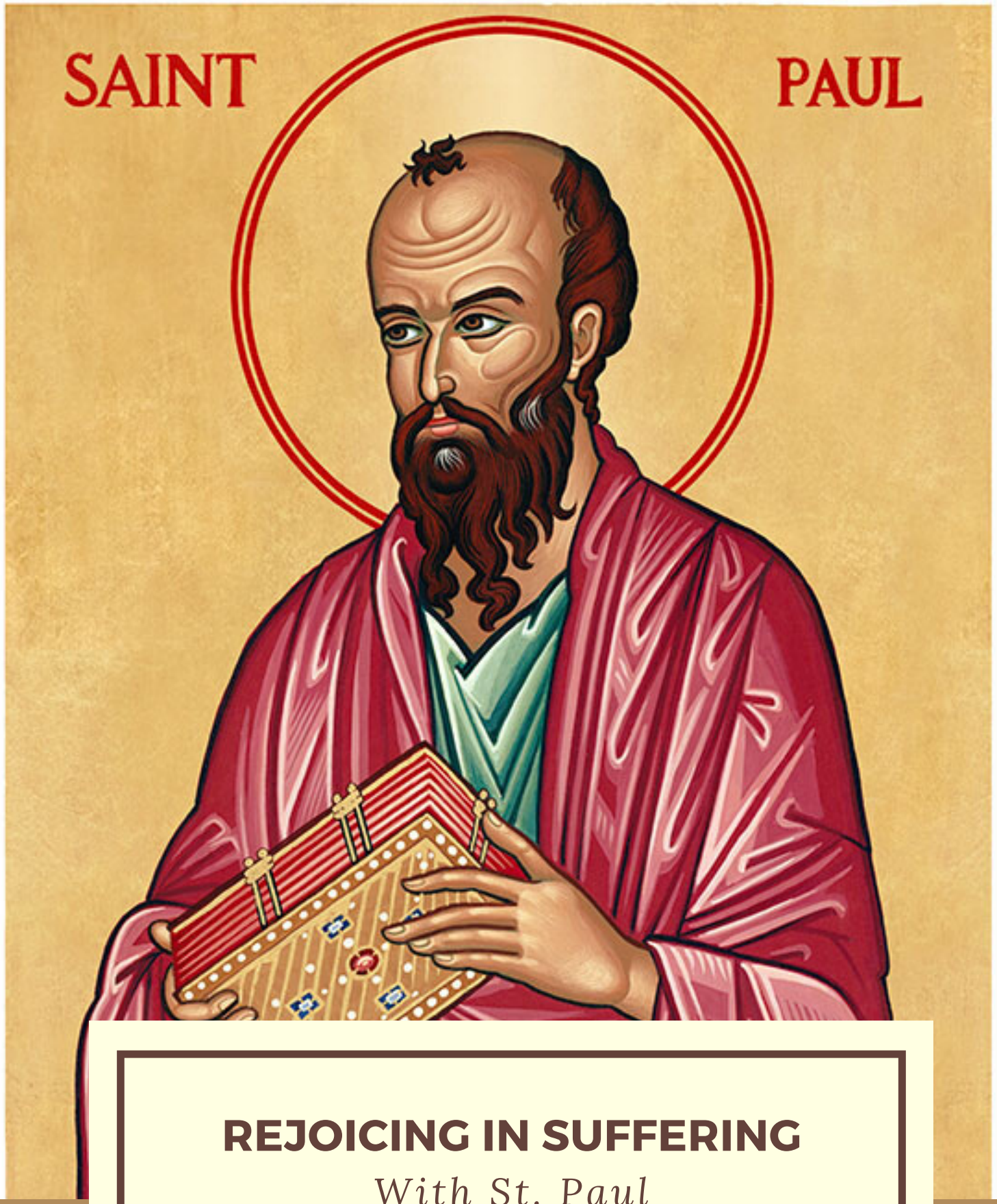

REJOICING IN SUFFERING

With St. Paul

~ SMALL GROUP SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION GUIDE ~

OFFICE OF EVANGELIZATION
SECRETARIAT FOR WORSHIP AND EVANGELIZATION
ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS
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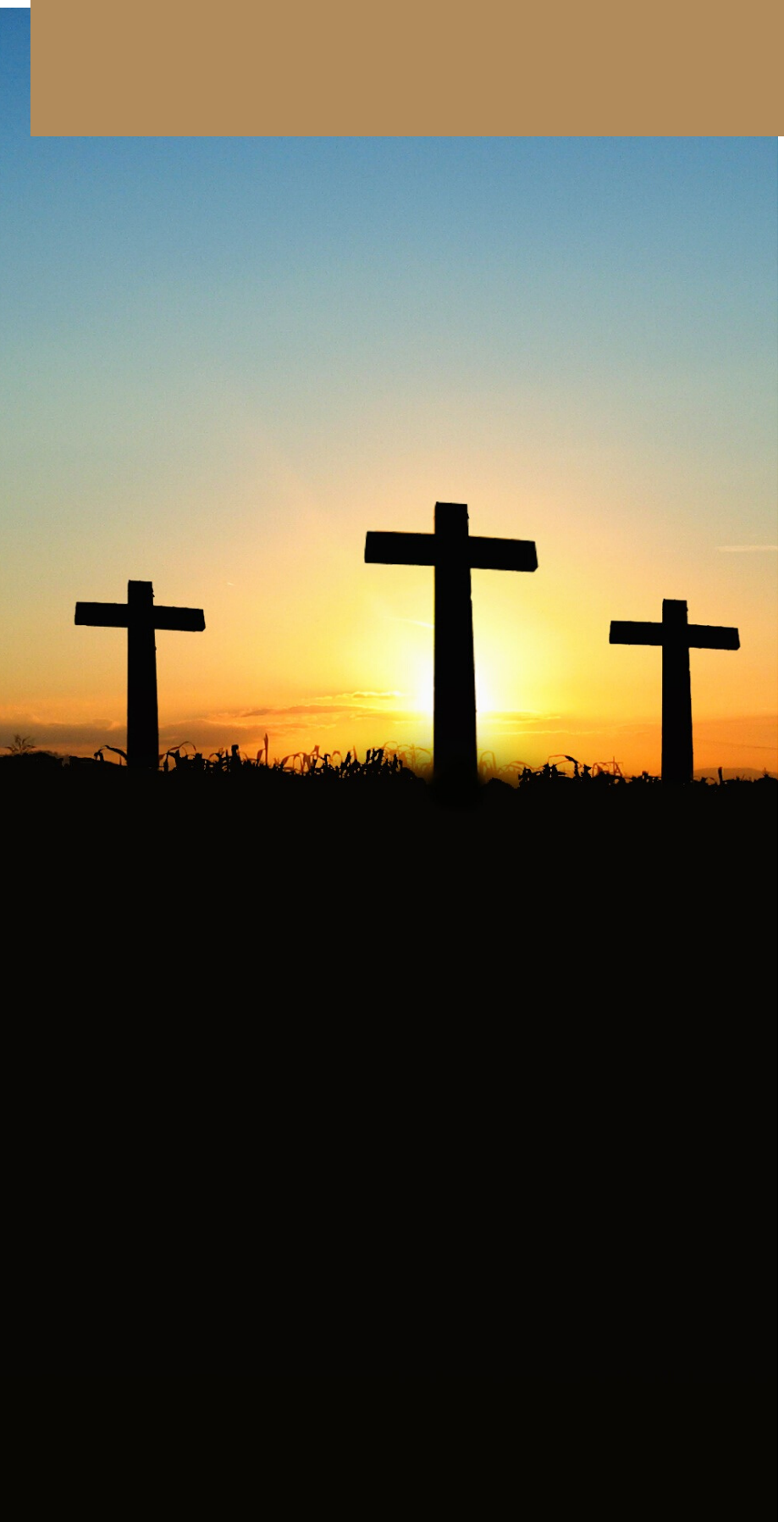
INTRO



Welcome!

Welcome to this opportunity to reflect prayerfully on the experience of suffering that we've all endured (Corona virus, COVID-19 disease, economic and household disruption etc.). This resource—meant mainly for small-group formation and use (but adaptable to alternate settings) will also help us prayerfully process the presence of suffering in general.

If your parish already has small-group efforts of various sorts going, great! This resource can be shared with existing groups. If, though, you'd like to see a lot more (or even just a few) small, discipleship-focused groups form in your parish, this post-pandemic resource can help that happen in a very helpful way for women and men throughout your faith community.

Our Office of Evangelization stands ready to help you in any way as you strive to make use of this timely, pertinent resource. Whether for small group use or an alternate setting, feel free to contact us at evangelization@archindy.org, 317-236-1542 for guidance, if desired, on various ways to use Rejoicing in Suffering with St. Paul throughout your parish.

PREFACE

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..." (2 Timothy 3:12). If you are striving to live as a disciple of Jesus, there will be times where you experience persecution or hardship in living out your faith. But suffering is not foreign to any of us as human beings. We all experience suffering in our lives. Suffering often produces loneliness. We may feel isolated, distant, or detached from others. We may even feel that God is distant or that He doesn't care about our pain. If you have ever felt this way, you are not alone.

However, the great joy of the Christian life is that suffering and death never get the last word. Jesus suffered, died, and then rose from the grave, so that we might have life in him. Therefore, in Christ, our suffering is never in vain. St. Paul says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of the body, that is the church . . . ” (Col 1:24). We can join our sufferings with Christ for the sake of others and for our own purification as well. In this way, suffering becomes redemptive. Jesus saved us through his suffering, and in joining our sufferings to his, we experience salvation. It is in this great hope that we may say with St. Paul, "I rejoice in my sufferings."

We pray that as you progress through these four passages from St. Paul, you will look at suffering in a new way, and that God will give you grace to endure all of your sufferings with joy for the sake of Christ.

Timeline

This resource is a four week small group Scripture discussion guide that can also be adapted to be used with large groups, families, discipleship partners or individually. If you are using this resource individually, we recommend you use this as a four day reflection guide during your daily prayer time.

- Format of Sessions -

OPENING PRAYER

If you are going through this discussion guide with another person or in a small group, before praying together at the beginning of your session, spend a little time catching up with one another. We do not want you simply to hurry through the content. One-on-ones and small groups are not only a place to draw close to Jesus, but also to cultivate our relationships/community with one another as well. If you are using this resource alone, you can begin with the opening prayer. In small groups, after a short time, you can transition to the opening prayer. The opening prayer in each of the four sessions is a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to be your guide as you read Sacred Scripture, so that you may be attentive to the voice of God. Use this prayer or feel free to offer a similar prayer from your own heart.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

All Scripture passages are taken from the RSV2CE translation. Each week there will be a reading drawn from Scripture. Scripture has a special, transformative effect and is a vital part of this resource. Reading and praying with Scripture is meant to be a time to listen to the voice of God and to respond to Him. In praying with the Scripture passage, ask "What is God saying to me?" and "What am I going to do about it?" If time allows, read through the passage more than once, meditating deeper on what is standing out to you. After reading through the passage, we recommend allowing a few moments of silence after the reading to process, reflect, and simply to rest in the presence of God. If you are in a small group, share with one another what comes to your heart in response to these questions.

- Format of Sessions -

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CCC)

You'll notice references to the CCC—the Catechism of the Catholic Church—for each week as well. The Catechism points out:
"Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God' (Dei Verbum 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches." (CCC 97)
In seeking to encounter Jesus—the Word of God—it's helpful to reflect on Sacred Tradition as well as Sacred Scripture. You're encouraged to consult these CCC passages—listening for the voice of Jesus as you reflect on the experience of suffering and its role in our earthly pilgrimage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each week will also include discussion questions in response to the Scripture reading. The purpose of this is to help you think deeply about the passage and listen to what God might be saying to you. If you are going through this with a small group, it is meant to help facilitate more discussion within the group. Good discussion is a result of good facilitation. If a question elicits a "yes" or "no," the small group leader will want to follow up with questions to facilitate deeper thought and discussion.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pre-written closing prayers will not be provided in the weekly sessions of this guidebook. This is intentional so that you will offer a spontaneous and personal conversational prayer with our friend, Jesus Christ. We encourage you to lift up whatever is on your heart after praying through the Scripture passage of the day. If you are going through this discussion guide in a small group, take turns each week in who is leading the closing prayer.

Session 1

ROMANS 5:1-11

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Father, anoint me with your Holy Spirit, so that as I read your eternal word, your word may penetrate my whole being and transform me. Grant me the blessing to be a faithful disciple in believing the Word of God and that I may be a light shining upon all who are in darkness. Amen.

ROMANS 5:1-11

CCC 368, 2734, 2847

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. 6 While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man--though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. 8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that stands out to you from the passage (a word, a phrase, a verse)? Why does that stand out to you?
2. What else does Paul and his companions rejoice in (Romans 5:3)? Why?
3. What does it mean to rejoice in our sufferings? What would that look like?
4. How do hard times bring about perseverance?
5. Why will the hope Paul mentions not disappoint us?
6. When you experience suffering, where do you turn? Is it easy/difficult for you to place your hope in the promises of God in the midst of suffering - Why do you think that is?

CLOSING PRAYER

Offer an extemporaneous prayer in response to your time of meditation and discussion (see the "Closing Prayer" sub-heading under the "Format of Sessions" section).

Session 2

ROMANS 8:14-28

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Father, anoint me with your Holy Spirit, so that as I read your eternal word, your word may penetrate my whole being and transform me. Grant me the blessing to be a faithful disciple in believing the Word of God and that I may be a light shining upon all who are in darkness. Amen.

ROMANS 8:14-28

CCC 280, 1046, 1721

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. 27 And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that stands out to you from the passage (a word, a phrase, a verse)? Why does that stand out to you?
2. What do you think it means to be led by the Spirit of God? How are you "led by the Spirit of God?"
3. St. Paul says that we are "fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him..." Why is suffering with Christ a necessary element to be glorified with him?
4. Why does St. Paul say that suffering has "no worth" in the eyes of faith?
5. How can the hope of eternal life in Christ help us endure suffering in our life?
6. How is Jesus calling you to "suffer with him?"

CLOSING PRAYER

Offer an extemporaneous prayer in response to your time of meditation and discussion (see the "Closing Prayer" sub-heading under the "Format of Sessions" section).

Session 3

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Father, anoint me with your Holy Spirit, so that as I read your eternal word, your word may penetrate my whole being and transform me. Grant me the blessing to be a faithful disciple in believing the Word of God and that I may be a light shining upon all who are in darkness. Amen.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-18

CCC 988-989, 1817, 1976, 2637

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God
and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to
despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the
body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For while
we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be
manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. 13 Since we have the
same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we
speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with
you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more
people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our
outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. 17 For this slight
momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,
18 because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things
that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that stands out to you from the passage (a word, a phrase, a verse)? Why does that stand out to you?
2. What is the "treasure" that we have in "earthen vessels?" Why is this "treasure" contained in "earthen vessels?"
3. How willingly do you share Jesus with others? Have you ever experienced suffering or hardship in sharing your faith? How has this either encouraged or discouraged you?
4. Why does St. Paul continue to share the Gospel even though he experiences suffering in doing so?
5. What causes you to "lose heart" in your life? How can you lift this up to Jesus?

CLOSING PRAYER

Offer an extemporaneous prayer in response to your time of meditation and discussion (see the "Closing Prayer" sub-heading under the "Format of Sessions" section).

Session 4

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Father, anoint me with your Holy Spirit, so that as I read your eternal word, your word may penetrate my whole being and transform me. Grant me the blessing to be a faithful disciple in believing the Word of God and that I may be a light shining upon all who are in darkness. Amen.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

CCC 268, 273, 1508

1 I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. 6 Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. 7 And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; 9 but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing that stands out to you from the passage (a word, a phrase, a verse)? Why does that stand out to you?
2. How does St. Paul respond when God denies the removal of his suffering? What can this teach us about prayer and suffering in our own lives or in the lives of our loved ones?
3. Why do you think God doesn't always heal us when we are sick or in pain? Why might God allow us to experience weakness?
4. How has the suffering in your life affected your relationship with God?
5. Describe your experience of trusting in God during times of weakness.

CLOSING PRAYER

Offer an extemporaneous prayer in response to your time of meditation and discussion (see the "Closing Prayer" sub-heading under the "Format of Sessions" section).

Conclusion

& Next Steps...

We hope you've enjoyed this resource for processing our recent pandemic experience and/or reflecting on the presence of suffering in general. If you flipped through the resource and are considering its use in a non-small-group setting (e.g. larger group day of reflection or retreat) please feel free to contact our Office of Evangelization for sample agendas, promotional blurbs, facilitation tips etc.

Small groups focused on a disciple relationship with Jesus—ideally encouraging members to form, in succession, additional groups that multiply intentional disciples in a parish—are a key part of a parish evangelization and discipleship effort. Please keep the momentum generated by this resource going by contacting our Office of Evangelization; we're here to help you start or jumpstart an evangelization team—a Discipleship Team—leading to a vibrant Discipleship Group ministry that will help permeate your parish with God's love, mercy, truth and salvation!

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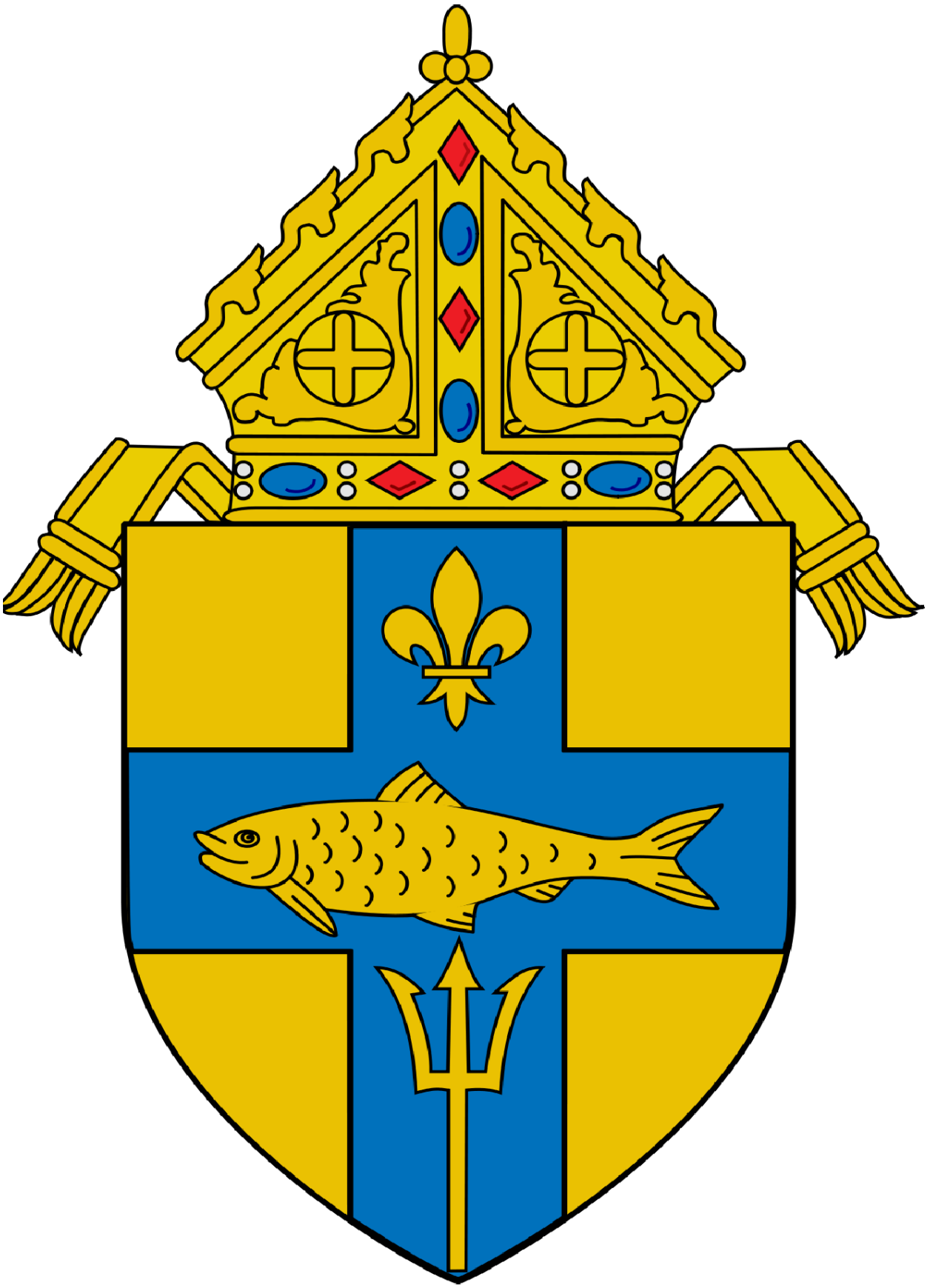

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