

Encountering Jesus, the Living Word

A form of
Lectio Divina



Prayer Booklet
2016-17

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.”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, 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.”⁶ We rest in the presence of the One who has invited us to accept His transforming embrace. There are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. This is true in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of God is called *contemplation*. Again we sit in silence, letting go of our own words, and simply enjoy being in the presence of God.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87

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

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

Guidelines for this process

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

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

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

Amen. +

Tips for small group facilitators:

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

September 2016

The Rich Man and Lazarus

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's gospel depicts the lot of the wealthy and the poor, first in this life and then in the next.
 - b. For all his worldly comforts, the rich man's callousness toward the poor plunged him into ruin. Lazarus, despite his earthly hardships, is escorted to Abraham's side.
 - c. The same opening line (There was a . . . man) is used in the two preceding parables and may suggest this story is also a parable. On the other hand, the poor man is personally identified as Lazarus which is a feature that is uncharacteristic of parables.
 - d. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the Twenty-Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is September 25 this year.
 - 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 16:19-31**
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 rich man's ordinary apparel is described as purple and fine linen. This purple, the true sea purple, was a most precious and rare dye, and the purple garment so dyed was a royal gift, and was scarcely used except by princes and nobles of very high degree. The fine linen (byssus) was worth twice its weight in gold. It was in hue dazzlingly white.
 - b. The only thing Jesus has to say about this rich man is that he was characterized by the materials of life. There are many people like that. Their whole concern is: "What shall I eat, and where shall I sleep, and with what shall I be clothed? -- so it was with this rich man. He lived a hollow life concerned only with the love of display and the desire for self-indulgence.
 - c. Lazarus was not only poor, but incapacitated. He was "laid" at the gates of the rich man's house. The dogs which licked his sores probably also stole the little bread he gained for himself. Dogs in the ancient world symbolized contempt. Enduring the torment of these savage dogs only added to the poor man's miseries and sufferings.
 - d. But we must understand that the rich man was not in hell because he was rich any more than that Lazarus was in heaven because he was poor. Heaven and hell are not a

compensation for what you go through here. The principle that determines who goes where is quite different.

- e. The rich man was too absorbed in what he had to notice the needs of those around him. He lost sight of God and the treasure of heaven because he was preoccupied with seeking happiness in material things. He served wealth rather than God.
 - f. Lazarus is depicted as the opposite. His name is significant; it means, "God is my helper." Surely this is deliberately intended by our Lord to suggest that Lazarus was a godly man. Even though poor and a beggar, God was his helper.
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.)
 - a. In the second part of the narrative, our Lord follows the two, who had been so near each other and yet so separated, into the land beyond the grave.
 - b. The torment of the dead is that they cannot warn the living, just as it is the torment of the mature that the erring young will not listen to them." If you have felt that torment, then you know something of what the torment of the dead is -- a desire to warn but an inability to do so. no matter whether it is Moses or a spirit from Hades who speaks, if people do not wish to hear, they will not hear. We have as much witness from heaven as we need.
 - c. The rich man was not bound to go and hunt for poor people, but here was one pushed under his nose, as it were. Translate that into general expressions, and it means that we all have opportunities of charity laid in our paths, and that our guilt is heavy if we neglect these.
 - d. Further note that the rich man now desires to have from Lazarus the very help which in life he had not given him. The rich man has now become the beggar.

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

Sources:

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, 1990.

Zanchettin, Leo. *Luke: A Devotional Commentary*. The Word Among Us Press, 1999.

October 2016

Faith as a Mustard Seed

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. In this gospel reading, faith is compared to a mustard seed. Luke uses this hyperbole to make the point that nothing is impossible to the person who has faith - for one who has a little faith can achieve great things.
 - b. This is the gospel you will hear at mass on the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is October 2 this year.
 - 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*: **Luke 17: 5-10**.
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.”
 - ◆ “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. In the verses prior to this verse, Jesus was teaching his disciples that “temptations to sin will come.” Reeling under the impact of these demands, the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith.
 - b. Jesus assures the disciples that their faith would prove adequate to the demands because of God’s great desire to establish his kingdom among his people. No obstacle, no matter the size, can stand before faith in God. Even the smallest amount of faith can achieve what is humanly impossible.
 - c. The next lesson Jesus offers is that Christians should not expect praise and honor for performing those duties that they are obligated to perform. God does not owe us anything because of what we do for Him.
 - d. Moreover, the saying is contrary that salvation can be gained on human merit alone without God’s grace. If our own deeds reduce us to unprofitable servants, we have no other option for salvation than to depend on God’s unconditional love.
 - e. Basically, we need to get our minds off ourselves, off what others may think, off the situation and focus completely on 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. Jesus was teaching them to do their duty first before they could start doing great things on their own. You cannot have great faith in a short time. It is through mistakes, trials, temptations and experience that faith is earned. It can take years of experience for one to increase and have strong faith.
 - b. Throughout the Bible, trees were used to represent amount of power or position in society. In this passage, a mulberry tree (in some translations a sycamine tree), a large tree with clustered black berries is used.
 - c. Christ tells us that we must remove the power that overcomes our lives through temptation. Being able to give, ask and receive forgiveness requires faith; God will increase our faith through obedience to God.
 - d. In this passage, the mulberry tree is not being disposed of, like being tossed in a landfill or into the chipper for mulch. The tree is being replanted in the sea. The sea is salty, not a good place to plant a tree. The miracle is that the tree will grow in an inhospitable environment, just like our Christian faith will continue to grow, even in our toxic world.
 - e. Notice the connection between the two ideas in this passage. In the first section, the faithful disciple can command the tree and it will obey. In the next section, the disciples are the servants who are being commanded by their master, who is figuratively Christ.

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

Sources:

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, 1990.

Zanchettin, Leo. *Luke: A Devotional Commentary*. The Word Among Us Press, 1999.

November 2016

Questions about the Resurrection

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's gospel recounts the Sadducees testing Jesus about his views of the topic of resurrection.
 - b. You will hear the reading at Mass on the Thirty-Second Sunday of Ordinary Time - which is November 6 this year.
 - 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*: **Luke 20: 27-38**.
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 or comment on what people choose to share.)
6. Share the following information with your group: (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. We are in no position to assert that the relationships we experience now in this earthly life will remain unchanged in the life to come. The Sadducees were not really concerned about how to word the wedding vows. They were using the wedding example as a way to discredit Jesus' teachings.
 - b. As Jesus teaches in the Temple, various groups come to try to trap him with questions about his authority, about paying taxes, and now, about resurrection.
 - c. Jesus, however, counters their attempt to trap him with a scriptural story that affirms that which they did not believe: the reality of the life to come, but one in which current relationships take on a different form. He exposes the motivation for their question and affirms that God is God, not of the dead, but of the living.
 - d. It is common for those who design to undermine any truth of God, to load it with difficulties. But we wrong ourselves, and wrong the truth of Christ, when we form our notions of the world of spirits by this world of sense. There are more worlds than one; a present visible world, and a future unseen world.
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. Is your life earthbound or heaven bound? The Sadducees had one big problem -- they could not conceive of heaven beyond what they could see with their naked eyes!
 - b. Aren't we often like them? We don't recognize spiritual realities because we try to make heaven into an earthly image. The Sadducees came to Jesus with a test question to make the resurrection look ridiculous.
 - c. The Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in immortality, nor in angels or evil spirits. Their religion was literally grounded in an earthly image of heaven. Jesus retorts by dealing with the fact of the resurrection. The scriptures give proof of it. In Exodus 3:6, when God manifests his presence to Moses in the burning bush, the Lord tells him that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He shows that the patriarchs who died hundreds of years previously were still alive in God.
 - d. Jesus defeats their arguments by showing that God is a living God of a living people. God was the friend of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when they lived. That friendship could not cease with death. The ultimate proof of the resurrection is the Lord Jesus and his victory over death when he rose from the tomb. Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he exclaimed: I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25). Jesus asks us the same question. Do you believe in the resurrection?

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

December 2016

The Proclamation of 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 Matthew's report that John the Baptist has begun his mission to "prepare the way of the Lord," as he calls on Israel to repent and be baptized at the Jordan River.
 - b. This Gospel will be proclaimed at Mass on the Second Sunday of Advent, which is December 4 this year.
 - 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*: **Matthew 3: 1-12**.
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. Many years have elapsed between the infancies of John and Jesus and the inauguration of John's ministry. The phrase, "In those days," suggests that a *Kairos* moment has arrived—one of those moments that forever shifts our history and changes our lives.
 - b. John begins his ministry in the wilderness, perhaps in part to escape the distractions of the city. The wilderness is also the birthplace of the nation Israel, and holds a holy place in its history. Hosea spoke of the wilderness as the place where God speaks tenderly to his people and brings them hope.
 - c. There has been no prophet in Israel for four centuries, and people are anxious to hear a prophet. John fits the bill, calling the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of God's kingdom—for the Day of the Lord.
 - d. For him, repentance involves turning around—a new direction—a change of heart—a new commitment. John calls for people to repent, because only when we face sin squarely and renounce it can we be freed from it. Today, we are sorely tempted to call sin by other names and to blame other people for our problems rather than accepting responsibility for our sins. Such an attitude denies the reality of sin, and thus offers no escape from it.
 - e. In his teachings, Jesus not only warns us that the kingdom is imminent, but also helps us to understand the "rules of the road" for kingdom living—encouraging us to adopt a kingdom lifestyle in the here and now. In their statements that the kingdom has come near, John and Jesus are telling us that we do not have to die and go to heaven to begin kingdom

lives. We begin to live kingdom lives the moment that we allow God to be our king—the moment we begin, however imperfectly, to try to do what God wants us to do—the moment that we adopt Christ as Lord of our lives.

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 the gospel, John performs a baptism of repentance—a beginning only. Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. We will see the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Today some Christians distinguish between water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit, but "the New Testament does not know two types of Christian Baptism.... There is one Baptism, which is an incorporation of the baptized into Christ, and it bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit".
 - b. By the time of the writing of this Gospel, the church has already experienced the reality of which John spoke. Christians are baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - c. In baptism, we received the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of power and new life. All activity of the Spirit is directed toward helping us draw close to God and so share more fully in his divine life. The Spirit helps us to recognize the discrepancies between the life we now lead and the one he wants us to lead as privileged sharers in God's divine life.

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

January 2017

Visit of the Wise Men

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's Gospel recounts the visit of the Wise Men to the Infant Jesus.
 - b. The 'Wise Men', or 'Magi', were a sacred caste that provided priests for Persia. Their journey by camel to visit the newborn King was likely 1,600-1,900 km.
 - c. The Gospel narrative does not mention how many Magi arrived to visit the newborn Christ child. The tradition that there were three was likely influenced by the three gifts mentioned in the Gospel – gold, frankincense and myrrh.
 - d. Tradition give us the names of Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar for the Wise Men.
 - e. This Gospel is proclaimed at Mass on the Solemnity of Epiphany of the Lord in early January as we continue to celebrate the Christmas season.
3. Ask one person to volunteer to read the Gospel aloud, *slowly*: **Matthew 2: 1-12**
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 members of the group have shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. In Matthew's narrative, Jesus' birth is detected by foreign priests, the magi; in Luke it is lowly Jewish shepherds who first learn the news.
 - b. Pope Francis said, “According to tradition, the wise men were sages, watchers of the constellations, observers of the heavens, in a cultural and religious context which saw the stars as having significance and power over human affairs. The wise men represent men and women who seek God in the world's religions and philosophies: an unending quest. Men and women who seek God.”
 - c. Led by the Spirit, the Wise Men come to realize that God's criteria are quite different from those of men and women. God does not manifest himself in the power of this world, but speaks to us in the humility of his love. God's love is great. God's love is powerful. But the love of God is humble, yes, very humble. The wise men are thus models of conversion to the true faith, since they believed more in the goodness of God than in the apparent splendour of power.
 - d. We can ask ourselves: what is the mystery in which God is hidden? Where can I find him? All around us we see wars, the exploitation of children, torture, trafficking in arms, trafficking in persons... In all these realities, in these, the least of our brothers and sisters who are enduring these difficult situations, there is Jesus (cf. Mt 25:40, 45).

7. Read the Gospel aloud 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 commenting.)
10. Help draw out the following understandings during your discussion: (Use as needed.)
 - a. The Magi point out to us the path of our journey through life as they sought the true Light. Having seen the sign of the star, they grasped its message and set off on a long journey in search of God. It is the Holy Spirit who called them and prompted them to set out; during their journey they were also to have a personal encounter with the true God.
 - b. The Magi in this Gospel demonstrate that when spirituality is lifted up by revelation - when the Magi are told by the religious leaders where the Messiah is to be born - we find the object of our spiritual longing.
 - c. The Magi symbolize the best spiritual searchers for God. They come seeking God. They don't know precisely where to go until they meet with representatives of Israelite religion, who tell them, on the basis of Revelation, where the Messiah is to be born. Only after this encounter with those learned in religion do they know whom they seek.
 - d. The biblical claim is that Israelite people were chosen by God so that all who seek God might find him and be animated by God's revelation.

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

Sources:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09527a.htm>

http://www.bc.edu/schools/stm/crossroads/resources/birthofjesus/intro/introduction_to_thetwoinfancynarratives.html

<http://aleteia.org/2015/01/07/pope-francis-homily-on-the-epiphany/>

<http://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/following-the-star/5033/>

February 2017

The Law and the Prophets

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. In this passage, Jesus is speaking of the law and the prophets, a reference to the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures. In saying that he has come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them, he claims to bring to realization all that the Old Testament anticipated.
 - b. You will hear this gospel on the Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is February 12 this year.
 - 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*: **Matthew 5: 17-37**
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.)
5. After the group has shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information: (Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)
 - a. In the Old Testament God revealed himself and gave direction to his people through the law and the prophets. The law began with the ten commandments that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). God’s prophets were men and women whom he called to speak his word to the people. As the Word of God who came into the world, Jesus is the fulfillment of all the things God had spoke about through the law and prophets.
 - b. Jesus recognized that the laws of Moses and the prophets were good but imperfect. Thus, he came “not to abolish them but to fulfill them” and said that anyone who relaxed even “the least of these commandments...shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17,19).
 - c. In light of the coming of the kingdom, Jesus taught his followers how to live so that the life of God would take root and grow in their lives. He spoke about many of the challenges we face in our daily lives
 - d. Jesus’ vision transcended the letter of the law. Jesus shifted focus to the heart, questioning the legalities to expose Moses’ deeper intention. Using a typical rabbinical style of discourse, Jesus suggested that believers might even be better off sacrificing eyes or limbs – if this were necessary - to gain the kingdom (Matthew 5: 29-30). This emphasized the need to root out our innermost drives to sin.

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 was telling us that being right with the Lord does not depend solely on refraining from acts prohibited by the law, but on the condition of our hearts in our relationships with our neighbours and with God.
 - b. For example: Jesus' words of the Beatitudes and the call to love our enemies reveal the radically different way of life inaugurated by Jesus. To live up to this new way requires an inner work of the Spirit. Through faith, we can experience the power to love others as Christ loves us. When we call ourselves followers of Christ, we say, in effect, that we will follow the standards that Christ established. We can bear witness to the gospel with more than words; our lifestyles and our actions reveal to the world the true depth of our faith.
 - c. The Old Testament clearly allowed oath-taking. However, in Jesus' time oath-taking sometimes led to untruthfulness because loopholes were created to allow oath-takers to escape their commitments. How startling Jesus' words must have sounded to his listeners! He called his followers to a higher standard of truthfulness, one in which a person's word could be depended on, without the necessity of an oath. Our trustworthiness should be so great that it would be unnecessary to invoke God's name and all that he rules.
 - d. Trust and integrity are the foundation stones of our relationships. Relationships grow strong and deep when there is mutual trust. Other people, especially those close to us, need to be able to depend on us and believe that what we say is what we mean and what we will do. Without trust, love can be stifled.
 - e. When we call ourselves followers of Christ, we say, in effect, that we will follow the standards that Christ established. We can bear witness to the gospel with more than words; our lifestyles and our actions reveal to the world the true depth of our faith.

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

Sources:

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, 1990.
Mitch, Curtis and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Baker Publishing Group, 2010.
Zanchettin, Leo. *Matthew: A Devotional Commentary*. The Word Among Us Press, 1997.

March 2017

The Temptation of Jesus

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Today's Gospel challenges us to see how the devil is a reality of our world and how he opposes us having a relationship with God.
 - b. The Scriptures tell us that it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness. Therefore, it had to be an important part of God's plan. If we look closely at this event, we will find that it connects with Adam and Eve, the fall and the promise of a Saviour, the People of Israel and the future Church.
 - c. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the First Sunday of Lent, which is March 5 this year.
 - 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: 1-11**
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. Satan's temptation of Jesus reveals three of the key ways in which he works. First, he may try to persuade us to use spiritual power or authority to benefit ourselves. Second, Satan often tries to persuade us to bargain with God, perhaps enticing us to try to convince God to act in a certain way in exchange for our prayers or service without regard for his will. Finally, he tries to deceive us into worshipping idols instead of God, things like money, fame, possessions, or status.
 - b. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were tempted directly by Satan and were deceived by him. Jesus now comes as the New Adam. By means of Baptism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is still to come, the human race will be recreated and restored in Christ. But first, Jesus must go into the wilderness as the New Adam, to relive the experience of Adam and Eve and to make it right, to be tempted like them, but to remain faithful. His obedience to the Father will annul their disobedience.
 - c. Having received God's Covenant at Sinai, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. It was meant to be a time of purification and testing of loyalty and humility. Unfortunately, Israel failed to remain humble, faithful and fully reliant upon God.

- d. Jesus now goes into the wilderness, as the New Israel and on behalf of the New Israel to come, to relive the experience of Israel in the wilderness and to make it right, to be tested as they were tested, but to remain humble, loyal and fully reliant upon the Father. His obedience, once again, will annul their disobedience.
 - e. In the future, every member of the Church will also be led into a spiritual desert after Baptism to be tested and humbled, as they journey to the kingdom. By entering the wilderness to be tempted, Jesus unites himself with his Church and every member, to strengthen them on their journey.
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. Satan's words and questions have not changed much since the Garden.
 - b. The first temptation had to do with food. Jesus answers in a partial quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, which ends "but... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." Adam and Eve chose to forget God's word and live by the forbidden fruit. Jesus chose to go hungry rather than fail to follow the voice of His Father. In time Jesus will demonstrate his power, but only upon the word of His Father.
 - c. The second temptation had to do with power and glory. Satan offers Jesus power and glory in exchange for worship, echoing the words of the serpent "you will be like God" if you obey me and eat. Both Adam and Eve and Jesus already have, from the hand of God, what Satan offers. Adam and Eve succumb to deception, but Jesus insists on following God's word and worshiping Him alone.
 - d. In the third and final temptation, Satan challenges Jesus' status as the Son of God and urges him to prove it. A similar kind of temptation was used in the Garden. He made Adam and Eve feel like they were not "like God" and that they need to prove it or achieve it by disobeying God. Jesus answers by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."
 - e. Because Jesus was tempted as we are and triumphed, we can share in his victory. Because he destroyed the work of the devil by his death to sin and resurrection to new life, Jesus has won protection and deliverance for all who die and rise with him in faith. We can look to Jesus in time of temptation and receive from him as abundance of grace and strength to resist the devil.

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

Sources:

Mitch, Curtis and Edward Sri. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Baker Publishing Group, 2010.
Zanchettin, Leo. *Matthew: A Devotional Commentary*. The Word Among Us Press, 1997.

April 2017

Death of Lazarus

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. This passage is rich with theology, especially in verses 25-26 when Jesus speaks to Martha and says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”
 - b. One of the truly touching elements of this is the insistence on the love of Jesus for his friend Lazarus. When he hears of the death of his friend, “Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’”
 - c. The account of Lazarus’ resurrection parallels that of Jesus himself. This event is meant to prepare us for Jesus’ death and resurrection in chapter 20 of John’s gospel.
 - d. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Lent which occurs this year on April 2.
 - 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: **John 11:1-45**
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. Martha’s profession of faith, echoes the understanding of the some Jews of the day who did believe in resurrection. She goes further, however, to confirm that Jesus is the source of this resurrection because he is indeed the Messiah.
 - b. The resurrection of Lazarus is not solely an act of Jesus, but also, and primarily of the Father, “Father, I thank you for having heard me” (John 11:41). He has already asked the Father to raise Lazarus from the dead.
 - c. Jesus thanks the Father out loud for the benefit of his followers and the crowd gathered. He is completely confident in the support and unity of himself with his Father, but he wants to make sure that the people realize that this is the case.
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 reading, Jesus is a true friend to Lazarus, and the Martha and Mary, but he is so much more as well. This passage leaves no doubt as to who Jesus is – he is certainly the Messiah.
 - b. Jesus lets his followers know that he is the resurrection and the life. This means that those who believe and follow him, even if they die, they will live.
 - c. Jesus makes it clear that the people who follow him will be rewarded by seeing the glory of God.

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

Source:

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, 1990.

May 2017

Parable of the Shepherd

1. Begin with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. Jesus used parables to reveal or convey powerful, often hidden, messages and truths about the exact nature of God and God's relationship to humanity.
 - b. Before Jesus' time, the image of shepherd was used to describe the tenderness and provident care God shows us. Shepherd and host are both images set against the background of the desert, where the protector of the sheep is also the protector of the desert traveler, offering hospitality and safety from enemies.
 - c. In the Bible and the ancient Near East, "shepherd" was often used as a political title to stress a king's obligation to provide for his subjects. The title connoted concern for and dedication to others.
 - d. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd shows his tenderness and compassion
 - e. The image of the shepherd also expresses great authority. The shepherd's rod is a defensive weapon against wild animals, while the staff is a supportive instrument symbolizing care and loyalty.
 - f. This Gospel reading is proclaimed at Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Easter which occurs on May 7 of this year.
 - g. 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 aloud, *slowly*: **John 10: 1-10**
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 members of the group have shared their initial thoughts and insights, provide them with the following information:

(Use only as needed. These are provided for facilitating discussion in your group and do not have to be used in their entirety. Use what you are comfortable with to stimulate discussion.)

 - a. In ancient Israel, the gates of Zion symbolized the very idea of entrance into God's presence. When the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the day of universal peace as a time when God's "gates shall stand open constantly; day and night they shall not be closed" (Isaiah 60:11). Christ is the door through which we have "access to the Father" (Ephesians 2: 18). He is the "new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20).
 - b. In this Gospel (John 1:1-10), Jesus identifies himself as the sheep gate. Temporary sheepfolds consisted of a circle of rocks, with an opening at one end. The shepherd himself would serve as the gate to such sheepfolds, laying across its entrance to sleep.

- Whether a sheep tried to leave or a wolf tried to enter, they would have to do so by way of the shepherd himself! The shepherd himself was the door.
- c. Jesus first identifies himself, not as the Good Shepherd, but as the gate for the sheep. In the ancient walls of Jerusalem, there was a gate on the north of the city, by which animals were brought in from the surrounding areas for sacrifice. It was called the Sheep Gate. Once inside the city and within the temple courts, there was only one door where the sheep went in, and no lamb ever came back out after entering the temple precincts. In the very temple area filled with sheep on their way to slaughter, Jesus declared there was a way out: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11).
 - d. Jesus is the model shepherd in three ways. First, he is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Second, he knows his sheep. This intimate knowledge of his flock, which involves love and long night watches, is his reason for laying down his life for them. Third, Jesus is the gate of the sheepfold -- not a trap door, but rather the entrance into the loving security of God -- into the protection of the good shepherd.
 - e. Jesus Christ never ceases to be the 'sheep gate.' And despite the history of humanity's sins against life, he never ceases to repeat with the same vigor and love: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10).
7. Read the Gospel aloud 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 commenting.)
 10. You might discuss these questions during your discussion. (Use as needed.)
 - a. Jesus says that the sheep will know the voice of their shepherd, and that they will not follow a stranger. How well do I listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd? Where do I seek to hear Him? Do I follow where He leads?
 - b. Jesus says that He has come that we might have life, and have it abundantly. What does He mean by this? Do I live the abundant life that God has prepared for me?
 - c. In the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls us to "take on the 'smell of the sheep' and the sheep are willing to hear" (EG 24). Are we willing to be smelly shepherds, witnessing the love of Christ?
 - d. Jesus says that He has other sheep that do not belong to the fold, but that must also come in. Who are the sheep in today's world that must come into God's sheepfold? What are we doing to bring them to Christ?
 11. Conclude with a vocal prayer such as the *Our Father* or *Hail, Mary*.

Source:

<http://saltandlighttv.org/blogfeed/getpost.php?id=22483&language=en>

June 2017

Whom to Fear

1. Start with the prayer on page 5.
2. Share the following background information with your group:
 - a. In today's passage, Jesus encourages the disciples to be fearless in the promotion of the faith and Jesus' teachings.
 - b. The first saying (26-27) appeals to the inevitability of the coming of God's kingdom and Jesus' witness to it.
 - c. The second saying (28-30) appeals to God's care for Jesus' disciples. They may be persecuted and even come to physical harm, but their enemies cannot destroy their souls.
 - d. The third saying (31-33) appeals to the final judgment before God, which will be based on the disciples' faithfulness to Jesus.
 - e. You will hear this Gospel at Mass on the 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time which occurs on June 25 of this year.
 - 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 passage out loud, slowly: **Matthew 10:26-33**.
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 first verses (26-27) may be referring to the Pharisees who would, at times, say one thing to a certain group, then a completely different thing to other groups. Jesus may be saying that it will all be made public at some point and they will be made to explain themselves.
 - b. The dualism of body and soul in 28 is not common in the New Testament and is not present at all in the Old Testament. It is understood in this context because of the physical persecution that the disciples were undergoing and that Jesus was preparing them for in the future.
 - c. The sparrow was one of the cheapest articles sold in the market, and yet God knew and cared about any harm that came to them. If this is so about these relatively worthless things, by human terms, then how much more does God care about the people that He has chosen for His own.
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 is challenging us in these passages to share our faith in him with those around us. If we are to call ourselves Catholic Christians, this should make a difference in how we live our lives.
 - b. Jesus lets his followers know that his Father is a loving Father who cares about every aspect of their lives. This is just as true for us today.

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

Source:

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Prentice Hall, 1990.

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



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Archdiocese
of Edmonton