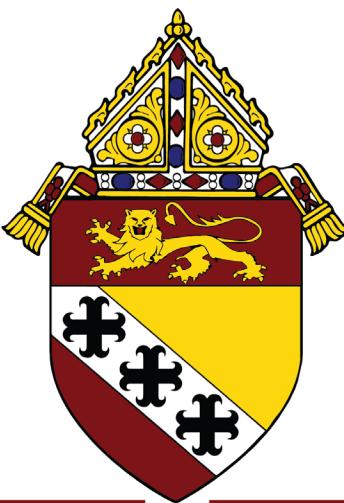


RE-ENGAGING *with* CHRIST

Small Faith Sharing Groups
in Preparation for the
Synod on Synodality



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
OF CHARLESTON

*In Collaboration with
the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey*

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Parishes interested in beginning or training small groups, please contact Sr. Kathy for help in training and support. This includes how-to's to create publicity, recruit group members, organize your groups and train facilitators.



Diocese of Charleston

Introduction

This scripture help is a framework designed as a guide for parishes in the Diocese of Charleston to help them plan for the Synod on Synodality and the re-engagement of our faith communities. Post-pandemic and the beginning of a new pastoral year is the ideal time to reach out to people who have not been engaged in the parish. This guide offers ideas for parish leaders to welcome people to return to their parish community and a way to reach out to welcome new members.

Throughout the pandemic, so many have been separated from family, friends, and parish community. Now it is time to welcome people back to the parish and re-kindle relationships and invite others to be a part.

One way to foster commitment and strengthen relationships is through the small group also called Small Christian Community (SCCs). Over the years, small groups of varied styles in parishes have been proven to be places of welcome where all can feel at home. Studies have shown that members of SCCs are engaged in the parish and take part in various ministries and organizations. Members also describe a deeper understanding of the call by Christ to be his disciples and live out their faith in everyday life.

The purpose of this resource for small groups is to provide a focus on the coming Sunday scriptures and assist members in applying them to their lives. The scriptures are rich in meaning and our reflection and experience helps us to make the words real in daily life. In preparing for the Synod on Synodality, the small group is a place of prayer, support, reflection, learning, participation in the larger Church, action for Mission and discipleship, and encounter with Christ and each other.

Using This Resource

This resource is designed for small group reflection and personal prayer in conjunction with the Mass readings for Ordinary Time from October 10-November 17, 2021. Groups of this kind do well with about six to eight participants. **The six** weekly gatherings that will likely last from one hour to ninety minutes max. The weekly reflection anticipates the coming Sunday to help group members prepare for hearing the Word of God proclaimed during the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Small-Group Format

Preparing for the Session

Group members should prepare ahead of time for each session by reading and reflecting on the scripture and the material for each week. A bible can be available for reading the scripture passages aloud when the group gathers. They are also printed in this resource. A facilitator in each group will help members participate, keep the group focused, and monitor time.

Setting the Environment

This provides hints for the host and/or facilitator on preparing a welcoming place for the group to meet and creating a simple focal point for prayer and reflection.

Gathering Prayer

The Gathering Prayer centers the group and calls for God's blessing on the group's sharing.

Connecting with Life

This section serves as a guide to the theme of the scripture for the coming Sunday. A few questions help the group move into the reflection.

Listening to the Word

A member of the group reads aloud the Sunday Gospel. The first and second readings may also be proclaimed, depending on the group's preference. But in the interest of time, the group may choose to hear only the Gospel at each session.

Appreciating the Word

Another group member reads aloud the reflection or commentary, which is focused primarily on the Gospel reading. Brief reflections on the other readings are also included in case the group wishes to reflect on these as well.

Reflecting on My Life

The reflection questions focus on the Gospel. Participants share on a personal level, describing how they apply the Gospel to their lives.

Reflecting on My Home

This section is designed to encourage group members to reflect on how the Gospel is lived at home. Families or households are encouraged to reflect on their faith together and consider prayer and action together.

Reflecting on My Parish

The questions in this part encourage group members to consider how their parish community supports, encourages, teaches, and fosters growth in faith. The facilitator can record these responses and submit them to the parish staff and pastoral council to aid in planning.

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

Faith reflection should lead to positive change. What will you do because of what you heard, said, or learned from the session? Taking a specific action each week will put the meaning and lessons of the scriptural text into practice.

Sending Forth

This concludes the session and sends members out to live the Gospel during the week. Participants may choose to add intercessions or other prayers.

Evaluation

At the end of each session, the facilitator will ask the group to evaluate the experience using the evaluation form available for free download at avemariapress.com. Another form of evaluation may also be used, such as a simple conversation about how the gathering went, possibly using the form provided here as a springboard.

Number of Members

Ideally, a small group consist of 8-12 members. In some cases, groups may be smaller or larger. The important thing is that each person can share at the session.

Timing of the Group

The group should meet for about one hour to one and a half hours for each session.

Facilitators

Each group should have a facilitator or co-facilitators. By creating a welcoming and prayerful atmosphere, the facilitator makes it easy for members to participate, keep the group focused, and monitor time.

Facilitators should be trained, and the Diocese is here to help. Many are familiar with this process when RENEW and facilitated many in our local parishes a couple of years ago.

Group Members

Each group member has responsibility for each session. Each member should participate, listen, and allow others to participate fully. Meeting space should allow all participants to hear the discussion. If the meeting in a parishioner's home, the host prepares a comfortable seating area. The facilitator also needs to ensure that everyone can participate.

Prepare Ahead

Group members should prepare each chapter in advance of each session by reading and reflecting on the given chapter and questions. This ensures good discussion and full participation.

Sharing in the Group

Everyone is invited to share and contribute, but no one is **forced** to speak. It is important that everyone who wants to speak be given an opportunity to participate in the sharing so it can be helpful to ask group members to share once and then wait until everyone has had the opportunity to speak before speaking again. Be careful to listen.

Keeping Focused

From time to time, it can be helpful to say, "Let's look at the question (or topic) again to see if we are really getting to the heart of the matter." If one person dominates or presents himself or herself as an "expert," the facilitator (or even other group members) may gently remind the group of its primary purpose and redirect the conversation. For example, "That's very true" or "You've really thought about that - let's hear what others have to say."

Evaluation

The facilitator should help the group evaluate each session. Key learnings and evaluation questions are at the end of each session. It is also a good idea for the facilitator or another group member to contact those who could not make the meeting to let them know they were missed and encourage them to come the following week.

Prayer

Each section has six stages: 1) opening prayer; 2) ice breaker; 3) reflection (personal, home, parish); 4) Action; 5) sending prayer; 6) evaluation. You may wish to set an environment of candle, a bible, a seasonal cloth to enhance the call to prayer.

A Word about Confidentiality

What is said in the group stays in the group! People grow in their depth of sharing as the trust level grows in the group, so each member should show the utmost respect for each member and for God who lives in each person. Respect each other by commitment to the meeting time and by honoring with confidentiality the personal stories and thoughts that are shared in your time together.



Scripture in Preparation for the Synod

Week One

**Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 10, 2021**

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open Bible and a lighted candle.

Ice Breaker: Introduce yourselves and say why you joined the group.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

Loving God

We gather to listen to your Word and each other.

Speak to us the ways we can reach out

to welcome all our brothers and sisters

to our parish community.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One Wisdom 7:7-11

I prayed, and prudence was given me;

I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.

I preferred her to scepter and throne,
and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her,

nor did I liken any priceless gem to her;

because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand,

and before her, silver is to be accounted mire.

Beyond health and comeliness I loved her,
and I chose to have her rather than the light,

because the splendor of her never yields to sleep.

Yet all good things together came to me in her company,
and countless riches at her hands.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 90:12-17

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Teach us to number our days aright,

that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?

Have pity on your servants!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,

that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.

Make us glad, for the days when you afflicted us,

for the years when we saw evil.

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Let your work be seen by your servants

and your glory by their children;

and may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Reading Two **Hebrews 4:12-13**

Brothers and sisters:

Indeed, the word of God is living and effective,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow,
and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

No creature is concealed from him,
but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him
to whom we must render an account.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Alleluia **Matthew 5:3**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel **Mark 10:17-30 or 10:17-27**

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up,
knelt down before him, and asked him,
"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.

You know the commandments: You shall not kill;
you shall not commit adultery;
you shall not steal;
you shall not bear false witness;
you shall not defraud;
honor your father and your mother."

He replied and said to him,
"Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth."

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him,
"You are lacking in one thing.

Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor
and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

At that statement his face fell,
and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,
"How hard it is for those who have wealth
to enter the kingdom of God!"
The disciples were amazed at his words.
So, Jesus again said to them in reply,
"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle
than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves,
"Then who can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said,
"For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.
All things are possible for God."
Peter began to say to him,
"We have given up everything and followed you."
Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you,
there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or lands
for my sake and for the sake of the gospel
who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age:
houses and brothers and sisters
and mothers and children and lands,
with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

A Case of Possession(S)

We are curious and fascinated when we hear reports of individuals being possessed by the devil, of people being controlled by evil spirits. Hollywood has made a fortune with films dealing with demonic possession ever since the phenomenal success of *The Exorcist* that debuted in 1973. While the Church believes that such possession is possible, it also believes that it is rare.

However, there is one type of possession that takes place far more than we realize or would like to admit. We see an example of such possession in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 10:17-27). There a man, who wants to do what is good and to grow closer to God, cannot do so. He is so possessed that he cannot bring himself to accept an invitation from Jesus himself to join him as one of his apostles.

"Something" has hold of that man, so much so that he walks away from Jesus. That "something" is the man's wealth and possessions. The man is so possessed by them that even Jesus is amazed. He tells his disciples, "How hard it is for those who are rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:23)

This Sunday's Gospel warns us that the wealth, the money, the material things, and all the stuff that fills our closets and rented storage containers can take control of our mind and heart and deaden our soul and spirit even to the presence and call of God.

Today, cases of possession are rarely caused by grotesque demons taking over people. But as was the situation in the Gospel, they are caused by "cases of possessions" taking over us!

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ What are the basic necessities that I need?
- ✚ What possessions do you feel sometimes take over your life?
- ✚ What are the ways you reach out to serve those who need basic necessities?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ In what ways do I try to simplify my home and surroundings?
- ✚ What are the ways we as a family reach out to help others?

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ In what ways does the parish provide opportunities to serve those in need? What more could it do?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

✚ How will you live out the Gospel and these scripture passages this week?

Sending Prayer

Leader Send us forth, O God, to change our lives
and serve all in need of our help.
May your Word spur us into action
for the good of all.
Through Christ our Lord,
All Amen

Leader Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace with each other.



Week Two

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 17, 2021

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open bible, lighted candle and an image of service

Ice Breaker: Describe a time this week when you had the opportunity to go out of your way to serve someone.

Action from Last Week: What was the action that you were able to do because of last week's gathering.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

Compassionate God,

You call us to serve and not to be served.

Give us clear sight to see the needs around us
and work toward the dignity of all.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One Isaiah 53:10-11

The LORD was pleased
to crush him in infirmity.

If he gives his life as an offering for sin,
he shall see his descendants in a long life,
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.
May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us
who have put our hope in you.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading Two **Hebrews 4:14-16**

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,

Jesus, the Son of God,

let us hold fast to our confession.

For we do not have a high priest

who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,

but one who has similarly been tested in every way,

yet without sin.

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Alleluia **Mark 10:45**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Son of Man came to serve

and to give his life as a ransom for many.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel **Mark 10:35-45**

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him,
"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?"

They answered him, "Grant that in your glory

we may sit one at your right and the other at your left."

Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking.

Can you drink the cup that I drink

or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

They said to him, "We can."

Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink,
and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;
but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.

Jesus summoned them and said to them,

"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles
lord it over them,

and their great ones make their authority over them felt.

But it shall not be so among you.

Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.

For the Son of Man did not come to be served

but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

"Carry Those Bags!"

Suppose you were walking past the entrance to a luxury hotel on your way to work, when suddenly a police officer barked, "Hey you, carry those bags inside!" He ordered you to bring the luggage of a visiting dignitary,

who was only holding a newspaper, inside the hotel. If that happened, you would have felt annoyed to say the least.

But suppose you were walking past that same hotel, and you saw a family friend struggling to get her bags inside the building. You would help and help willingly.

In both situations, you and I would carry luggage into the hotel, but we would carry a very different attitude in our heart along with the bags. What would make the difference was how we saw the person we helped.

In the first instance we would have viewed the dignitary as too big, too important in his or her mind to bother with luggage, and the police officer would be just another official throwing his weight around. We would have felt treated like a hotel porter. We would have found ourselves agreeing with words of Jesus in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 10:42-45) "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones makes their authority felt."

In the second instance, we would have seen a person with whom we had a relationship, a person who had a claim on our heart and our service.

In this Sunday's Gospel Jesus calls his disciples to be of service, to be "the servant of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many."

The reason Jesus was so willing to serve others was because he saw them as children of his heavenly Father, as his brothers and sisters, as his friends. We will be able to imitate the example of Jesus only when, like him, we recognize others not as strangers, but as our brothers and sisters, as fellow children of God.

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ How have you jumped in to help another? Describe.
- ✚ In what way do you heed Christ's words to be a servant to all?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ In what ways do I make my home a place that welcomes others in Jesus' name?

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ What are the ways that our parish welcomes and reaches out to those in need?
- ✚ How are parishioners invited to take part?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

- ✚ What is one thing that you might do to reach out to help another person this week?

Sending Prayer

Leader O God,

We go forth changed by your Word.

May we live our lives in service to you and our neighbors.

Through Christ our Lord,

All Amen

Leader Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace with each other.



Week Three

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 24, 2021

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open bible, a lighted candle and a picture of Blind Bartimaeus from the Gospel.

Ice Breaker: Is there something you saw or noticed for the first time this week that maybe you missed seeing before?

Action from Last Week: What was the action that you were able to do because of last week's gathering.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

God of wisdom and insight,
As we gather and share on your Word,
May we see you in each other
and listen deeply to the ways you call us to be your disciples.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One Jeremiah 31:7-9

Thus says the LORD:
Shout with joy for Jacob,
exult at the head of the nations;
proclaim your praise and say:
The LORD has delivered his people,
the remnant of Israel.
Behold, I will bring them back
from the land of the north;
I will gather them from the ends of the world,
with the blind and the lame in their midst,
the mothers and those with child;
they shall return as an immense throng.
They departed in tears,
but I will console them and guide them;
I will lead them to brooks of water,
on a level road, so that none shall stumble.
For I am a father to Israel,
Ephraim is my first-born.
The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 126:1-6

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those that sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Reading Two Hebrews 5:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

Every high priest is taken from among men
and made their representative before God,
to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring,
for he himself is beset by weakness
and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself
as well as for the people.

No one takes this honor upon himself
but only when called by God,
just as Aaron was.

In the same way,
it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest,
but rather the one who said to him:

You are my son:
this day I have begotten you;
just as he says in another place:
You are a priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.
The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Alleluia

2 Timothy 1:10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed death
and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see." Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

20/20 Vision

Normal vision is set at 20/20. But have you ever asked yourself what those numbers indicate? Having 20/20 vision means that when you stand 20 feet away from an eye chart, you can see what ophthalmologists judge a person with good eyesight should be able to see clearly at a distance of 20 feet.

If your vision is 20/60, it means you can see at 20 feet what a person with good vision could see standing 60 feet away. If your vision is 20/100, it means you can see at 20 feet what a person with correct vision could see standing 100 feet away. If your vision is 20/200, you are considered legally blind.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 10:46-52), we meet Bartimaeus, a blind man, who would be unable to even begin taking an eye test. He could see nothing at all no matter where he stood.

Bartimaeus cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." When Jesus asks him what he wants, Bartimaeus responds, "Master, I want to see." Jesus answers that request and Bartimaeus receives the gift of physical sight. His vision goes from nothing to 20/20.

But the Gospel implies that while Bartimaeus was physically blind his spiritual vision was far better than many of those around him. Bartimaeus was able to "see" Jesus as someone with power, someone who could heal, someone who was the "son of David." His spiritual vision is recognized by Jesus who says to him "your faith has saved you."

With his physical healing, the spiritual vision of Bartimaeus becomes even sharper. As the Gospel relates, Bartimaeus "followed him (Jesus) on the way." He became a disciple.

This Gospel challenges us to test our spiritual vision. Can we see what a disciple of Jesus should see? Do we recognize Jesus as the “the way, the truth, and the life?” Do we follow his ways rather than our own ways and the ways of the world? Do we discern how we should live as Christians in all of life’s situations?

Our answers to those questions will determine if we are Christians who are “legally blind” or Christians whose spiritual vision is 20/20.

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ What are the blind spots in your life?
- ✚ Think of the many situations in our world today. What one would you most like to see more clearly and help to solve?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ Ask the family what people or situations they want to pray for God’s help or blessing. Then pray together for those intentions.

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ What are the ways the parish could listen to the insights of parishioners to welcome people of all ages and plan for the future?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

- ✚ Notice how you “see” the power of God working through the people you meet this week? Jot these down.
- ✚ Pray for sharper vision so that you may see what Jesus sees.

Sending Prayer

Leader Loving God,
Send us forth with eyes to see your power at work in the world.
May we reflect you in all we do.
Through Christ our Lord,

All Amen

Leader Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace with each other.



Week Four

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 31, 2021

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open bible, a lighted candle and a big heart.

Ice Breaker: Who is a person you love who brings you great joy?

Action from Last Week: What was the action that you were able to do because of last week's gathering.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

Loving God,

You call us to love you and our neighbors
with whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

May our reflection together

open our hearts to love as you love us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

"Fear the LORD, your God,
and keep, throughout the days of your lives,
all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you,
and thus have long life.
Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them,
that you may grow and prosper the more,
in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers,
to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!

Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God,

with all your heart,

and with all your soul,

and with all your strength.

Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

I love you, O LORD, my strength,

O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge,

my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!

Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,

and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The LORD lives! And blessed be my rock!
Extolled be God my savior.
You who gave great victories to your king
and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading Two **Hebrews 7:23-28**

Brothers and sisters:

The Levitical priests were many
because they were prevented by death from remaining in office,
but Jesus, because he remains forever,
has a priesthood that does not pass away.
Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him,
since he lives forever to make intercession for them.

It was fitting that we should have such a high priest:
holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners,
higher than the heavens.

He has no need, as did the high priests,
to offer sacrifice day after day,
first for his own sins and then for those of the people;
he did that once for all when he offered himself.
For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests,
but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law,
appoints a son,
who has been made perfect forever.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Alleluia **John 14:23**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord;
and my father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel **Mark 12:28b-34**

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"
Jesus replied, "The first is this:
Hear, O Israel!
The Lord our God is Lord alone!
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
and with all your strength.
The second is this:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
There is no other commandment greater than these."
The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher.
You are right in saying,
'He is One and there is no other than he.'
And 'to love him with all your heart,
with all your understanding,
with all your strength,

and to love your neighbor as yourself
is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."
And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding,
he said to him,
"You are not far from the kingdom of God."
And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

It Takes Two

"It Takes Two" is the title of a popular song that was recorded in 1965 by Marvin Gaye and Kim Weston. The song says that it takes two people to make love real and alive. Without someone to love, life is cold and lonely. It takes two. Jesus could have said those very words in response to the scribe in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 12: 28-34) who asked, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus did not answer with just one commandment. He responded with two. It took two commandments to answer the question that was addressed to him.

Jesus said "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Then he immediately added a second commandment to go along with the first, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love of God and love of neighbor go together. It takes two loves if we are to be faithful children of God. Without both, religion becomes distorted.

If people only concentrate on love of God without love of neighbor, they can become blind to the needs of those around them. A person can spend hours in prayer before God and then ignore the elderly widow a few houses away who lives alone and struggles to get to the store or the doctor. In its most extreme case, people who claim to love and adore God can, without any feeling of remorse, harm their neighbors who they judge to be infidels or heretics. Such a distorted notion of love of God is all too common. Today's suicide bombers would claim to be serving God and following that first commandment.

If people only concentrate on love of neighbor, without love of God, they can fall into secularism. They can become blind to the spiritual dimension of life and the spiritual hunger that gnaws at every human heart. Such people also fail to recognize that the problems and injustices that oppress people are ultimately moral problems that demand moral solutions. The world where all people live in peace without want or fear – the world that they strive for – only comes about when God's will is followed. As we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

To live as children of God, to live as faithful disciples of Christ, we need to follow the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. Following only one does not work, it takes two!

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ Describe a time in your life when someone loved and supported you unconditionally? What impression did that make on you?
- ✚ When have you loved and supported another without question?
- ✚ In what ways do you put God first – with your whole heart, mind, and strength?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ How do you as a family concretely show love for each other and for others?

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ What are the ways that our parish gives opportunities to encounter Jesus Christ in a deeper way?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

- ✚ Take some time this week for prayer and meditation on your relationship with Jesus. Jot down the ways you make time to be with Jesus each day.

Sending Prayer

Leader You, O God, are our Father.
 We ask you to fill us with compassion and love as we pray,
All Our Father...

Leader Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace with each other.



Week Five

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 7, 2021

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open bible, a lighted candle and a picture of the widow putting her coins in the basket.

Ice Breaker: Describe a time when you were struggling to make ends meet. What was that like?

Action from Last Week: What was the action that you were able to do because of last week's gathering.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

Generous God,
You gift us with plenty and ask us to give of ourselves for others.
May our sharing compel us to reach out in generosity to all around us.
We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One 1 Kings 17:10-16

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath.
As he arrived at the entrance of the city,
a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her,
"Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink."
She left to get it, and he called out after her,
"Please bring along a bit of bread."
She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives,
I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar
and a little oil in my jug.
Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks,
to go in and prepare something for myself and my son;
when we have eaten it, we shall die."
Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid.
Go and do as you propose.
But first make me a little cake and bring it to me.
Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son.
For the LORD, the God of Israel, says,
'The jar of flour shall not go empty,
nor the jug of oil run dry,
until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'"
She left and did as Elijah had said.
She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well;
the jar of flour did not go empty,
nor the jug of oil run dry,
as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The LORD keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The LORD gives sight to the blind.
The LORD raises up those who were bowed down;
the LORD loves the just.
The LORD protects strangers.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

Reading Two Hebrews 9:24-28

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands,
a copy of the true one, but heaven itself,
that he might now appear before God on our behalf.
Not that he might offer himself repeatedly,
as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary
with blood that is not his own;
if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly
from the foundation of the world.
But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages
to take away sin by his sacrifice.
Just as it is appointed that human beings die once,
and after this the judgment, so also Christ,
offered once to take away the sins of many,
will appear a second time, not to take away sin
but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Alleluia Matthew 5:3

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mark 12:38-44

In the course of his teaching Jesus said to the crowds,
"Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes
and accept greetings in the marketplaces,
seats of honor in synagogues,
and places of honor at banquets.
They devour the houses of widows and,
as a pretext recite lengthy prayers.
They will receive a very severe condemnation."

He sat down opposite the treasury
and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury.
Many rich people put in large sums.
A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents.
Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them,
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more
than all the other contributors to the treasury.
For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth,
but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had,
her whole livelihood."

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

Their Motto

Certain figures in the scriptures are associated with particular qualities:

- Thomas the Apostle is known for his initial skepticism and doubt about the Resurrection of Jesus.
- Martha is remembered for her busyness in the kitchen when Jesus comes to visit, while her sister Mary is celebrated for the undivided attention she gives to the Lord.
- Paul is famous for his radical conversion to Christianity and his unwavering dedication to preaching the Gospel.
- The Canaanite woman is recognized for her persistence and boldness as she asks Jesus to cure her demon-possessed daughter.

In this Sunday's readings we meet two widows who are famous for their generosity.

In the First Reading (1 Kings 17:10-16), we meet the widow of Zarephath who unselfishly uses her remaining oil and flour to prepare some food for the Prophet Elijah. As she tells the prophet, "Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks (for a fire), to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die."

In the Gospel (Mark 12:38-44), we meet another widow whose generosity knows no bounds. She donates her last coins to the Temple treasury. As Jesus observes "this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury.... she from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood." Both widows are models of generosity. They both gave all that they had. But perhaps there is another quality that we should associate with those two widows, and that quality is trust. It was their trust in God that allowed them to act with such generosity.

The widow of Zarephath put her trust in the assurance given by Elijah that if she fed him, she and her son would not starve. "Do not be afraid...For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry.'"

The widow at the Temple placed her trust in God's care for women like her. She remembered what she heard proclaimed from the sacred texts. "The LORD protects the resident alien, comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked." (Psalms 146:9)

"For the LORD, your God ... executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing." (Deuteronomy 10:17-18) It was trust in God that led both widows to be generous.

If we are to grow in generosity, perhaps the first thing we need to do is to put more trust in God's care for us rather than in our wealth. It is interesting that the money we use reminds us of just that. All our coins and paper currency contain the phrase, "In God We Trust." Those words are the national motto of the United States.

The two widows in this Sunday's readings are associated with wonderful generosity, but even more so they are figures of trust. The words on our currency could well have been the motto and creed of the two widows we hear about this Sunday. "In God We Trust."

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ What are the gifts God has blessed you with? Make a list.
- ✚ How do you contribute your gifts to family, neighbors, parish and many other activities or organizations you are a part of?
- ✚ How are using your gifts sometimes a sacrifice for you? Why?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ What are the ways we, as a family, save money to contribute to organizations that care for those in need?
- ✚ What is one way that we can share our gifts and talents with others?

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ What are the ways that our parish welcomes and reaches out to those in need?
What more can we do?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

- ✚ Choose a charity or a cause that you can contribute time, talent, and treasure to.

Sending Prayer

Leader Send us forth, O God, with generosity of heart.
Keep us faithful to your teaching and never let us be parted from you.
Through Christ our Lord,
All Amen
Leader Let us go forth sharing a sign of peace with each other.



Week Six

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 14, 2021

Preparing the Environment

On a table in the center of your group, place a cloth with some green in it, an open bible and a lighted candle.

Ice Breaker: This summer was particularly stormy. Was there a moment when you felt frightened or a sense of impending doom in looking at the sky? Describe.

Action from Last Week: What was the action that you were able to do because of last week's gathering.

Gathering Prayer

Leader We begin, + In the name of the Father...

Be with us ever faithful God,
as we reflect on the steadfastness of your Word
and your love for us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

All Amen

Reading One Daniel 12:1-3

In those days, I Daniel,
heard this word of the Lord:
"At that time there shall arise
Michael, the great prince,
guardian of your people;
it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress
since nations began until that time.
At that time your people shall escape,
everyone who is found written in the book.

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;
some shall live forever,
others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.

"But the wise shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
and those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever."

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm Psalms 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.
I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence;

because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Reading Two Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

Brothers and sisters:

Every priest stands daily at his ministry,
offering frequently those same sacrifices
that can never take away sins.

But this one offered one sacrifice for sins,
and took his seat forever at the right hand of God;
now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.

For by one offering
he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.
Where there is forgiveness of these,
there is no longer offering for sin.

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Alleluia Luke 21:36

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Be vigilant at all times
and pray that you have the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mark 13:24-32

Jesus said to his disciples:
"In those days after that tribulation
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from the sky,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

"And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds'
with great power and glory,
and then he will send out the angels
and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

"Learn a lesson from the fig tree.
When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves,
you know that summer is near.
In the same way, when you see these things happening,
know that he is near, at the gates.
Amen, I say to you,
this generation will not pass away
until all these things have taken place.
Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away.

"But of that day or hour, no one knows,
neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."
The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciating the Word

MOST NEAR US

When have you most felt the presence of God in your life?

If we were asked that question, we might respond by mentioning a certain moment of personal prayer, a particularly inspiring liturgy, a time of retreat, the birth of a child, an instance of creativity, or the sight of an amazing part of God's creation.

We all have moments when God seems particularly present, but there are also moments when God seems to be absent. We sometimes feel that God has abandoned us when a family member or friend dies in a tragic accident, when a doctor gives us a devastating diagnosis, when we lose a job, when a relationship collapses, or when we are hurt by malicious lies and gossip.

This Sunday's Gospel (Mark 13:24-32) may offer us a different perspective.

In this Gospel, Jesus speaks about the days when "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." While those images call to mind the end of time, they can also apply to our own lives.

We all have occasions when our personal world is shaken, when things seem to be falling apart, and when sadness and pain darkened the joy of living.

Yet on those occasions, the Lord may not be absent but rather most near us. Jesus tells us to "learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates."

When our personal lives are in turmoil, we need to realize that God is at our gates.

That was certainly the case for Jesus that first Holy Thursday evening. When the world was crashing down around him as his betrayer led the mob to arrest him, Jesus realized that he was not alone. God was with him. Then "to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him." (Luke 22:43).

We have a God who is always with us, but particularly so in our moments of pain and sorrow. Just as true friends stand by us not just in the joys of life but also in its sorrows, God, our truest friend, does the same.

We need to remember that when our lives are falling apart, that the Lord comes even closer to us. To use the image of our Gospel, he comes to "gather his elect" into the embrace of love.

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Reflecting on My Life

- ✚ Describe a time when you most felt the presence of God in your life.
- ✚ What did you learn from that experience?
- ✚ How do you feel strengthened by God in everyday activities?
- ✚ How do you share your experience with others who might need to hear your story?

Reflecting on My Home

- ✚ In what ways does your home express the presence of God in symbols, liturgical seasons or other ways?
- ✚ Why is this important?

Reflecting on My Parish

- ✚ What are the ways that our parish provides opportunities to experience God's love in deep ways?

Action/Mission – Living Out the Gospel

- ✚ Reach out to another person who needs to feel loved and supported.
- ✚ Research an organization that could benefit from your love and support.

Reflecting on the Past Six Weeks

- ✚ What is a word that expresses your experience over the six weeks with your group?
- ✚ As a group, please fill out the evaluation form and give to your small group organizer in the parish.
- ✚ Please provide a statement about your small group experience for promotional material.

Sending Prayer

All Loving God,

We thank you for the many blessings we received these past weeks:
reflecting of your Word,
praying together,
listening to each other,
all of this, inspiring us to live as disciples of Jesus.

May we bring this experience of love and support
to all we meet. Amen

Leader Let us share a sign of peace with each other.



Living the Mission and Engaging in Action

*To live charitably means not looking out for our own interests,
but carrying the burdens of the weakest and poorest among us.*
Pope Francis

This is a sample of many organizations around that a faith sharing group might contact to live out the Gospel in specific action or outreach.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website

- USCCB.org/topics
- wearesaltandlight.org

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) World-wide relief organization

www.crs.org

Catholic Social Teaching Resources (CST)

Catholic Relief Services excellent video series provides brief explanation of the principles of CST
www.crs.org/resource-center/cst-101.

Charity, Service & Advocacy

Catholic Charities of South Carolina

Catholic Charities offers many programs in each county across the state.

- To donate: www.charitiessc.org/donate
- The best place to check out our services would be our website: charitiessc.org/office-locations
 - Each office location has the services they offer listed there.



Small Group Evaluation for Faith Sharing

This evaluation may be filled out as a group or individually

Date _____

Facilitator _____

Group Member(s) _____

Phone _____ Email: _____

Number in group _____ Number generally in attendance _____

Place of Meeting _____

1. In general, the sessions were: Excellent Good Fair Poor
2. What attracted you to a small group?
3. What did you most like about the group? Write an endorsement that may be used for the bulletin or social media.
4. What could be improved?
5. In what ways did the faith sharing booklet keep you focused and reflective?
6. Does your group plan to continue meeting? If so, when?
7. **Early Sign-Up for Advent.** I wish to sign up for an Advent group: YES NO

Best Day _____ Best Time _____

I would consider being a facilitator _____

Thank you for participating in this essential ministry.

