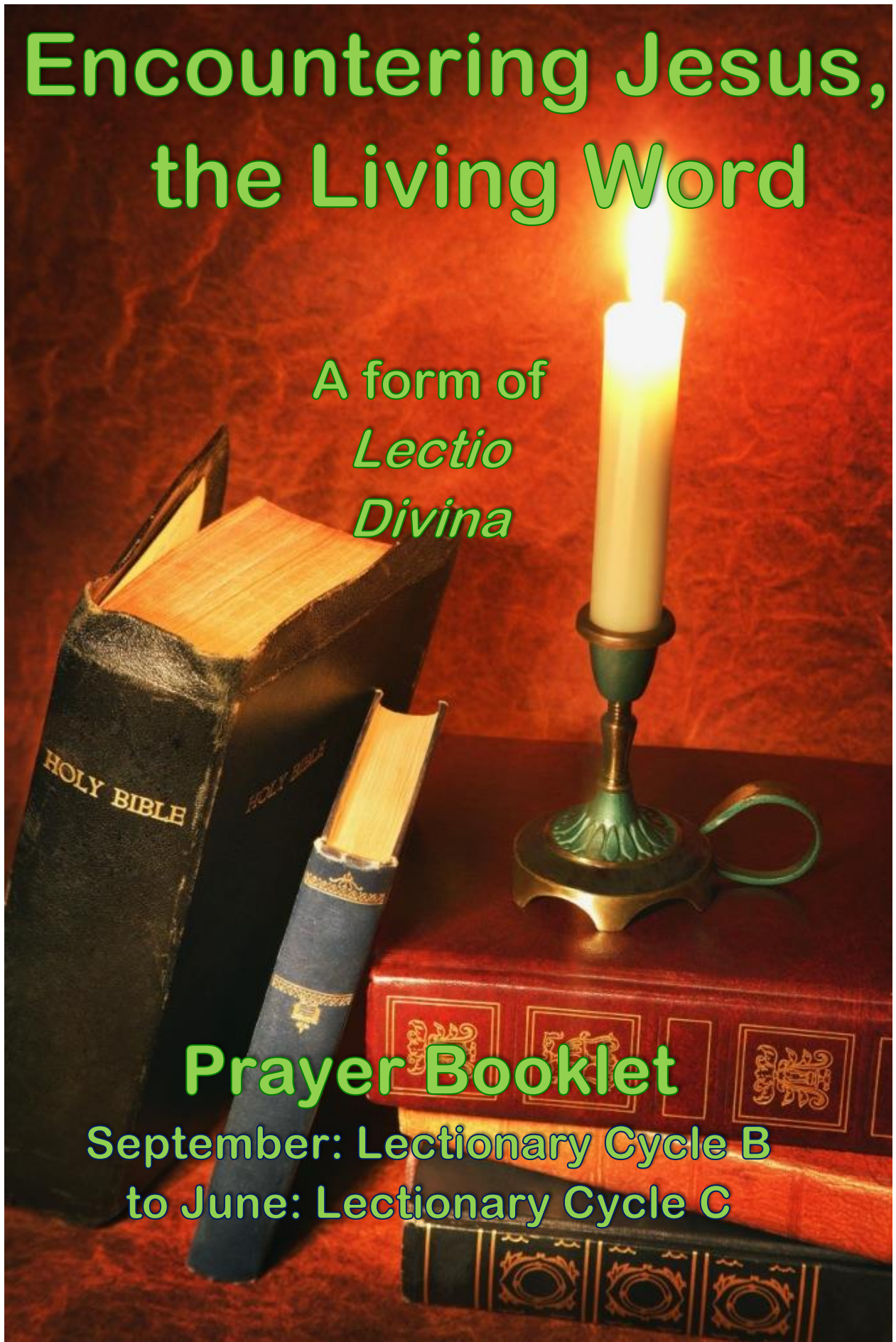


Encountering Jesus, the Living Word

A form of
*Lectio
Divina*

Prayer Booklet

September: Lectionary Cycle B
to June: Lectionary Cycle C



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 Archdiocese of Edmonton.

Committee members:

Susan Barylo, Archdiocesan Catechesis Office
Kathleen Nguyen, Archdiocesan Sacramental Education Initiative

LeeAnn Arsenault, Red Deer Catholic Schools
Suzanne Foisy-Moquin, Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord
Clare Ganton, St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Schools
Ed Jean, Edmonton Catholic Schools
Louis Kloster, Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools
Karen Koester, Evergreen Catholic Schools
Ryan Ledene, Red Deer Catholic Schools
Bridget McAndrews, Living Waters Catholic Schools
Alene Mutala, Elk Island Catholic Schools
Richard Ries, East Central Catholic Schools
Janice Stefancik, Edmonton Catholic Schools
Sandra Talarico, Edmonton Catholic Schools

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.”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 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.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 (**meditatio**), ruminate or chew on it. The image of cattle and sheep quietly chewing their cud 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: praying

Through prayer, we allow that word to transform us. Prayer (**oratio**) 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 (**contemplatio**). “We take up, as a gift from God, his own 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. The graphic on this page is also from his handout.

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

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.

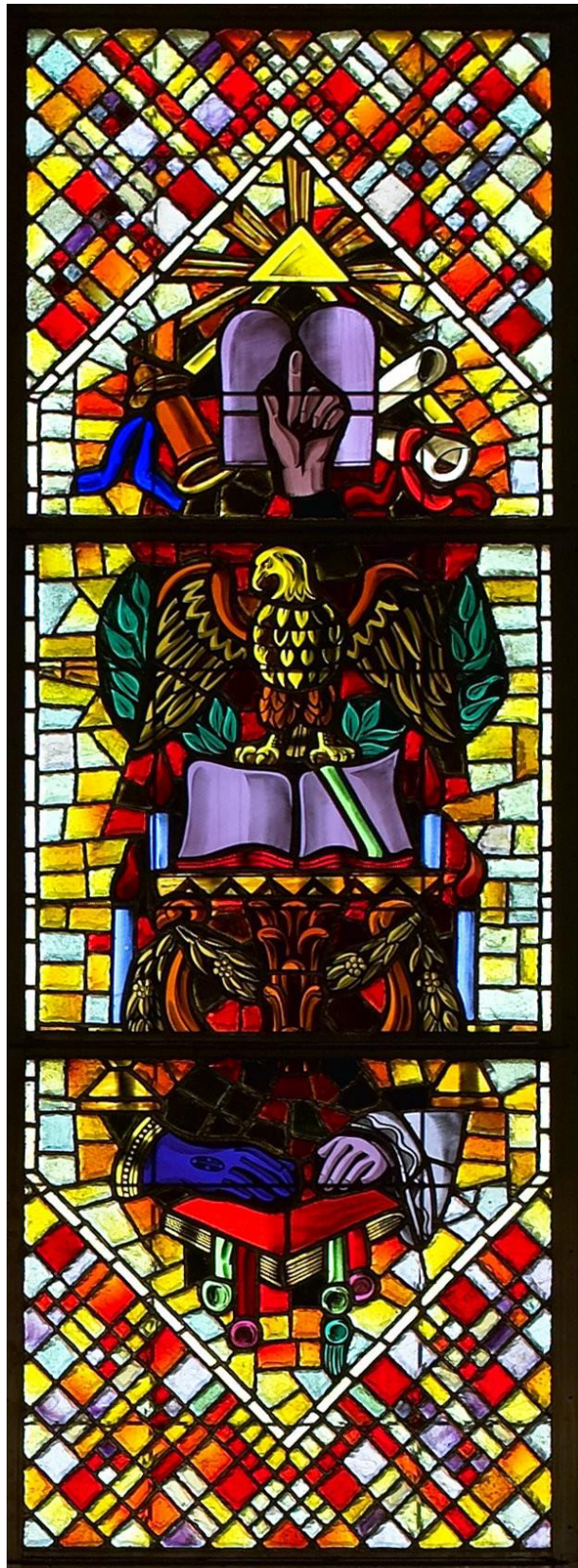
Prayer before reading Scripture:

+

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.

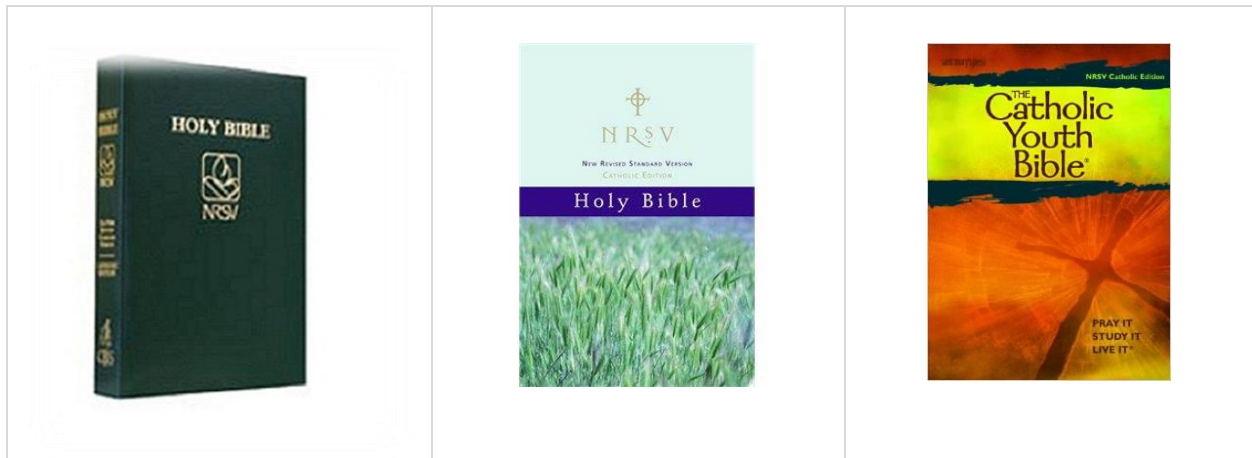
Amen. +



1 "The Ministry of Lector Window" at St. Joseph Seminary, Edmonton

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.



- Your responsibilities as facilitator each month:
 1. To read the Scripture passage, and the two pages in this guide for the month, 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

“Take Up Their Cross and Follow Me”

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Until November, we are in Lectionary Cycle B; most of the Gospel readings for the year which will end in November are from the Gospel of Mark.
 - b. Recent scholarship has shown that there was no single definition within first-century Judaism about the term “messiah.” It could mean teacher, warrior, judge, high priest, patriarch, or king. The one constant was that a messiah was always imagined as victorious in his work.
 - c. Many Jews of Jesus’ time had been longing for a “conquering hero” kind of messiah who would defeat the Roman occupiers. Popular opinion agreed that Jesus was a prophet and certainly a man of God. In this Gospel, people are confused by Jesus and his message of love and mercy: if he is the messiah, what kind of messiah is he going to be?
 - 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 captures your attention.
2. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Mark 8:27-35**.
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.)
 - a. Up to this point in Saint Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been viewed through the mighty deeds he has done. But until Peter proclaims his statement of faith that Jesus *is* the Messiah, Jesus has not yet been seen as such.
 - b. To counteract the expectations that the messiah would be a political-military figure, Jesus instructs his followers about the suffering and shame that is to come for him to accomplish his mission. He will be rejected by Israel’s leaders and killed, then rise from the dead.
 - f. Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke him for talking about suffering and dying. Jesus publicly rebukes Peter for that very reason: because Peter is not willing to accept the idea of a suffering messiah. Jesus tells him Peter needs to think *like God*, not like humans.
 - g. “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (8:35). Jesus speaks very plainly about

what will be required to follow him as a disciple. It is the ultimate paradox: to save your life, you must lose it (give it away).

- a. Jesus refer to himself as the “Son of Man” in this Gospel. Jesus uses this phrase to refer to himself 14 times in Mark’s Gospel, and over 80 times in the four Gospels. In this passage, Jesus is alluding to Isaiah 52 and the suffering servant of the Lord.
- b. Here is the first prediction of the Passion (Mark 8:31-32). Jesus tries to prepare his followers for the rejection and shameful misery that is to come, and yet he also predicts the resurrection. In discipleship, there will certainly be suffering, but God will always take care of God’s people—the essential message throughout Scripture.
- c. When Jesus says to Peter, “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (8:33), Jesus is referring to the common belief that the Messiah would be a political leader who would liberate the Jewish people from the oppression of the Romans. Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples, will not lead like that. They will deny themselves, pick up their crosses, and follow Jesus... into suffering and even death.

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 Gospel, Jesus acts as any good teacher does: by assessing where his students are in their understanding of what he has been teaching.
- b. Jesus makes it clear that he is the Messiah but, unlike in Matthew’s Gospel, he doesn’t compliment Peter for recognizing it. Instead he chides Peter harshly for thinking like humans think. Suffering and rejection are not easy for anyone to endure, but Jesus wants the disciples to understand that *human ways do not work to bring about God’s Kingdom*; only God’s ways will, yet they will seem foolish to human eyes.
- c. Peter speaks for all of us when he expresses horror at the idea of Jesus suffering, or of Jesus’ followers suffering. Instead we prefer to avoid the cross. Jesus calls us to realize that the only way to get to the resurrection is through accepting the cross.
- d. Take time every now and then to ask yourself, “Who *do I say* that Jesus is? Do I simply want Jesus to rescue me from my troubles? Do I only turn to Jesus when I need help? Or do I dedicate myself to Jesus at all times?”

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

October

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. The Gospel of Mark explores who the person of Jesus is, with secondary themes of faith, mission and discipleship. Today's reading explores the theme of faith and Jesus as the Son of David.
 - b. The name Bartimaeus means "son of the unclean," or "son of one without honour." Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been in constant association with "the unclean" of his society: demoniacs, lepers, tax collectors, sinners, a bleeding woman, and a dead body. When Mark shows Jesus healing someone called "son of the unclean," Mark reminds everyone of all the "unclean."
 - c. Jericho is six miles north of the Dead Sea. It was the city first conquered by Joshua upon entering the Promised Land. It may be the oldest continuously occupied city in the world, showing evidence of settlement back to 10,000 BCE.
 - d. This is the Gospel you will hear at Mass on the Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Mark 10: 46-52**
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. Bartimaeus, the blind man, calls out to "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This prayer has become known as "the Jesus prayer." Bartimaeus models for us how to pray: ask simply and honestly for the desire of your heart.
 - b. When Bartimaeus calls Jesus "Son of David," it shows that he recognizes Jesus as God's chosen one. Ironically, the blind man has seen more clearly than many of those sighted people who have travelled with Jesus.
 - c. This passage hints at discipleship. Bartimaeus throws off his cloak to run to Jesus, where Jesus tells him his faith has made him well (as he told the woman with a hemorrhage). Throwing of garments in Mark's Gospel is often a signal of throwing off the old way of being. Bartimaeus immediately follows Jesus on *the way*.
 - d. Jesus performs his last miracle in Mark's Gospel when he heals Bartimaeus. In verse 10:49, "Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.'" The beggar scrambles up to run to Jesus and pleads to see again and, when healed, he immediately follows Jesus. Mark's

Gospel stresses quick action in response to God's call, by using words like "immediately" many times.

7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. Invite any other sharing, 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. Bartimaeus was determined to get Jesus' attention above the din of the surrounding crowd. Jesus was probably teaching as he walked along, and people wanted to hear Jesus, not Bartimaeus. Jesus did not sideline people. Jesus responded to what were seen as the 'hopeless cases' of his day.
 - b. Jesus does not presume to know what Bartimaeus wants. Instead Jesus asks him to specify exactly what he is asking for from Jesus. Thus Jesus initiates a relationship with him. Ironically, just before this in Mark's Gospel, Jesus had also asked James and John (with whom he *did* have a relationship) what they wanted from him, finding out they wanted something much more self-serving (seats on his right and left in his glory).
 - c. The crowd would also want to shush Bartimaeus because it might draw the attention of Roman soldiers who did not like disruptive people or scenes. In addition, Bartimaeus was loudly identifying Jesus as the Messiah, a dangerous classification in those days.
 - d. Jesus commends Bartimaeus' faith and tells him it has made him well. Bartimaeus is a good model for prayer and for our praying. He overcame the obstacles to his praying (the noise and crowd) by persisting, leaping up, throwing off his cloak, and coming to Jesus.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

November

Jesus Denounces the Scribes

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Jesus is teaching in the temple. He warns his listeners to beware of the scribes (powerful and wealthy), who dress to be noticed, and who claim the best seats in the synagogue and at banquets. They pray long prayers to God to be noticed by other people.
 - b. Mark contrasts the scribes with the poor widow. She put far less money in the treasury box than other people, especially the rich. She has contributed all she had from her livelihood and has shown her total trust in God by doing so.
 - c. The widow's offering is a sign of what total dependence on God really means.
 - d. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the third last Sunday of the Church year—the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.
 - e. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Mark 12: 38-44**.
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. Jesus holds the widow up as a model of faith and trust in God. The rich do not need to depend on God; they have plenty to live on. The widow only has God and God's people to lean on.
 - b. Jesus says that the widow puts in more than the wealthy because what she gives is a higher proportion of her total monetary worth—in this case, it is her *total* worth. This story of the widow's offering suggests that faithful giving—and faithful living—are *for the sake of the giver* as much, if not more than, for the sake of the recipients.
 - c. In this Gospel, the scribes are the epitome of what is wrong with the elite and wealthy of any age. Their goal, like many millions before and since, is to reinforce their own social status and power. The widow stands for those few who serve *God's purposes* so that all in the community may experience blessing.
 - d. Jesus warns his disciples against the wrong kind of religious faith. When denouncing the scribes, Jesus warns against three things:
 - i. the desire for importance rather than selfless service

- ii. the desire for admiration and recognition rather than seeking to promote the good of others through humble service and love, and
- iii. attempting to use one's position (especially a religious position) for gain and self-advancement.

True religious faith consists of relating rightly (with love, honor, and respect) to God and to one's neighbors, especially the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned.

7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. Invite any other sharing, 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 implies that discipleship involves absolute surrender to God's will and purpose.
 - b. Catholic Christians are called to see that what they have—time, talents, and treasure (money)—is a gift from God. Our response to receiving these gifts must have two dimensions: both gratitude *and* generosity.
 - c. As disciples of Christ, we are called to share our gifts of time, talent, and treasure with all of God's people. Our ability to be good stewards of God's gifts requires a conversion of outlook from self-centered to God-centered.
 - d. We are simply caretakers of God's gifts and are called to use them as God wills... for the community of which we are a part, and for all of God's people.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

December

Mary's visit to Elizabeth

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. After Vatican II, the Church introduced a *three-year cycle for Scripture readings* to allow more of the Bible to be heard. Each Sunday celebration has four passages from Scripture (including one from the Psalms). The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are used in cycle A, B, and C, respectively. The Gospel of John is used throughout the Easter season, as well as Advent, Christmas, and Lent, as appropriate.
 - b. The Church year begins with the season of Advent. This Church year we move to Cycle C, using mainly the Gospel of Luke.
 - c. In this Gospel, we hear the story of Mary's visit to her kinswoman, Elizabeth. Mary has just been told she will bear the Son of God. She immediately goes to visit Elizabeth, who after years of barrenness, is now six months pregnant.
 - d. Zechariah was a priest, and Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, the first of Israel's high priests. Aaron, Moses' older brother, had been Moses' spokesman ("prophet") to Pharaoh. Zechariah and Elizabeth were "righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord" (Luke 1:6).
 - e. This Gospel will be proclaimed at Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Advent.
 - f. As we read the Gospel together, make a mental note of a word or phrase that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 1: 39-45**.
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 journey Mary made "with haste" to the "Judean town in the hill country" from Nazareth was about 130 kilometers and would have taken about four days. Mary made her journey to Elizabeth right after she was told by the angel, Gabriel, that she would be the mother of the Son of God.

- b. Mary was young, a virgin, and had been told something by an angel that many people would not have believed. She probably felt quite alone. When we are weighed down by loneliness, we yearn for someone to understand and accept us.⁷
 - c. Her haste to visit Elizabeth suggests that Mary went to share her news with someone she felt might believe her story, a righteous woman who was married to a priest, one who was herself a recipient of God's miraculous love and bearing a child in her old age.⁸
 - d. What a joy and relief for Mary, then, when Elizabeth responded to Mary's arrival with "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Elizabeth already knew and immediately affirmed Mary's condition as coming from God.⁹
 - e. Mary stayed with her older relative for three months, and presumably she was there to offer her support and help until Elizabeth gave birth to her son, John the Baptist.
 - f. Mary's visit to Elizabeth sanctifies Elizabeth and Zechariah's home with the presence of the Lord.
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
 8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
 9. Invite any other sharing, 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 visiting Elizabeth, Mary becomes the first disciple by sharing the news of the Word made flesh with another person.
 - b. "Blessed are you..." Elizabeth blesses Mary with words spoken to two women in the Old Testament, Jael and Judith, for their heroic faith and courage in warding off enemies hostile to Israel. Mary follows in their footsteps, but her victory will be greater and the enemy will be destroyed forever. She will give birth to the Savior who will destroy evil, sin, and death.¹⁰
 - c. Mary's divine motherhood is the first Marian dogma (truths of the faith from Divine Revelation or connected to it) expounded by the Church. Mary was given the title of "Mother of God" (or, in Greek, *Theotokos*), at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E., and it was affirmed at Vatican II in 1964 in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.¹¹
 11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

⁷ Charles A. Curran, *The Word Becomes Flesh, Cycle C / Vol. III*, (Counselling-Learning Publications, East Dubuque, Illinois, 1979), p. 30.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: New Testament, Second Catholic Edition RSV*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, p. 106.

¹¹ Ibid.

January

Jesus' First Miracle at Cana

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. The Gospel of John portrays Jesus differently than the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). In John's Gospel, we come to better understand "the heavenly identity and mission of Jesus." John's Gospel's was known as the "spiritual" Gospel in the ancient Church.¹² In it, Jesus is always in control of his destiny.¹³
 - b. John's Jesus uses ordinary words filled with different layers of meaning, which are usually misunderstood by his listeners. Water is more than water, and bread is more than bread. Always hear John's Gospel as if for the first time, and let the text provoke, challenge, and enlighten you.¹⁴
 - c. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time.
 - d. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 2: 1-12.**
4. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
6. 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. Jesus addressing his mother as "Woman," sounds abrupt and a bit rude to modern ears. However, it is an Aramaic form that is not disrespectful, though it is rather formal.¹⁵ John also uses the same title when Jesus addresses the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman about to be stoned for adultery, his mother at the foot of the cross, and Mary Magdalene on the morning of the Resurrection.
 - b. Jesus' use of the title "Woman" for his mother also signals the beginning of a change in her relationship with him. In the privacy of their life until now, Jesus has been primarily her son; in his public ministry, he is defined by his relationship with God the Father and

¹² Ibid., p. 158.

¹³ Daniel Durken, ed., *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2009), p. 309.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 316.

not by earthly family ties. His mother's name is not used because it is discipleship rather than individual personalities that is important.¹⁶

- c. During this era, wedding festivities could last as long as a week and, with poor people, it was easy for wine to run short. In a culture that regarded hospitality almost as a sacred duty, running out of wine would have been a shameful social disaster, and an insult to the guests. Jesus blessed a young couple and brought joy to their wedding party. First by his presence, and second, by saving them from embarrassment when the wine ran out.
- d. Water in stone jars was used for Jewish purification rituals. Stone jars, unlike clay pottery, did not transmit impurities. The water of six stone jars, each holding 20-30 gallons, was turned into wine, yielding far more than the wedding guests needed.
- e. John is careful to note that Jesus' first miracle at Cana is done in response to Mary's intercession. Mary, the icon of the bride and the counterpoint to Jesus the groom, is the persistent petitioner.
- f. Mary's final words in the New Testament are "Do whatever he tells you." These words are her motherly advice to each one of us as disciples of Jesus. Our salvation depends upon our living out of these words. As she did at Cana, Mary knows what we need before we do, and she always points us to Jesus.

6. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.

7. Pause for a time of silent reflection.

9. Invite any other sharing, 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 the Bible, a wedding is a metaphor for the mystical union between God and humanity. God wants to marry his people—to create an intimate relationship like that of spouses and to share God's life fully with humanity. God becomes flesh in Jesus as the ultimate marriage of heaven and earth—divinity and humanity. Therefore, it is fitting that Jesus' first public ministry takes place at a wedding.
- b. John always refers to Mary as the mother of Jesus; never by her personal name. In John's Gospel, it is discipleship rather than individual personalities that is important.
- c. Jesus' mother advocates for the young couple, possibly her relatives. The Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* (or the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*), affirms the propriety of using the title "Advocate" for Mary. Just as she intervened for the young couple at Cana, she continues to intercede for us now.

11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

¹⁶ Durken, p. 316.

February

The Temptation of Jesus

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's Gospel recounts the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness. The story of Jesus' temptation is paralleled in Matthew 4:1-11 and noted in Mark 1:12-13.
 - b. In the chapter before this Gospel, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. In the verses following this reading, Jesus begins his active ministry. Part of Jesus' preparation for ministry is overcoming the temptations offered to him by Satan.
 - c. The Greek word *diabolos* (meaning devil) translates the Hebrew word *satan* (meaning, adversary, opponent, rebel).
 - d. Jesus is in the wilderness for forty days. "Forty" is a common number in the Bible for a period of difficulty, hardship, testing, or suffering. Jesus is in the wilderness for a purpose: preparing for his public ministry.
 - e. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed on the First Sunday of Lent.
 - f. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 4:1-13**
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 forty days Jesus spends in the wilderness relates back to the forty days during which Moses fasted on Mount Sinai, and Elijah journeyed to Horeb, the mount of God. The Lord led the Israelites into the wilderness of the Sinai desert for forty years, to humble them, testing them to know what was in their hearts, and whether they would keep his commandments.
 - b. Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus was led on a forty-day journey of prayer and fasting to prepare him to meet with God on God's holy mountain: in Jesus' case, the mountain of Calvary.
 - c. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus (and by extension, in the life of Christian disciples). This Gospel makes clear that Jesus, just baptized, is "full of the Holy Spirit." It is also the Spirit who has led Jesus to the

wilderness. Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit to give him strength, wisdom, courage, and self-control during his time in the wilderness and his time on earth.

- d. The three temptations of Jesus by Satan are the temptations we all face: temptations to sensual pleasure, to power, and to pride. These are the three fundamental ways that all of us can be distracted from the path that God wants us to walk.¹⁷
 - e. The Gospel of Luke has the Jerusalem temptation scene come third as a foreshadowing of the important role that Jerusalem will play in the suffering and death of Jesus. Satan's offer to bypass that suffering is an attempt to stop God's overall plan.
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
 8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
 9. Invite any other sharing, 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 responds to each temptation by quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy tells of an earlier time and place where both temptation and God's chosen met in the wilderness. During the Exodus, the Israelite nation failed this test; however, Jesus succeeds where Israel failed.
 - b. Jesus' success is the first of many that he will have over Satan. Jesus shows that discipleship does not always take the easiest road; disciples trust God's Word and remain faithful to God's Way.
 - c. Usually, we see deprivation as a punishment, or as a lack of God's love for us. However, deprivation often serves a greater purpose. In times of trial, a person must try to discover God's purpose in the deprivation, what spiritual growth is optimal, and how it should be achieved. We must always try to search out God's will for our lives.
 - d. Our Lord Jesus knows that we can't fight temptation on our own. We need the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us. We receive the Holy Spirit in baptism, to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and to be our guide and strength in times of testing (1 Corinthians 10:13). God wants us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12) with the strength and help which comes from the Holy Spirit.
 11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

¹⁷ Bishop-elect Rev. Robert Barron, "Jesus is Tempted in the Desert" (homily podcast, 29 Feb 2004), available at <http://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/jesus-is-tempted-in-the-desert/617/>. Accessed 21 August 2015.

March

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. On Palm Sunday, we hear two gospels proclaimed at Mass: one at the beginning of the celebration, and one during the Liturgy of the Word. The one we hear today is the first Gospel—the triumphant one; the second Gospel tells the story of Christ’s Passion, his suffering and death.
 - b. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week—the final week of Lent. Holy Week is the week in which Christians celebrate the mystery of their salvation: Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection.
 - c. Only in Luke is Jesus explicitly given the title “king” when he enters Jerusalem in triumph. Luke has inserted this title into the words of Ps 118:26 that heralded the arrival of the pilgrims coming to the holy city and to the temple.¹⁸ The issue of Jesus’ kingship will lead to his crucifixion.
 - d. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed on Palm/Passion Sunday.
 - e. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 19: 28-40**
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. Beginning in the fourth century in Jerusalem, Palm Sunday was marked by a procession of the faithful carrying palm branches, representing the Jewish people who celebrated Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem. In the early centuries, the procession began on the Mount of the Ascension and proceeded to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.
 - b. “Greek *ôsan*na transliterates Hebrew *hoshia’ na* (literally, “Save, please!”). [Hosanna] is usually rendered as if it were an acclamation of praise... Actually, “*hoshia’ na*” is a prayer addressed to the Messiah, quoted from Psalm 118:25-26.¹⁹

¹⁸ USCCB. Commentary on Luke 19 available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/19>, Accessed 21 August 2015.

¹⁹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications, Clarksville, Maryland, 1992), p. 63.

- c. Riding on a donkey was the manner in which kings entered a city in triumph. It was the prerogative of royalty.²⁰
 - d. As the practice of carrying palm branches spread throughout the Christian world by the ninth century, the procession would begin in each church with the blessing of palms, proceed outside the church, and then return to the church for the reading of the Passion.
 - e. Christian faithful have traditionally decorated their houses with the palms from Palm Sunday and, in many countries, a custom developed of weaving the palms into crosses, crowns of thorns, or other shapes that were then placed on home altars or other places of prayer.
 - f. Traditionally, blessed palms are returned to local parishes in the weeks before Lent, to be burned and used as the ashes for Ash Wednesday.
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. Invite any other sharing, 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 different parts of the Christian world, particularly where palms were hard to obtain, branches of other bushes and trees were used, including olive, box elder, spruce, and various willows. Perhaps best known is the Slavic custom of using pussy willows, which are among the earliest of plants to bud out in the spring.
 - b. The Pharisees command Jesus to tell his disciples to stop saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” This line is also from Psalm 118, one of the psalms of the Passover *Hallel* (composed of Psalms 113-118, the last four of which are Messianic).
 - c. Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees that the stones would shout out, finds echoes in verses 22-23 of Psalm 118: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is a marvel in our eyes.” With both the kingly donkey and the chanting of the Messianic Psalm, we can understand why the Pharisees are so shocked and appalled. But Jesus must acknowledge what is true; he stands clearly before all of us in this passage as the Messiah, the King of Kings.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

²⁰ Curran, p. 48.

April

Doubting Thomas

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. This Gospel passage recounts two of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples; the first takes place on Easter Sunday night. The disciples are behind locked doors for fear that what happened to Jesus will also happen to them.
 - b. “Peace be with you” or “Shalom” was a traditional Jewish greeting. In this case, it was God’s peace that Jesus was bringing. Jesus says this not once, but twice. This greeting echoes Jesus words at the Last Supper (see John 14:25-27 and 16:33).
 - c. Shalom is translated as “peace” in English, which makes one think of lack of hostility or disturbance. The Hebrew word “shalom” has more dimensions than simply lack of conflict. It means completeness, wholeness, fullness, well-being, right relationship, and harmony. True shalom can only come from God.
 - d. This Gospel is read at Mass on the Second Sunday of Easter.
 - e. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **John 20: 19-31**
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 peace that Jesus wishes for his disciples, and “Peace be with you!” greeting that is said at Mass, is meant to convey the true *shalom*, the peace of God—spiritual peace of heart, mind, and soul.
 - b. By showing his wounds, Jesus confirms his identity and his humanity.
 - c. Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” This action brings to mind God’s act of breathing on the first man (Genesis 2:7) and giving him life. Similarly, Jesus breathes new life into the disciples. As Jesus is breathing the Holy Spirit into the community of disciples, God is transforming them and empowering them to continue Jesus’ ministry. The disciples are assigned the same mission that Jesus was given for the sake of the world.

- d. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples will be bearers of the Spirit, making God present to the world for generations to come. As disciples, we too continue Jesus' mission. We are first called and then sent.
 - e. This passage actually describes two occasions when Jesus appeared to the disciples, one week apart. Thomas is absent the first time (cf. John 20: 24) and dismisses his friends' reports of having seen Jesus. A week later, however, Thomas is present.
 - f. In verse 23, Jesus says "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." With these words, Jesus gives the disciples the authority to forgive sins in His name. This passage becomes the scriptural basis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This power to forgive and to retain sins in the name of Christ is passed on to priests and bishops in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. This Scripture passage is one reason why we as Catholics confess our sins to a priest.
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
 8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
 9. Invite any other sharing, 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. While there is an element of disbelief in all the post-resurrection accounts, it is most dramatically embodied in Thomas. It is not clear whether Thomas actually puts his finger into Jesus' side. To have touched Jesus may have been a sign of Thomas' continuing doubt. However, Thomas responds with the most eloquent profession of faith in Jesus when he says, "My Lord and my God!"
 - b. Thomas's words at the end of John's Gospel echo the words at the start of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*" (1:1).
 - c. John's was the fourth—and last—Gospel to be written, around 90 CE. In Verse 29, Jesus' words to Thomas seem to be quite direct and chastising. John may have intended these words, not so much for Thomas as for the second- or third-generation Christians in his community who may have been questioning their faith.
 11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

May

The Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's Gospel tells of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus through the multiplication of loaves and fishes. It is among the few accounts found in all four Gospels. Five thousand is the number of men who were present, but the crowd was much larger as it included women and children as well.
 - b. The people of Jesus' time lived in expectation of a Messiah, a 'new Moses' who would repeat the great signs worked by Moses in Exodus: leading the people through the desert and feeding them with manna. The multiplication of the loaves in the desert was for the crowd a sign that the messianic time had come (see John 6:14-15).
 - c. In Luke's Gospel, this account occurs immediately after the beheading of John the Baptist. The apostles have just returned from having been sent out by Jesus, and they are sharing their experiences.
 - d. You will hear this Gospel proclaimed on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known by its Latin name, *Corpus Christi*.
 - e. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 9: 11-17**.
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. Reading between the lines about the situation of the crowd, we find something very important. People neglected to eat in order to stay with Jesus. In his person and his message, Jesus attracted people, even to the point that they forget everything to follow him around.
 - b. When the disciples realize the problem, they tell Jesus to dismiss the crowds so they can go and find food. Moments of sin are always in the direction of dispersion. *Diabole* (pronounced "dee-ah-bowl-eh") means to scatter—and scattering is always the work of the dark power, of sin.
 - c. The voice of God's grace calls us to bear each other's burdens in love. Jesus, the voice of communion and compassion, says there is no need for the crowd to go away. No breaking

- up the group, even when they are in danger. The disciples feel overwhelmed, so their first instinct is to dismiss the crowd—Jesus says no, especially now; we stay together as one.
- d. Luke alludes to Old Testament prophets to show the reader who Jesus is. Moses first gave the hungry crowd something to eat in the desert after leaving Egypt (see Numbers 1-4). Luke submits that Jesus is the new Moses, the new prophet who must come into the world (see John 6:14-15). Because they know the Hebrew Scriptures, Luke's listeners understand the allusions. They begin to grasp the mystery that is unfolding in the person of Jesus.
 - e. The words used by Jesus when he multiplies the loaves and asks the disciples to distribute the food to the seated people are still used in the Mass today in the words of consecration (see Luke 22:19).
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
 8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
 9. Invite any other sharing, 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. Through their faith in Jesus, people begin to live in a new way: sharing bread with brothers and sisters who have nothing and are hungry. This sharing is a miracle in itself. In today's world, some animals have more to eat than poor human beings who are hungry. When all the hungry are fed, it will be a sign that the Eucharist has taken root more deeply, as it could and should.
 - b. Jesus' compassion must be our compassion: we Christians are the instruments of the Lord's love for the world. How do we cooperate with him? By giving him even the little that we have and waiting for him to multiply it! The worst we can do is hang onto what we have and tell others to fend for themselves. Do not be surprised what Christ can do with our little offerings: keep offering him your "five loaves and two fish."
 - c. God is the God of abundance, not of scarcity. God doesn't give us "just enough;" God gives us *more than enough*: more bread than we can eat, more love than we dared to ask for. God is a generous giver, but we can only see and enjoy God's generosity when we love God with all of our hearts, minds, and strength. God truly wants to give us life in abundance.
 11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

June

Who loves more?

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. In this Gospel, we hear about a woman who anoints Jesus with costly ointment and her tears. This story often gets lumped together with a similar story told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John which takes place in Jerusalem. In Luke, however, the story is set in Galilee.²¹
 - b. “A woman... brought an alabaster jar of ointment...” Alabaster was highly esteemed in ancient times for making small perfume bottles or ointment vases.
 - c. In the time of Jesus, Jews had adopted the Greek manner of dining, reclining on mats around a horseshoe-shaped table filled with food. A guest would recline on his left side on a cushion, and take food and drink with his right hand; his feet would be angled away from the table.
 - c. We hear this Gospel proclaimed on the Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time.
 - d. As we read this Gospel, make a mental note of any word, phrase, or image that captures your attention.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the passage out loud, *slowly*: **Luke 7:36-8:3**.
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 woman in this story broke several taboos. First, she crashed a dinner gathering of males, which no proper woman would do, plus she was a public sinner, so probably a prostitute. It was a bold step for one like her to press uninvited into the house of a rigid purist like Simon. The knowledge that Jesus was there gave her courage. She must have felt no one would dare thrust her out of the presence of the loving Master, who had so earnestly invited those weary of their sins to come to him, so he could give them rest.
 - b. Luke has bequeathed to us an artistic and spiritual masterpiece that gives clear and convincing witness to Jesus Christ’s universal message of salvation for Israel, for all nations, *and for the lowly*. Jesus’ message for Israel and the nations is also for the outcasts, the poor, and the disreputable.

²¹ Durken, p. 242.

- c. Women are particularly highlighted in Luke, despite their low social standing in antiquity. Many women play leading roles in the Luke's story: the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha of Bethany, the widow of Nain, the woman with a lost coin, and so on.
 - d. Pharisees were members of a sect that were extremely concerned with ritual purity and with enforcing the law. The Pharisees' spirituality was one of exclusion—keeping themselves “holy” because God is holy. That to them meant segregating themselves from those who were profane or unclean. Pharisees were not much interested in their own repentance but were more interested in noticing the sins of others.
 - e. The Pharisee Simon's inner thoughts in verse 39 have an ironic twist: Jesus *is* a prophet and he *does* know what kind of woman it is at his feet. That's why he acknowledges her sins and forgives them.²²
7. Read the Gospel out loud a second time, *slowly*.
8. Pause for a time of silent reflection.
9. Invite any other sharing, 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 his Gospel, Luke calls upon the reader to identify with Jesus, who is caring and tender toward the poor and lowly, the outcasts and sinners, the afflicted and all those who recognize their dependence on God. Jesus critiques the proud and self-righteous, and particularly those who value their material wealth above service of God and God's people.
 - b. When we are frozen in sin, we are like misers, clinging stingily to what little we have. Jesus, our Saviour, is always interested in that deep-down frozenness, alienation, and separation which is causing sins on the surface. When we turn to the Lord in faith, his forgiveness re-creates in frozen hearts the capacity to love. The woman was not only forgiven, she became alive with the love of God. In the words of St Paul, she lived no longer with her own life, but with the life of Christ living in her.
 - c. Jesus compels Simon the Pharisee (and us) to see things anew. The parable of creditor and forgiven debtors obliges us to see that the one who is forgiven more loves more. There is a tight correlation between the amount of forgiveness and the amount of love that follows. People found in Jesus a reconnection to the deepest source of life which overflows in love.
11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

²² Durken, p. 243.

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