the dead and preaches glad tidings to the poor. Those who can accept this Messiah are blessed.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
  8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
  9. 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)
  10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
    - a. John was in prison when he sent messengers to Jesus asking if he was the one they had been waiting for. Jesus answered by describing the Messiah's deeds in terms described in Isaiah (35:5-6 and 61:1).
    - b. Jesus also calls those who take no offence at him 'blessed.' Calling those people blessed connects back to the beatitudes heard earlier in Matthew's Gospel (5:3-12).
    - c. Jesus is also referring to the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (Mal 3:1) that a messenger will prepare the way for the Lord. Jesus identifies John as that messenger.
    - d. Those who oppose the preaching of John and Jesus about the kingdom oppose the kingdom itself.
  11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## January

### Jesus begins his ministry

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. The purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was to prepare for the Messiah. John the Baptist's arrest marks the end of his work, and the stimulus for the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the gathering of His first disciples.
  - b. Both John's and Jesus' preaching are the same; they encourage people to repent because the kingdom of heaven is near (Mt. 3:2 and Mt. 4:17). Calling for repentance offends many people because it suggests that they need to change.
  - c. You will hear this gospel proclaimed on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time.
  - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 4: 12-23**.
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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 word repentance in Greek is *metanoia* which means to change your mind and think differently. For John and Jesus, calling people to repentance means calling them to turn away from sin and be faithful to God.
  - b. Jesus is upset by John's arrest and retreats to Capernaum in Galilee. On the surface, Galilee is farther away from Herod and seems safer for Jesus, but Matthew explains the change in location as in accord with Isaiah 9:1-2, and thus in accord with God's will.
  - c. Capernaum is on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee on an important trade route connecting Damascus and Caesarea, where many Gentiles (non-Israelites) live. Most of Jesus' ministry will take place in this region. Jesus' ministry and message are meant for all nations, not simply the Jewish people.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.

9. 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)
10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (use as needed)
  - a. Jesus' call is to "repent, for the kingdom has come near." Jesus, like John, calls for a complete conversion and reorientation of people's lives.
  - b. Matthew consistently uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God." Consider for a moment what life will be like where God's kingdom is fully come. In the kingdom, there will be no need for armies, or prisons, or locks on the door. No police force will be required to enforce proper behavior. People will look for ways to give to others rather than to take for themselves. We catch glimpses of the kingdom in the lives of saintly people for whom the kingdom has truly come.
  - c. Jesus tells us that we will have eternal blessings through repentance, forgiveness and seeking peace with a pure heart.
  - d. The first four people Jesus calls to be his disciples are ordinary fishermen. At that time, fishermen were usually common folk, with little education, tended to be poor, and worked very hard to make their living. Jesus is showing us two things here:
    - i. Anyone / everyone can be a disciple of Jesus. We are all called to serve him.
    - ii. Jesus loves and calls all people equally. Jesus' love is not given based on status or wealth; it is given freely and abundantly to all.
  - e. Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." The disciples—and that includes us—must rely on God's help to bring in a catch... on our own, our nets will be empty.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## February

### Be salt and light

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. We are in the cycle of Sunday readings that the Church calls Year A. Right after the Christmas Season, the readings that we hear at Mass on the Sundays of Ordinary Time are mostly from the Gospel of Matthew. Year B is Mark's gospel, and Year C (which we just finished) is Luke's.
  - b. Matthew's is a teaching Gospel. He begins Jesus' ministry with the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the first of five major teaching sections. Matthew closes Jesus' ministry with the Great Commission, in which Jesus calls his disciples to make disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey everything that he had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). So in this Gospel, Jesus' work begins and ends with an emphasis on teaching.
  - c. In this passage, Jesus continues the teaching known as the Beatitudes, or the Sermon on the Mount.
  - d. You will hear this gospel on the 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time.
  - e. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 5. 13-16**
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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. As salt purifies, preserves, and seasons, so the disciple must be as salt in the world of human society to purify, preserve, and penetrate that society for the kingdom of God, witnessing to God's righteousness and peace.
  - b. Salt was a valuable commodity in the ancient world. People traded with it, like we trade with gold and other commodities. Salt also served a very useful purpose in hot climates before the invention of electricity and refrigeration. Salt not only gave food flavor, it also preserved meat from spoiling.
  - c. Salt cannot change its chemical composition, but loses taste and value if adulterated. This is a warning to the church that while it must be *in* the world, it must not be *of* the world—Christians must not be overwhelmed and tainted by the values of the world.

- d. Lamps in the ancient world served a vital function, much like they do today. They enable people to see and work in the dark and avoid stumbling.
  - e. Light is a familiar metaphor in scripture (Ps. 36:9; Ps. 119:105; Isaiah 42:6). Jesus says in the Gospel of John that he is the light (John 9:5). In this Gospel passage, he extends that metaphor to the disciples... to the church... to us. Our light is derived from our relationship to Christ. Our light is not our own, but is the reflection of Jesus' light.
  - f. The Canadian Catholic television network, Salt + Light TV, is named after this gospel passage.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
  8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
  9. 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)
  10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion : (use as needed):
    - a. A lamp is not intended to be invisible. It is positioned where it can provide light for the house. Like lamps, disciples have a purpose. We are to live in such a way that our lives, words, and actions works give glory to God.
    - b. The Jews also understood "light" as an expression of the inner beauty, truth, and goodness of God. *In his light we see light* (Psalm 36:9). *His word is a lamp that guides our steps* (Psalm 119:105). God's grace not only illumines the darkness in our lives, but it also fills us with spiritual light, joy, and peace. We need to be in relationship with Christ our Saviour to receive the grace to live according to his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.
    - c. The candles used at Mass are symbols of the light of Christ.
    - d. Jesus used the image of a lamp to describe how his disciples are to live in the light of his truth and love. Just as natural light illumines the darkness and enables one to see visually, so the light of Christ shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God's kingdom.
    - e. Our mission is to be *light-bearers* of Christ so that others may see the truth of the gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception. Jesus remarks that nothing can remain hidden or secret. We can try to hide things from others, from ourselves, and from God. Nonetheless, everything is known to God who sees all. There is great freedom and joy for those who live in God's light and who seek this truth.
  11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## March

### Do not worry

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's Gospel challenges us to put our trust only in God. This challenge confronts us to experience the freedom of a happy life, trusting God for everything.
  - b. He is not advocating a reckless, thoughtless attitude towards life; instead he speaks against worried preoccupation that takes the joy out of life.
  - c. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
  - d. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Matthew 6: 24-34**
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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. Love and hate do not refer to emotions, but represent the biblical idiom for 'choose'/'not choose.' The point is that undivided service can be given to one master only; if there is more than one, every choice means a favoring of one and rejection of the other.
  - b. Jesus tells his followers, "You cannot serve God and wealth." To live a responsible life in today's world, we must deal with financial concerns. But when this concern becomes an obsession, money becomes one's goal, one's god, and one's master.
  - c. Great rabbis taught that one ought to meet life with a combination of prudence and serenity. Biblical Jews were very familiar with this attitude to life.
  - d. Do not worry about your life (Greek: *merimnesete* -- be anxious; be apprehensive about possible danger or misfortune). Jesus is not commending recklessness, but calls us not to be distracted by worry. Worry disables; faith enables.
  - e. What we are and what we have are gifts from God. Excessive worry indicates a lack of trust in God.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.



9. 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)
  
10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion : (use as needed):
  - a. In this passage, Jesus gives seven different reasons why we shouldn't worry. If God gave us life, we can trust him for the things necessary to support life. We should not be obsessed with trying to find security in accumulating things. In any event, worry is a useless exercise, it doesn't add time to the day and is pointless.
  - b. It is true that birds "neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns" (v. 26), but they build nests, forage for food, and care for their young. We have an obligation to do the same: to work, to produce, to avoid idleness and dependency (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13).
  - c. Worry is typical of Gentiles (pagans), not of those who know what God is like. Worry and anxiety show that a person does not trust God.
  - d. Jesus tells us two ways to defeat worry:
    - i. Seek the Kingdom of God, and
    - ii. Concentrate on doing and accepting God's will.
  - e. "So do not worry about tomorrow." Worry can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time, without worrying about the future. While we are planning and preparing, we can be sure that God is for us, so we have no need to be anxious (Romans 8:31). In life and death, we belong to God and, in life and death, God will provide for our needs.
  
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## April

### The Empty Tomb

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's passage is the account of the Resurrection as found in the Gospel of John.
  - b. You will hear this Gospel on Easter Sunday.
  - c. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 20: 1-9**
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)

6. 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. Mary Magdalene is present in all four Gospels, but here she is alone, before sunrise. People believed that the dead person's spirit remains in the vicinity of the tomb for three days, so they commonly visited the tomb during the first three days after burial. Sabbath regulations prohibit such visits on the Sabbath, so the earliest that Mary can visit is sundown on Saturday evening, which ends the Sabbath and begins the first day of the week.
  - b. In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the women are heading for the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. In John's Gospel, wrapping and anointing the body with spices and linen clothes has been done before the body is laid in the tomb.
  - c. When Mary Magdalene sees that the stone has been removed, she runs to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple. Mary does not even consider that Jesus might be risen from the dead. She sees only that the grave has been opened—probably desecrated.
  - d. Both disciples run to the tomb. The other disciple arrives first but does not enter, possibly out of deference, although he looks in and sees the burial cloths. The presence of these two men at the tomb will be important, because it establishes two legal witnesses (the number required by Torah law) to the empty tomb.
  - e. There is a bit of tension between the two disciples, and it is clear that in this Gospel the Beloved Disciple is the star and is highly esteemed and beloved by Jesus.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.

8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. 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)
10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion : (use as needed):
  - a. As Simon Peter enters the tomb, he sees the burial cloths, and the cloth covering the face of Jesus that is carefully rolled up and placed to one side in a separate place. Such a detail likely illustrates that the Resurrection is a very deliberate and definitive conquest of death, for we remember that, in John 11:44, Lazarus exited the tomb still bound in the burial cloths.
  - b. The grave clothes serve three functions in this story:
    - i. First, they provide visual evidence of Jesus' resurrection.
    - ii. Second, they provide evidence that Jesus' body was not stolen. Grave robbers would not leave behind valuable linen cloth.
    - iii. Third, they serve a theological function. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus emerged from the tomb still wrapped in his burial clothes (11:38-44). However, when Jesus emerged from the tomb, he did so unencumbered, perhaps signaling "his resurrection into the life of God's eternal order."
  - c. Further, the Greek grammatical construction points to God, as the source of the action. When the other disciple enters the tomb, he sees and believes, but believes what? The impression is that the other disciple believes that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but John does not say that. Instead, in the next verse, John says that "they didn't know the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (v. 9). It seems that the sight of the grave clothes and the tomb have awakened some sort of fledgling belief in the beloved disciple that he would be hard-pressed to define.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## May

### The road to Emmaus

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's gospel occurs right after the Easter narrative in the Gospel of Luke and takes place later in the day on Easter Sunday.
  - b. Today's gospel recounts Jesus appearing to two men as they walk to Emmaus, looking sad. They are sad because of their memories of the events of the last few days.
  - c. This story is only found in the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Mark (16:12-13) has a similar account that describes the appearance of Jesus to two disciples while they were walking in the country, at about the same time in the Gospel narrative, although it does not name the disciples, nor the destination as Emmaus.
  - d. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed on the Third Sunday of Easter.
  - e. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.

3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 24: 13-35**.

4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.

5. 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.)

6. 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 location of Emmaus has never been identified with certainty, but it was near the city of Jerusalem. According to Scripture, it was but eleven kilometers from Jerusalem. At least three towns near Jerusalem claim to be the Emmaus in Scripture. However, no town by that name exists today.
- b. The two men are not a part of the eleven apostles. They appear to be a part of the rest of the followers of Jesus. One of the men is named Cleopas, but he shows up nowhere else in the New Testament.
- c. We must admire these two Emmaus disciples. The Jewish leaders killed Jesus, and the disciples went into hiding for fear that they might be next. However, these disciples talk openly about Jesus with a person whom they believe to be a perfect stranger.
- d. For Luke the resurrection is a 'sign' to see, requiring that one's eyes be properly opened (v. 16). We remember that in John's account of the Resurrection, Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener, recognizing him only when he called her name. These two disciples on the

- road to Emmaus had not yet had the eyes of their faith opened and so they could not recognize their traveling companion.
- e. Jesus must have had a normal human form, since the men did not recognize him. He was not a “superhuman” with glowing features. The inability to recognize Jesus is typical of initial reactions to Jesus in resurrection stories.
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
  8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
  9. 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)
  10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion : (use as needed):
    - a. This story echoes the story of the angels’ appearance to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15). In both stories, the hosts fail to recognize the significance of their guests, but extend hospitality nevertheless. In both stories, hospitality leads to revelation—to blessing.
    - b. This story involves highly liturgical language, including “he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.” (v. 30); “The Lord is risen indeed” (v. 34); and “the breaking of the bread” (v. 35). The risen Christ is revealed through the telling of the story, the interpretation of scripture, and the breaking of bread.
    - c. Eucharistic symbolism is intentional—the event takes place on the same day as the resurrection (Sunday), and it involves the interpreting of Scripture, proclamation, and sacrament. This sequence of events is how the disciples come to recognize and identify Jesus.
    - d. The passage ends with the disciples going to Jerusalem to report what had happened. Before they can do that, they hear the testimony of the eleven say that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to Simon (24:34). This statement functions to place Peter as the first believer in the risen Christ, the first apostle.
    - e. Why is it that some believe, and others do not? We cannot believe by our own reason or strength; it is by the Holy Spirit that one comes to believe.
    - f. The setting for most persons to come to faith is Christian worship, which includes Scripture, proclamation, and sacrament. That is also where the faith of all is sustained. It is the place where Jesus continues to reveal himself. The Christian faith is born and nurtured where people share in worship through word, gesture, and earthly means, such as water, bread, wine, and tactile expressions of mutual care—the smile, the clasp of another’s hand, perhaps even an embrace.
  11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

## June

### The coming of the Holy Spirit

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
  - a. Today's reading is from the Acts of the Apostles. This book was written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke. It describes life in the Christian community after Jesus' ascension into heaven.
  - b. In this passage, the twelve apostles were afraid to speak publicly about Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. They were afraid to face the same fate— arrest and crucifixion— as Jesus suffered. They had no idea how to carry out the mission that Jesus had entrusted to them.
  - c. This reading is read at Mass each year on Pentecost Sunday. The word, Pentecost, means 'fiftieth.' Pentecost marks the last day – the 50th day – of the Easter season.
  - d. You will hear this reading proclaimed at Mass on Pentecost.
  - e. As we read this gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that you find profound or interesting.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the passage out loud, *slowly*: **Acts 2: 1-11.**

#### Pronunciation Guide

Mesopotamia	mehs-o-po-TAY-mih-uh
Judea	dzhou-DEE-uh
Cappadocia	kap-ih-DO-shee-uh
Pontus	PAHN-tus
Phrygia	FRIH-dzhih-uh
Cyrene	sai-REE-neh

4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
5. 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.)
6. 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 Pentecost was the name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which was a harvest festival or feast. Jews would come from afar to celebrate in the Temple in Jerusalem. There were crowds of pilgrims in Jerusalem on this day.



- b. The Holy Spirit is often associated with the wind. Ask everyone to go to the very beginning of the bible, Genesis 1:1-2. Read the two verses together.
  - c. Fire often symbolizes the presence of God. Remember the story of Moses and his encounter with God in the burning bush (Exodus 3)? God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and sent him on a mission to set his people free from the Egyptians. Similarly, in this story of the Pentecost, God's Spirit (in the form of tongues of fire) empowers the apostles to continue the mission of Jesus Christ.
  - d. The tongues of fire correlate with the words of John the Baptist where, in Luke 3:16, he says that Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire."
7. Read the gospel out loud a second time, slowly.
  8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
  9. 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)
  10. Help to draw out the following understandings during your discussion : (use as needed):
    - a. In writing about the coming of the Spirit, Luke uses words and imagery that are similar to those used to describe the encounter with God on Mount Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were given to Moses. At Sinai, the mountain trembled and there was fire. At that time, God made a covenant with His people... He would be their God, and they would be His people. The story of the Pentecost is understood to be a renewal of that covenant.
    - b. When the apostles were able to speak in tongues—in other languages—this was a sign that they should proclaim publicly what God had done in Jesus. At the Last Supper (John 16:13), Jesus announces that he must soon return to the Father but that he will send an Advocate, a Paraclete (which means 'right by your side'). The Pentecost is the fulfillment of this promise. The Spirit remains 'right by our side.'
    - c. The miraculous ability for the Apostles to speak in foreign languages symbolizes the worldwide mission of the Church. Salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all people. The Good News of Jesus Christ was to be proclaimed to people of every nation.
  11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

**Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your hearts.**

**~ Deut. 6: 4-6**

**Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before God no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.**

**~ Heb. 4: 12-13**

**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**

**~ Ps. 119: 105**



*The Catholic*  
**Archdiocese**  
*of* **Edmonton**