

FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY OF STEUBENVILLE

# DISCIPLESHIP QUAD GUIDEBOOK

PART 3 • BY BOB RICE



STEUBENVILLE  
CONFERENCES

## About the Discipleship Quad Guidebook

In developing Discipleship Quads, Franciscan University of Steubenville saw a need for a Catholic discipleship curriculum that was specifically written for the Discipleship Quad process, and therefore created the Discipleship Quad Guidebook. Dr. Bob Rice, professor of Catechetics and director of the Masters of Arts in Catechetics and Evangelization at Franciscan University of Steubenville, is the primary writer. The Guidebook is also the fruit of the feedback and consultation of many people who work in the field of discipleship, including the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University.

**This resource is available for free to download on [steubenvilleconferences.com](http://steubenvilleconferences.com) and provides all that is needed to conduct Discipleship Quad gatherings. It guides a person through the various aspects of being a disciple of Jesus in the Catholic Church today, giving specific attention to not only gaining knowledge about being a disciple, but by challenging each person to actually grow into the disciple God created him or her to be, which includes actively sharing the faith and making other disciples.**

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## **WEEK 22**

### **Come, Holy Spirit!**

#### **Main Point**

We are transformed by the Holy Spirit to share God's love with the world.

#### **Scripture to Memorize**

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit." – Galatians 5:25

It is easy for us to imagine what Jesus might have looked like—a Jewish man in his 30s. Because of that, it can also be easy for us to have a mental image of God the Father—an older man in his 60s, usually with a long white beard. However, when we talk about the Holy Spirit, our imagination fails us. A dove? A tongue of fire? A dove on fire? None of these images really capture the essence of who the Holy Spirit is. Like the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit is a Person who loves you and wants a relationship with you.

The word for "spirit" in Hebrew is *ruah*, which also means "breath" or "wind." Both of these things are invisible to the eye. They are more felt than seen. In a similar way, though we can't visualize the Holy Spirit as well as the other Persons of the Trinity, we experience him in a profound way.

#### **The Holy Spirit at Work in Us**

Of all the Persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the most intimate with us. You have felt many movements of the Spirit, you just might not have known it was him. St. Paul wrote, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' without the Holy Spirit." Have you ever proclaimed Jesus as Lord? That was the Holy Spirit.

The Catechism states that the Holy Spirit is present "in the scriptures he inspired" and "in the sacramental liturgy... in which the Holy Spirit puts us into communion with Christ" (688). Have you felt the presence of God as you prayed with the scriptures or when you went to Mass? That was the Holy Spirit.

It goes on to state the Spirit is present "in prayer, wherein he intercedes for us." As St. Paul wrote, "For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26). Have you encountered God in prayer? You get the idea. Like the air we breathe, we are often not even aware of all the things the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives.

#### **The Mission of the Spirit**

"When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath" (Catechism

689). This is a beautiful image of the distinct roles of each Person of the Trinity. The Father is the Creator. Jesus, the living Word, comes from the Father to redeem us. But one cannot have a word without breath. That breath is the *ruah*, the Spirit, who sanctifies us.

Here is a less beautiful image, but hopefully one that clarifies. If one was going to build a vacuum cleaner, a blueprint would be needed—that is the Father. He makes the plan. But you can't clean a house with a blueprint. Someone has to put the pieces together. That is the work of the Son. So now you have a vacuum cleaner all built... but it won't work unless it is plugged in. It needs power. That is the Holy Spirit.

In the synagogue, Jesus proclaimed the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me" (Luke 4:18). The anointing of Jesus ("Christ" means "Anointed") was from the Holy Spirit. Though their roles are distinct, their mission is the same: "To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him" (Catechism 689).

## **Transformed by the Spirit**

A couple months ago, we reflected on how God does not desire us to be his creatures, but his children. We are adopted by the Father through the blood of Jesus Christ. Unlike adoptions today, where legal custody is granted through courts and paperwork, the Father adopted us by having us be "born again." He put the breath of his Spirit into our lungs.

Scripture tells us that we have received "the first fruits of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14) in the Holy Spirit. The prodigal son asked for his inheritance early, and the father gave it to him. So also does the Father generously give us our inheritance even before we die.

We are no longer creatures of earth, but have been transformed into temples of the Holy Spirit. This is why when St. Paul chastised those in Corinth about their sexual immorality, he asked them, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Clearly they didn't. Do we?

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. How does the Holy Spirit act in the Church? See CCC 688.
  
2. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?

## Scripture Reading

At the Last Supper, Jesus explained to the apostles, "I will not leave you orphans" (John 14:18) and that the Father would give them an "Advocate," which means, "One who walks beside": **John 15:18-16:15.**

## Questions for Reflection

3. Jesus said that it is better for us to have the Holy Spirit than to have him physically present (John 16:7)! Why do you think He said that? See Acts 2.
4. The Spirit convicts the world regarding both sin and righteousness. Have you felt the Spirit convict you in these areas? (If you haven't, ask the Spirit to reveal these things to you.)

## Faith into Life

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, Jesus ascends into heaven and tells the apostles, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). And then they went back into the upper room (the same room where the Last Supper was celebrated) and spent over a week in prayer.

This is a moment worth reflecting on. The apostles had experienced everything they could about Jesus. They knew him. They were "Jesus experts." But that wasn't enough for them to go out and transform the world. They needed the Holy Spirit. It wasn't until he came that the Church was born. This is what we celebrate on the feast of Pentecost, celebrated fifty days after Easter.

## Life in the Spirit

Later in Acts, St. Paul comes across a group of disciples of Jesus who had been baptized by St. John the Baptist:

He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They answered him, 'We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ...When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:2, 6).

I think the same question can be asked of us: Did we receive the Holy Spirit when we became believers? In one sense, of course we did. In our baptism we were made temples of the Spirit. However, we can all receive a gift that we never use; we can "hold our breath." Are we living a transformed life in

the Holy Spirit, or do we just intellectually believe that Jesus saved us? The Letter of James makes it clear that intellectual belief is not enough: "You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble" (James 2:19).

## **Fruits of the Spirit**

How can we know if we are living in the Spirit? We know by the same way you can tell if a tree is healthy: by its fruits. St. Paul compares those who live in the "flesh" with those who live in the Spirit:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:19-23).

When the fruit of a tree is rotten, it is unlikely that there is something wrong with the branch from which the fruit hangs; it is probably a problem with the roots. This is why St. Paul prayed that we would be "strengthened through his Spirit in the inner self," so we would be "rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:16-17). We need to draw life from the "living water" to bear good fruit.

The heart of life in the Spirit is being able to do the things of God and not be enslaved by sin: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). If you feel bound by any of the fruits of the flesh, the most effective prayer is, "Come, Holy Spirit!"

## **The Spirit of More**

It was the Spirit that anointed Jesus for his mission of the salvation of our souls, and it is the same Spirit that anoints us. This is why in the Sacrament of Confirmation a bishop, a successor of the apostles, lays his hands on us and anoints us as he says, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." The Catechism describes the effects of that sacrament in our lives:

Confirmation perfects baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds (1316).

Rooted more deeply, incorporated more firmly, associated more closely... you might notice the use of the word "more." For those who wonder why baptism isn't enough, the answer is because the Holy Spirit wants to give us more!

## “And You Will be My Witnesses...”

This “more” isn’t just for ourselves; it is to share with others. The Spirit gives in abundance, and we have to share that living water, freedom, and new life. Evangelization, which means, “To share the Good News,” is the work of the Holy Spirit. We can share the message, but only the Holy Spirit can change hearts. He wants to use what he has given to us to do his work of leading others to proclaim that “Jesus is Lord.”

If that makes you feel a bit afraid, remember that the apostles were afraid, too... until they received the Holy Spirit. They surrendered themselves to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit did amazing things through them. We don’t “use” the Spirit; we allow the Spirit to work in us. We participate in his works, not the other way around.

If you’ve been baptized and confirmed, you have this Spirit within you. You just need to start calling upon him and surrendering to his will. This is how St. Paul encouraged St. Timothy:

I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self- control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord (2 Timothy 1:6-8).

## Questions for Reflection

5. What are the 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit? See CCC 1832.
6. Of what fruits of the Spirit do you need more? At your next Quad gathering, those in your Quad will pray for an outpouring of this fruit in your life.

## Daily Readings

**The coming of the Spirit at**

**Pentecost:** Acts 2:1-12 **Need for**

**Baptism and Confirmation:**

Acts 8:14-17 **Spirit of adoption:**

Romans 8:1-17

**Many gifts, same Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

**Sharing the faith:** 2 Timothy 1:6-14

## Question for Reflection

7. How has this lesson helped you depend more on the power of the Holy Spirit? How can you depend more on the Holy Spirit?

# Come, Holy Spirit!: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer *(three minutes)*

"God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us today as we discuss the power of the Holy Spirit and the fruits he wants to bear in our lives. We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." *(Take a quiet moment.)* "Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week *(20-25 minutes)*

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- What would you like to do differently this week from last week?
- **Last week we committed to one thing we could change or implement in our daily life to work towards greater unity. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion *(40 minutes)*

*Note that the time is shorter this week in order to make more time for praying together during the Resolution and Commitment section below:*

Discuss the questions from this weeks lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment (20 minutes)**

*Note that there are 10-15 more minutes scheduled for this section this week. Read the following reflection out loud:*

“This week we read that St. Paul encouraged St. Timothy with these words:

‘I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self- control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord’ (2 Timothy 1:6-8).

For the last 20 minutes today, we are going to take some time to pray with each other for the fruits of the Spirit.”

**Details of Prayer Time:** Take time to individually pray with each person in the Quad for the fruits of the Spirit that each person wrote down in Question 5 above. When praying, if everyone is comfortable with it, the three people praying with the one person may lay their hands on his or her shoulder or back during the time of prayer. Take turns leading the prayer for each person so everyone gets a chance to lead. Begin with the Sign of the Cross. The person leading the prayer should ask for more of the Holy Spirit for the person (this could simply mean saying, “Come, Holy Spirit”). Then you will specifically ask for the gifts that the person requested (ask each person to re-state what gifts they want to pray for right before beginning prayer). Feel free to use your own words of prayer for each person.

The Resolution and Commitment this week is to continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to be stirred up in your life. This can simply mean saying, “Come, Holy Spirit,” at different moments throughout the day. Look for the fruits of the Spirit that you prayed for in your life this week and be ready to discuss next week.

*Also, take some time this week to complete the Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment 2 on the next few pages. There will not be a Quad gathering specifically about this Self-Assessment (though there will be for the third one), but we will have a few moments to share about it in your Recap next week. The goal of this Self-Assessment is for you to personally track your growth and next steps.*

## **Closing Prayer (three minutes)**

Close by offering up a general prayer for the Quad and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## Characteristics of a Disciple: Self-Assessment 2

It was about 10 weeks ago that you completed the Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment

1. At that point, you discussed your answers and next steps and goals with your Discipleship Quad. This time, we are offering the Self-Assessment 2 for your own personal reflection. There will not be a Quad gathering specifically to discuss your answers this time around. Though, in about 10 more weeks, we will have a Quad gathering to discuss the Self-Assessment 3. The goal this week is to read through the characteristics of a disciple, referencing your answers from Week

13. Consider how you have grown and what further commitments you want to make in the areas of these characteristics of a disciple of Jesus. Remember, these self-assessments are here to help you to identify how you can work towards growth in each of these areas in your daily life and allow you the opportunity to make a practical goal for each one.

Here is the description of a disciple we are using for this Discipleship Quad: *A disciple is a person who has responded to God's grace of conversion, is committed to living a life of faith as taught to us by Jesus, and is further committed to sharing their life of faith with others so as to equip them to go and make other disciples.* Therefore, we have identified the following core characteristics of being a disciple of Jesus:

A disciple of Jesus Christ...

1. Is rooted in the identity of being a son or daughter of God
2. Has an active, daily prayer life, adoration, marian devotion
3. Regularly receives the sacraments (mass, confession)
4. Is in fellowship with other disciples (community)
5. Devotes his or her time to serving others (service)
6. Shares the Gospel with those around him or her (evangelizes)
7. Is obedient to what the Catholic Church teaches – accepts the teaching of the Catholic Church to be true and is growing in one's understanding of Scripture
8. Is financially and materially generous to his Church and the poor

Read the following descriptions of each characteristic and answer the questions. Please be aware that some of the topics associated with each characteristic have not yet been covered in the Discipleship Quad Guidebook. All of the topics will eventually be covered.

### **1. Is rooted in the identity of being a son or daughter of God**

We receive our identity as a son or daughter of God in our baptism. This is

what roots us in the truth of God's personal love for us as his children. We are loved because we are his, not because of what we do or how we act. This truth builds the foundation for making major life decisions, our vocation, and living our God-given purpose every day.

*How have you grown in your identity being rooted in being loved by God and not in what you do?*

*What is your next step to grow in your identity as a son or daughter of God?*

## **2. Has an active, daily prayer life**

A disciple builds his or her relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by regularly communicating with him in prayer. This includes daily personal prayer time, prayers of petition, praying with others, and traditional devotional prayers.

*How have you grown in your prayer life?*

*What is your next step to grow in prayer?*

### **3. Regularly receives the sacraments**

The sacraments of the Catholic Church give the disciple the grace to live the Christian life. A disciple makes frequent use of the sacraments and depends on the grace of a sacramental life. This includes all seven sacraments, with emphasis on the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

*How have you grown in living a sacramental life?*

*How are you doing with attending Sunday Mass?*

*When was the last time you went to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?*

*Considering your answers above, what is your next step to grow in the sacramental life?*

### **4. Is in fellowship with other disciples**

The journey of a disciple is a journey that is intended to be done in community and fellowship with others. We are not meant to live the

Christian life alone. This not only means being surrounded by others in a faith community, but also having frequent fellowship with a few close friends to help one another grow in a trusted and authentic friendship where Jesus is the foundation and there is a mutual desire to help each other grow as disciples. The Discipleship Quad is intended to be a formative experience in fellowship. The fruits of meeting weekly with three others for intentional fellowship is transformative and can very much meet the need for Christian fellowship and community.

*How have you grown in experiencing Christian fellowship and community?*

*Considering that the commitment to this Discipleship Quad is a commitment to grow in fellowship, what is your next step to grow in cultivating frequent time in genuine Christian fellowship outside this Quad?*

## **5. Devotes his or her time to serving others**

By following the example of Jesus, a disciple is called to serve those in need. This is done in the Church community by giving of our time, talent, and treasure—especially to those who are poor and in need.

*How have you grown in serving the Church and those in need through your time, talents, and treasure? Keep in mind your service to your family and remember that our ministry needs to start in our homes.*

*What is your next step to grow in service to others (including your family)?*

## **6. Shares the Gospel with those around him or her**

The good news of the Gospel message of our salvation compels us to share it with others. As a disciple, we are called to share the Gospel by proclaiming God's love in our everyday lives through our actions and words.

*How have you grown in your comfort with sharing the Gospel (the Good News about Jesus) with people you encounter in your life? How have you shared the Good News?*

*What is your next step to grow in sharing the Gospel?*

## **7. Obedient to what the Catholic Church teaches**

God has given us all we need to live in the truth of his love through what the Church has passed down through tradition and Scripture. We are called to be obedient to these truths because God knows that it will lead us to fullness of life. The first step to being obedient is knowing what and why we believe.

*How have you grown in your commitment level to what the Church teaches?*

*What is your next step to grow in obedience to what the Church teaches?*

## **WEEK 23**

### **Our Blessed Mother**

#### **Main Point**

To Jesus, through Mary!

#### **Scripture to Memorize**

"His mother said to the servers, 'Do whatever he tells you.'" – John 2:5

Though I was born into a Catholic family, I spent many of my teenage years with Evangelical Christians. They taught me to love Jesus and the scriptures, and I am so grateful for the impact they had on my life. As mentioned earlier, Catholics have far more in common with our Protestant brothers and sisters than not. However, one of the most significant differences is what we believe about Mary, the mother of Jesus.

My Protestant friends had questions about Mary, and at the time I didn't have answers. They thought devotion to Mary was unbiblical and even superstitious. Little did I know how grounded Marian devotion was in the Bible and in the life of the Church.

#### **Mary in Scripture and Tradition**

Scripture reveals that it was through the "no" of a woman that sin came into the world. Is it not fitting that the "yes" of a woman would bring about salvation? St. Irenaeus wrote, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."

500 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us" (Isaiah 7:14). The Gospel of Matthew begins with this prophecy, and the Gospel of Luke gives even more detail about how an angel appeared to Mary, announcing that she was "full of grace" and that she, though a virgin, would give birth to the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). In Acts, St. Luke says Mary was present when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and other believers at Pentecost, showing her important role in the early Christian community.

St. John also highlights Mary's importance in both his gospel and in Revelation. He refers to her as "woman," which is a direct reference to Eve, the first woman. In Revelation he has a vision of her "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1).

Scripture lays the groundwork for understanding Mary's role in our faith, but

tradition builds upon it. Like the sacraments and so many other doctrines of the faith, both tradition and Scripture are needed to more fully understand the mystery. It is worth mentioning that devotion to Mary is not just a “Catholic thing.” Eastern Churches, Anglicans, and many other Christian groups all venerate our Blessed Mother in different ways.

### **Hail Mary, Full of Grace...**

The prayer that we pray to her is mostly from Scripture. “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you” is Luke 1:28, the greeting of the angel Gabriel to her. “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” is Luke 1:42, the words of Elizabeth when Mary came to see her.

The rest of the prayer comes from the teaching of the early Church. We call her, “Holy Mary,” because we believe she was conceived without sin, just as Eve was. This is known as the Immaculate Conception. However, unlike Eve, she accepted the will of God and remained without sin in her entire life. Since the flesh that the second Person of the Trinity would take would be hers, it makes sense that it would be holy flesh. This is not to say she did not need Jesus for her salvation—we all do! It was her faith in God and the Word becoming flesh in her very body that preserved her from sin. This is also why we believe she did not face death but was assumed into heaven. (Jesus *ascended* into heaven, meaning that he went by his own power. Mary was *assumed* into heaven, meaning that she was drawn to heaven, not by her own power, but by the power of God.) As G.K. Chesterton said of her, she is “our tainted nature’s solitary boast.” She is holy, indeed!

### **Mother of God**

She is also “Mother of God.” This phrase is more about the divinity of Christ than it is about our Blessed Mother. As the Holy Spirit led the Church to more deeply understand who Jesus was, we also learned more about the role of Mary: “What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ” (Catechism 487).

There was a heresy in the early Church that suggested that Jesus was not fully God and fully man, and suggested that Mary was only the mother of Jesus’ humanity. They wanted to divide Jesus in two—part God, part man. The Church affirmed the unity of Jesus’ humanity and divinity. Because Jesus is fully God, Mary is the Mother of God. This is not to put her above God, as if she created God before the beginning of time. Instead, it shows the humility and love that God has for us that would allow him to enter into our human experience, for we all have a mother, and now he does, as well!

### **Mary, the Perfect Disciple**

Mary is the perfect example of what it means to be devoted to Jesus. What love is stronger than a mother’s love? Who knows a child better than his mom? The second Person of the Trinity *chose* to have a mother, and of all the people

in human history he picked Mary. Of all humanity, she is the only one who can claim to be a daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit.

We do not adore her as we adore God, but we give her the highest honor we can. Jesus gave her not only the honor of being his Mother but crowned her Queen of Heaven and Earth. It would be hard for us to honor her more than he did. As Chris Padgett, a convert to Catholicism, often says, "If she was good enough for Jesus, she is good enough for me."

## Questions for Reflection

1. What new insight did you get about Mary, our Blessed Mother?
  - What does immaculately conceived mean?
  - Name 3 titles of Mary.
  - Where do we get the Hail Mary prayer from?
  
2. How would you describe the role Mary currently plays in your spiritual life? If the answer is "nothing," why is that?

## Scripture Reading

Pray with the following reading, remembering that Mary was likely a young teenager at the time:

**Luke 1:26-56.**

## Questions for Reflection

3. Why do you think Mary questions the angel when she says "How can this be, since...?" if she's so full of faith? Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist questions the angel and was muted (see Gospel passage). What's the difference?

(Hint: look up JPII's comment on the difference)

4. What virtues did Mary exemplify in that reading?

## Faith into Life

When GPS navigational systems became available for cars, they were essentially virtual maps. They could tell you how to get to a destination in the shortest way possible, but not necessarily the fastest, especially in times of heavy traffic or construction. In 2008, a group of Israeli programmers wanted to enhance the maps given through GPS and add to them real time information of traffic, detours, and road closures. The app they created was Waze, and now that technology is available in GPS devices today.

St. Louis de Montfort, famous for his devotion to our Blessed Mother, wrote that "Mary is the safest, easiest, shortest and most perfect way of approaching Jesus." Marian devotion is like the Waze of spirituality. It leads you most directly to Jesus, often by taking you on new pathways you didn't expect! De Montfort summed up his devotion to our Blessed Mother in one beautiful phrase: "To Jesus, through Mary!" This does not mean that we "use" Mary to get to Jesus, but that we draw closer to Jesus in a more intimate way with her at our side.

### Pray for Us Sinners...

In the final part of the Hail Mary we ask her to "pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." This is at the heart of our relationship with Mary. She has no divine power on her own. She loves us and *prays* for us. Scripture tells us, "Fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" (James 5:16).

We refer to ourselves as "sinners" in humble recognition that we need the mercy of God. We entrust our prayers to her intercession "now and at the hour of our death," to remind ourselves that what we need most is salvation in Jesus Christ: "May she be there as she was at her son's death on the cross. May she welcome us as our mother at the hour of our passing to lead us to her son, Jesus, in paradise" (Catechism 2677).

## The Rosary

One of the most powerful prayers to our Mother is the Rosary. St. Louis de Montfort wrote, "No prayer is more meritorious for the soul and more glorious for Jesus and Mary than a well recited Rosary." My Protestant friends thought this was something superstitious to do. Why say the same prayer over and over? We say this because a Hail Mary is an act of love to our Mother, and one cannot say, "I love you," enough.

My own experience of the Rosary radically changed when I realized it was not about accomplishing a checklist—one Apostle's Creed (check!), six Our Fathers (check!), and 53 Hail Marys (check!). Each decade of the Rosary (one Our Father and 10 Hail Marys) invites us to meditate on a different mystery in the life of Jesus, to be able to see him through the eyes of his mom. This is another reason for the repetition of prayers. We don't have to "think" about the words but can instead reflect more deeply on the mysteries.

Scripture is a beautiful way to do that. Sometimes I read the section of Scripture the mystery is about and then ask the intercession of Mary to help me see something new as I pray that decade (we have included a guide on how to do this after this lesson). At times I have felt as if Mary was holding my hand as I saw her Son with her perfect eyes.

If you don't have time for five decades of the Rosary, then say one or two. If the Spirit moves you to deeper contemplation of a mystery, it is okay to stop for a moment to listen more deeply to what the Spirit is saying. Again, the Rosary is not a task to accomplish. Its success is not judged by the number of beads that go through our fingers but the sincerity of our heart.

## We All Need Mary

My Protestant friends thought that Mary was a distraction from being devoted to Jesus. The reality is the complete opposite. To love Jesus with the heart of Mary, to see Jesus with the eyes of Mary, to say "yes" to Jesus with the soul of Mary: this is what it means to be a perfect disciple. Humanity not only needed her "yes" to bring Christ into the world, but we still need her help in the world today.

God chose Mary to play an essential role for our salvation and that role hasn't ceased. The Church sees herself in Mary, the one whose faith brought the Savior into the world. Countless saints have had devotions to her. In fact, it is hard to find a saint who didn't! The Church has approved numerous apparitions over the past few centuries of our Blessed Mother—such as in Guadalupe, Lourdes, and Fatima—that have resulted in millions of conversions and countless miracles. Her messages are always pointing the world to Jesus, echoing the words she spoke at the miracle of Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

Mary is not just *our* Mother; she is *your* Mother. She loves you and wants to



## Daily Readings

“Do whatever he tells you”: John 2:1-12

“A sword will pierce your heart”: Luke 2:22-35

**The prayer of Judith, who foreshadowed Mary:** Judith 16:1-16

**In his final act before his death, Jesus gives Mary to John (and, in a symbolic way, to the Church):** John 19:25-30

**Queen of Heaven and Earth:** Revelation 12:1-18

### Question for Reflection

3. How have these readings helped you fall more in love with Mary?

## Supplemental Reading

For more information on Marian devotion, read *Introduction to Mary* by Dr. Mark Miravalle.

For information on Consecration to Mary, read *33 Days to Morning Glory* by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC.

## Discipleship in Action: A Scriptural Meditation of the Rosary

The Rosary is an opportunity to meditate upon the life of Jesus and Mary with Mary’s intercession. If you are unfamiliar with how to pray the Rosary, do a simple search online for “how to pray the Rosary.” There are many great resources out there that teach each of the prayers for each of the beads of the rosary. Do not be ashamed if this prayer is new for you. The Rosary is a powerful addition to incorporate in your prayer life.

Here are some scriptures to read as you pray the mysteries, either all at once before you pray the decade or to break up the verses with each of the 10 Hail Mary prayers.

**Joyful Mysteries** (*traditionally prayed on Mondays and Saturdays*)

**First Decade:** The Annunciation (*Luke 1:26-28*)

**Second Decade:** The Visitation (*Luke 1:39-45*)

**Third Decade:** The Nativity (*Matthew 1:18-25 or Luke 2:1-14*) **Fourth Decade:** The Presentation at the Temple (*Luke 2:22-38*) **Fifth Decade:** Finding Jesus in the Temple (*Luke 2:41-52*)

**Luminous Mysteries** (*traditionally prayed on Thursdays*)

**First Decade:** The Baptism of Jesus (*Matthew 3:13-17 or John 1:29-34*)

**Second Decade:** The Miracle at Cana (*John 2:1-12*)

**Third Decade:** The Teaching of the Kingdom of God (*Matthew 13:24-33 or 44-53*)

**Fourth Decade:** The Transfiguration (*Matthew 17:1-13 or Luke 9:28-36*)

**Fifth Decade:** The Gift of the Eucharist (*Luke 22:14-20 or 1 Corinthians 11:23-26*)

**Sorrowful Mysteries** (*traditionally prayed on Tuesdays and Fridays*)

**First Decade:** The Agony in the Garden (*Matthew 26:36-45 or Luke 22:39-46*)

**Second Decade:** The Scourging at the Pillar (*John 18:33-19:1*)

**Third Decade:** The Crowning of Thorns (*Matthew 27:27-31 or John 19:2-16*)

**Fourth Decade:** Carrying the Cross (*Luke 23:26-31*)

**Fifth Decade:** The Crucifixion (*Matthew 27:45-54, Luke 23:33-49, or John 19:18-30*)

**Glorious Mysteries** (*traditionally prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays*)

**First Decade:** The Resurrection (*Matthew 28:1-10, Luke 24:36-49, John 20:1-10 or 11-18*)

**Second Decade:** The Ascension (*Luke 1:6-12*)

**Third Decade:** The Coming of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:1-12*)

**Fourth Decade:** The Assumption of Mary (*Luke 1:46-55. This isn't recorded in Scripture, but it could be good to meditate on her Magnificat.*)

**Fifth Decade:** The Crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth (*Revelation 12:1-17*)

# Our Blessed Mother: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, this week we reflect on your Mother, Mary. Thank you for giving her to us as an intercessor and spiritual mother. We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we prayed for specific fruits of the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives. How did you see those fruits this week in your daily life? How did you do with asking for more of the Holy Spirit throughout this last week?**

*Please take a few moments for everyone to share about their experience of doing the Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment 2. There will not be time for everyone to share in detail, but please share, in general, how the experience was for you to complete it a second time. If there is one characteristic on which you'd like everyone to hold you accountable, please make that request.*

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"Mary does not want to distract from her Son, Jesus; rather, she wants to bring people closer to him. One image used throughout history to signify Mary is the moon. Just like the moon, Mary does not produce her own light but only reflects the light from the Son (or sun, in the analogy of the moon). In this way, Mary is also an image of what we should be to others in our lives: a reflection of Jesus' light and love."

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

*As you consider all of the insights you received from this lesson, what is one thing about Mary on which you want to meditate or do differently based on this knowledge? It could be praying a decade of the Rosary each day, meditating on one of the virtues of Mary and trying to imitate it, asking for her prayers more throughout the day and being mindful of her spiritual motherhood, or any other thing that comes to mind. Write down what you would like to focus on and how you will practically remember to do it each day this week.*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## WEEK 24

# “You Shall Have No Other Gods but Me”

### Main Point

We should have no other “gods” but God.

### Scripture to Memorize

“Store up treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”  
– Matthew 6:20-21

When you began this Discipleship Quad you were challenged to memorize, “Hear O Israel! The Lord is God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus referred to this as “the greatest and the first commandment” (Matthew 22:38), which is summed up as, “I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.”

### The First Law

God had just delivered his people from the slavery of Egypt. They saw the power of God as the water of the Nile was turned into blood and the sun was darkened in the sky. They had just walked through the Red Sea and saw it collapse behind them, killing those Egyptians who sought to bring them back to slavery. They were then brought to Mount Sinai where there was thunder, lightning, and a heavy cloud that hung over the mountain.

Sometimes God works in subtle ways. This was not one of those times.

Moses went to the mountain and God gave him the “10 words”, or the 10 Commandments. The first thing he said was this: “I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3).

In this commandment, God does three things: He tells them who he is, he reminds them what he has done, and he tells them how they should respond. All three things are important to keep in mind as we reflect upon this “greatest” commandment—the commandment on which every other is based.

### Who God Is

God is God whether people believe in him or not. We are made in *his* image and likeness, not the other way around. When we die, we will see him as he is, not as we wanted him to be. He does not change himself to accommodate the beliefs of the people. He does not change... at all. He is Absolute Truth: “When we say ‘God’ we confess a constant, unchangeable

being, always the same, faithful and just, without any evil" (Catechism 2086).

He is the Lord. That means that he is the one who is in charge. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and Omega" (which would be A to Z in English), "the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13). In light of God's power and glory, the prophet Sirach exclaimed, "More than this we need not add: let the last word be, he is the all!" (Sirach 43:27).

His isn't one of many gods to choose from. *He is God, the only God.* But in his tender compassion toward us, he doesn't just say, "I am the Lord, the God," but instead identifies himself as "the Lord, *your* God." He could force himself upon us, but he doesn't. He wants a relationship with us. He wants to be our Father and has sent his Spirit into our hearts so we can cry out to him.

## What He Has Done

"...who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." He had just freed the Israelites in dramatic fashion. He left no doubt in their mind who had set them free. In this, God revealed himself not only as Lord but also as Savior. We have a God who sets us free.

He did this, not to display his power, but to show his fatherly love. Hundreds of years later, he spoke to the prophet Hosea:

When Israel was a child I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son... but they did not know that I cared for them. I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like those who raise an infant to their cheeks; I bent down to feed them (Hosea 11:1, 3-4).

The fact he created us should be enough of a reason to be obedient to God, but even when we turn away he still reaches out and saves us. He did that with the Israelites throughout the Old Testament, but he did that in an even more profound way when the Word became flesh to die for our sins. What more could he do to show us his love?

## What We Should Do

Because he is both Lord and Savior, "you shall not have other gods before me":

It follows that we must necessarily accept his words and have complete faith in him and acknowledge his authority. He is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent... Who could not place all hope in him? Who could not love him when contemplating the treasures of goodness and love he has poured out on us? (Catechism 2086).

The God who made us and saves us deserves our full obedience. Just as a child should respect a loving parent, we should all be obedient to God. That means that we don't have other things in our lives competing with him.

For the Israelites, that meant the gods of Egypt or other foreign gods. For us today, those "gods" can be a number of things that we think "make" or "save" us: success, money, relationships, etc. We make something a god in our life when we put our identity and worth in it.

Jesus told his followers, "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). The Lord does not want to just be a part of our lives. He wants to be at the heart of our lives. That is where he belongs. He already is *the* God, but wants to be *our* God, and it is only right that we get rid of anything that gets in the way of that.

### Questions for Reflection

1. How would you answer the following question if asked by a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader: "If God made everything, who made God?"? See Exodus 3:14 for help.
2. Research: What is the Shema in the Old Testament?
3. What things compete with the Shema in your life?

### Scripture Reading

How do we know what other "gods" might be in our lives? Jesus tells us, "Look at your heart." Where is our hope? **Matthew 6:19-34.**

Does it sound familiar? You have read it before. From time to time, we will re-

read portions of Scripture. Each time you read God's Word, it is "living and active" and can say different things to our hearts. Ask the Spirit to say something new to you. This is a good spiritual habit to cultivate.

### Questions for Reflection

4. Notice Matthew 6:21. Why do you think the heart follows the treasure rather than the treasure following the heart? What does it practically mean?
5. What do you worry about, and how do the words of Jesus give consolation to our fears and worries?

## Faith into Life

There are many different "gods" that compete for our heart. There are three areas we can examine to see if we are putting God first in our lives: What do we do with our time? How do we use our talents? Where do we invest our treasure?

### Time

Our calendar is a reflection of our priorities. There are days when I could not find time to pray, yet somehow I was able to find time to spend on social media. This is partly because it is easier to waste time with the things of this world than to spend focused time with the Lord. The world intentionally makes it that way!

If someone looked at your calendar, would they know you are a disciple of Jesus? Are you spending time in prayer? Are you volunteering your time in service? We can become very possessive of our time, forgetting that every second we breathe is a gift from God.

### Talent

If you have a talent, it was given to you to build up the people of God. We should rejoice at being able to share those gifts with others. Jesus told his followers, "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Matthew 10:8). Just as the parts of a physical body are there to help others, so God gives talents and gifts to different people in the body of Christ to help

serve others.

We are to be stewards of the gifts God gave us. For example, God gave me a good voice and a musical ear. I have spent thousands of hours learning to play guitar, write music, and sing better. But that doesn't make that gift mine and mine alone. I'm grateful to God, not only for the innate musical skill he gave me, but also to live in a culture where I had time to cultivate it.

In our culture of work, we often use our gifts and talents in the jobs for which we get paid. Because of that, we may struggle to give of our gifts without receiving something in return. The result, sadly, is the people who might not be good enough to get paid for their talent end up being the volunteers at church, and then we complain about the lack of talent our parishes! This isn't right.

When someone in my parish asked me if I could play music for a group of intellectually disabled children on a Sunday afternoon, I said yes—even though I also do music as a part of my living, traveling around the country with a band and getting paid to do so. I didn't send her my tech rider and contract. I was happy to give, especially back to my parish, my faith family.

## Treasure

The Bible warns more about money than any of the other "gods." St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy, "For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Timothy 6:10). I sometimes hear this misquoted as "money is the root of all evils," but it is actually "the *love* of money is the root of all evils." Money, in and of itself, is neutral—neither good or evil. Is it what we do with it, and what we *think* of it, that can lead many to ruin... or salvation!

"For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7). Another way of saying this is, "He who dies with the most toys... still dies." Money is a temporal gift that can bring about eternal treasure when we use it to serve God's kingdom. One of the best ways to overcome the "god" of money is to be generous in giving it to serve those in need.

## It is All a Gift

Many have the attitude that we earn our money. And in a certain way, we do. Personally, I work very hard for the money I make to support myself and my family. I can be tempted to think I'm "worth" the paycheck I get.

I had an experience that changed my perspective. I went to Juarez, Mexico where I helped build a house for a family in need. The father's name was Miguel. He worked in a factory for 10 hours a day, six days a week, and in three months made the same amount as I would make for a two-hour concert. Juarez is on the border of El Paso, Texas. Had he been born three miles to the north, his life would have been very different.

What did I do to be born in a nice suburb of Chicago? Why wasn't I born blind, deaf, or mute? How did I end up in the family I did? All of these things were completely out of my control. They were a gift. God gives in abundance to some so they can know the joy of giving gifts to others, just as God rejoices in giving gifts to us. St. Teresa of Calcutta used to say, "God has all the money in the world, he just put it in your pockets."

## The Blessing of Tithing

In the Old Testament, God told his people that the first 10 percent of what they have should go to him; this was known as a "tithe" (Deuteronomy 14:22). Remember that all of his commands are for our benefit, not his. He wants us to trust him with what we have (which is really what he gave us) and rely on him, not the things of the world. As he spoke to the prophet Malachi:

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, and see if I do not open the floodgates of heaven for you, and pour down upon you blessing without measure! (Malachi 3:10)

I try to give God 10 percent of my waking hours each day (about an hour and a half). I try to make sure that for every nine of my events, I do something free for someone who can't afford it. When my wife and I pay our bills each month, we make sure that the first thing we do is give 10 percent of what we made to our parish and to other charities we support (we give five percent to our parish and five percent to others).

I cannot tell you how I've been blessed by this! God cannot be outdone in generosity! "Put me to the test," he says. So, do it! You will receive "blessing without measure!"

If this is overwhelming to you, take it a step at a time. If you currently give two percent of your waking hours, then go for three. If you currently give five percent, then go for six. As you do, you will find more and more blessings.

## Being Like God

The first Commandment is that we love God above all other things. We only have one Lord, so we should not worship the things of earth. We only have one Savior, so we should not put our hope in something else to save us. He is *our* God, and gives generously to us so that we can give generously to others. By doing so, he is teaching us to act like he does. What Father doesn't want his children to follow in his footsteps?

## Questions for Reflection

6. What are your thoughts on tithing? Malachi 3:10 is the only place in the Bible where God says, "try me" or "put me to the test". Do you more likely see things as something you own or something you were blessed with?

7. What part of the above reading challenged you? What do you intend to do about it?

### **Daily Readings**

**Parable of the talents:** Matthew 25:14-30

**The “rich young man”:** Mark 10:17-22

**Giving what you can (even if it isn’t much):** Mark 12:41-44

**Parable of the rich fool:** Luke 12:13-21

**Be content with what we have:** 1 Timothy 6:6-12

### **Question for Reflection:**

8. Have these reading encouraged you to be more generous and to trust that God will provide? Again, see Malachi 3:10

# “You Shall Have No Other Gods but Me”: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

“Thank you for creating us. Thank you for always pursuing us with your love, even when we turn away from you. We ask you to bless our discussion today about putting you first in our lives. We take a moment to give you all our anxieties and concerns and ask you to speak to us.” (*Take a quiet moment.*)  
“Please bless our time together and help us to grow closer to you today.”

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week’s resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we discussed one thing about Mary on which you want to meditate or do differently based on what you learned in the lesson. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week’s lesson.

## Resolution and Commitment (*five-10 minutes*)

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

“This week there was a lot of content that could have been challenging for us to apply to our own lives. Are we spending our time in a way that communicates that God is first in our lives? Are we sharing our gifts and talents with the world in a way that builds up the people of God? Are we attached to our money or do we see it all as a gift from God? Do we fear the idea of sharing our money by tithing? It is important to remember that God gives us the commandment to put

him first in our lives because he knows that it will ultimately lead us to the most fulfillment and happiness! We were made by God and are fulfilled through intimacy with him.”

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

*Look back at your answer to your sixth question from this week. What most challenged you? What practically do you need or want to do in order to respond to that feeling of being challenged? How can you begin to make some changes this week?*

### **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## WEEK 25

# A Good and Loving Father

### Main Point

God is not just *a* father, but *our* perfect Father.

### Scripture to Memorize

"All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change." – James 1:17

From the Old Testament to the New, the fatherhood of God went from a metaphor to a reality. The Old described God as a father, the New made it clear that he *is* our Father who adopted us through the blood of Jesus Christ. The Catechism says, "By calling God 'Father,' the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children" (239).

### Jesus, Revelation of the Father

At the Last Supper, the apostle Philip asked Jesus to show the Father to them. He was probably shocked at Jesus' reply!

Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you are not my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his work (John 14:9-10).

Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), who revealed to us both the Father and the Spirit. Have you ever seen a child who was a spitting image of his parent? That is how we can see who the Father is: through the Son. This is part of the mystery of the Trinity. The Persons are distinct, but the divine nature is the same.

### Our Father and Our Fathers

The Jewish faith was centered around family. They knew what a father was, or at least what a father should be. Jesus used that understanding to help them understand God the Father: "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

Unfortunately, our culture today often suffers from an absence of fathers. Some fathers are hurtful, some are absent, and even the good fathers aren't perfect.

We can carry these wounds with us and it can distort our perspective of the Fatherhood of God.

I had a good father. He was loving and supportive. But when I was younger, he wasn't around very often. In addition to his many travels, he was usually out the door in the morning before I was up and home later at night. I knew he loved me and was providing for me, but he wasn't very present to me, at least in those younger years.

Because of that, I pictured God as loving... but distant. He was someone I didn't want to bother unless it was *really* important, someone I was desperately trying to please to gain attention. I transferred the experience of my father on earth to my Father in heaven.

## **A Good and Perfect Father**

I think it points to the fact that we were made in God's image that, no matter how bad our experiences of our own fathers are, we still instinctually know what a good father is supposed to be. Our Heavenly Father is good, loving, and perfect. Jesus spoke of the Father not as a distant being, but as someone who cares and watches out for us:

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs on your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

Remember, this was back when men never shaved their beards—that was a lot of hair!

## **Abba or Allah?**

A few times in Scripture, both Jesus and St. Paul use the word, "Abba." This is an informal word for a father, much like we might use the word "Dad." It shows a level of intimacy and compassion. This is very different from Muslims, who refer to God as *Allah*, or, "Master." They imagine their relationship, not in a personal way, but as a slave would relate to a master.

Sadly, I see many Catholics who approach God more as Allah than Abba. They will do what they are supposed to do, but don't realize that the Father wants more than good behavior. He wants their heart. Our Abba isn't looking for slaves, soldiers, or employees. He wants sons and daughters that he can share his inheritance with—the gift of eternal life!

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. How has your relationship with your earthly father formed your image of God the Father? How is God the Father different?



## Faith into Life

Jesus told his apostles and us, "The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God" (John 14:27). We are no longer orphans, but children of the Most High God! Part of our birthright is a prayer Jesus told us to pray: the Our Father.

This is a prayer of which we all know the words, but unfortunately don't usually ponder its meaning. On the surface, it sounds like seven petitions to the Father. However, it is also a blueprint on how to pray perfectly. It is the perfect prayer of filial trust, the trust a child would have toward a loving dad. More importantly, it is also a way to grow closer to him.

Like many lists, it starts with the most important point and ends with the least (the 10 Commandments are also structured this way). Since our "top 10" culture likes to save the best for last, let's examine this prayer backwards in order to see it in a new light.

### Praying the Our Father Backwards

*Deliver us from evil.* We are specifically talking about the Evil One and the fires of hell. This is a prayer for our salvation and the salvation of the world!

*Lead us not into temptation.* The original Greek is tricky to translate, meaning both "do not let us be led into temptation" and "do not let us yield to temptation" (Catechism 2846). The implication isn't that God actually leads us into temptation (he might "test" us with an opportunity to grow in virtue but he doesn't tempt us to do something sinful) but that we ask help from our Father that we might not fall into sin.

*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.* It is not just a prayer to receive mercy, but also to share it. Sometimes we treat this as two statements instead of one: "Have mercy on me. Also, help me be merciful to others." But that isn't what it says! Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us *as we forgive others.*" We need grace to do this!

*Give us this day our daily bread.* In this petition, we rely on God for what we need, and trust him to provide: "So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' All these things the pagans seek. Your Heavenly Father knows you need them all" (Matthew 6:32).

*May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* We are more concerned about God's concerns than our own, knowing that whatever he wants is better than whatever we want; this includes the things God wants for us.

*May your kingdom come.* This is a prayer not just for God's kingdom to grow on earth but also for the Second Coming of Christ. Bet you didn't realize how often you've prayed for the end of the world!

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.* God is holy, and yet he is not acknowledged as such by many of his children. We pray that he gets the glory that he deserves!

## **“We Dare to Say”**

Glorifying the Father, trusting in his providence, mercy from sin, freedom from hell, the Final Judgement... this prayer covers it all. Think about it: is there anything else for which we need to pray other than this? This is why it is the “perfect prayer.” We pray it together at the most intimate part of the Mass, right after the consecration of the Eucharist. If you pay attention to the words that preface the prayer, the presider says, “We dare to say.” This is a bold prayer! We would never have the courage to call God our Father or to trust in him so intimately had not Jesus showed us how.

Jesus not only prayed this prayer, but he also fulfilled all of the petitions. Through him we have a relationship with the Father. He is the one who brought the kingdom of God on earth. He surrendered his human will to the divine will, and in doing so gives us our “daily bread” in the Eucharist. His sacrifice is our pathway to mercy. He sends the Spirit into our hearts to overcome temptation, and his resurrection conquered the gates of hell!

## **An Invitation to Intimacy**

If we are humble, we acknowledge that many of these petitions are tough to pray. We often seek our own glory over God’s. We want *our* will to be done. We don’t want to forgive those who have hurt us. We can be reluctant to get rid of sins that we think will give us satisfaction.

Truly praying the Our Father prayer isn’t just about saying the words, but allowing him to change our hearts so that we can mean them. It means that we spend time with Jesus, the fulfillment of this prayer and the image of the Father, by reading his Word and reflecting on his love. It means that we accept the gift of prayer but are also willing to fight the battle to do it, sacrificing our time and effort. Sometimes it can feel as dry as a desert; other times it is like being in the pouring rain of God’s love. Through it all the Spirit of the Father gives us the grace to persevere with humility and filial trust.

You are loved by your heavenly Dad: “I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you” (John 14:18). Pray this prayer with your heart, and allow the arms of your Father to wrap you in his love.

## **Questions for Reflection**

5. Is there a part of the Our Father that you find difficult?

6. What does the Our Father, the “perfect prayer,” teach us about prayer, in general?

### **Daily Readings**

**Many rooms in the Father’s house:** John 14:1-13

**Trust in the Father:** Matthew 10:26-33

**Jesus is the vine, the Father the vine grower:** John 15:1-11

**The Father will give good things to those who ask:** Matthew 7:7-11

**“We shall be like him”:** 1 John 2:28-3:2

### **Question for Reflection**

7. Have these readings (or these Quad lessons, in general) changed your perspective of your Father?

# A Good and Loving Father: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, thank you for being our Father. Thank you for being our provider, protector, and pursuer. We ask you to open our hearts and minds today to discuss the gift of your Fatherhood in our lives. We give you all our distractions and all the things on our minds as we take a moment to silently offer them up to you." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Give us the grace today to allow you to transform our lives by your truth."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Were you able to implement some changes this week regarding putting God first in your time, your talents and gifts, and your money? How do you need to continue to work on this, and how can this Quad help to hold you accountable?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"In this week's lesson you read:

You are loved by your heavenly dad. 'I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you' (John 14:18). Pray this prayer with your heart, and allow the arms of your Father to wrap you in his love.

As you consider being in the arms of your heavenly Father, what feelings come to mind? What reactions do you feel in your body as you imagine being a child in your Father's arms? Take a moment to hear the Father say to you, 'I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you.' How does it feel to consider God coming to you in the midst of whatever is most difficult in your life right now? How do you feel as you consider that God will never, ever abandon you?"

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

*Simply recall your answers to the questions above. Which question most resonates in your heart as something you need to hear and receive in your life? Take some time this week to remind yourself of God's love as a Father and focus on what is most striking to your heart today.*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

***Special Note:*** *Next week is the second rotation of facilitation. Please discuss among your Quad who will be the next person to facilitate the Quad gatherings and ensure they are aware that they will be facilitating the next 10 lessons. On the following pages, there is a guide to this rotation of facilitation as well as some helpful tips for proper facilitation.*

## Rotation of Facilitation

One of the benefits of the Discipleship Quad process is that everyone will receive an opportunity to facilitate the group for about 10 or 11 lessons. This provides a chance to practice facilitating the Discipleship Quad gathering before each person goes forth and starts their own Discipleship Quad. There is great value in being able to practice facilitating while you are with a group with which you have already been meeting for many weeks. This is the second Rotation of Facilitation and it will happen again after Week 35. The goal is that all four people have had the opportunity to facilitate the Quad gathering.

### Unique Gifts

Everyone in the Discipleship Quad is going to have unique gifts and experiences when it comes to facilitation and leadership. You may have heard the phrase, "God doesn't call the equipped—he equips the called." This is indeed true, but also, each person is equipped with a variety of gifts and strengths that affect people differently. Each person in the Discipleship Quad will facilitate the Quad gathering uniquely based on their gifts and experiences. Also, each person in the Quad will learn from each other as they witness everyone taking a turn at facilitating.

### Tips for Proper Facilitation

Facilitating a Discipleship Quad is different than leading or teaching a small group. The following is an outline of the role of the facilitator as well as some tips regarding what makes facilitating unique:

*Time Management:* One of the most important jobs of the facilitator of the Quad Gathering is to keep track of the time. Each Quad Gathering Outline has suggested times for each section. The facilitator needs to keep track of time and ensure that the Quad is moving through each section of the Gathering Outline in a timely manner.

*Moving through the Outline:*

**Opening Prayer (three minutes):** The facilitator begins the Discipleship Quad Gathering with the Opening Prayer as written in the outline. Take note of giving a moment of silence midway through the prayer for everyone to just simply sit in silence. It is good to be quiet and have a moment of silence in the day.

**Recap of the Week (20-25 minutes):** This is where the discussion is opened up for each person to share for three to five minutes the recap of their week since the Quad last met. The questions that are listed in this section can be used as a guide for sharing. As facilitator, begin this time by asking who wants to share their recap of their week first. It is good for the facilitator to emphasize the question in bold from the previous week's Resolution and Commitment.

**Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes):** Then, begin going through the questions in the Reflection and Discussion section. This is where the time management part of facilitating is important. If time is getting tight, feel free to group a few questions together and ask everyone to share their answers to the question that impacted them the most.

**Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes):** The facilitator will read the first paragraph and then give one minute of silent reflection for each person to answer the resolution question in writing. Some people need quiet time to reflect before sharing, so be sure to give that one minute of silence. Then the facilitator opens up the conversation for everyone to share and discuss their answer. Be sure to watch the time and leave enough time at the end for this Resolution and Commitment section. If this is hard to remember, consider setting an alarm or timer to remind you.

**Closing Prayer (three minutes):** Anyone in the group can close in prayer. This Closing Prayer is in your own words and can be very simply just asking God to bless each person in the group until you meet again. You may recall some of the intentions that came up in the discussion and pray for them. As the facilitator, you also may want to ask if anyone else would like to do the Closing Prayer. If no one volunteers after several weeks of asking, then perhaps start asking particular people to pray. Remind everyone that if they are not comfortable praying out loud, it's okay. But practice helps them to become more comfortable.

*Facilitating, Not Teaching:* There is a difference between teaching and facilitating. The facilitator keeps the Quad focused on the material in the Guidebook and is not there to teach the information. The facilitator does more asking of questions than making of statements throughout the discussion, so as to facilitate discussion. If there is a need to correct someone who may have said something that wasn't accurate or incorrect, then the facilitator (or anyone in the group) can suggest that the Quad members look up the information and come back next week with more information on the topic.

*Equal Participation:* The facilitator is there to ensure that there is equal participation from all members of the Discipleship Quad. If one person is not sharing as much, the facilitator can ask them specifically what their thoughts are on the question and give everyone an opportunity to share equally. This is easily done in a group of four (rather than a larger group) but still sometimes one person may need a little encouragement to share as much as everyone in the group.

## WEEK 26

### Living in Faith

#### Main Point

Faith is not just what we believe, but how we live.

#### Scripture to Memorize

“Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” – Hebrews 11:1

Moses was an 80-year-old man who had been exiled from Egypt and his own people for almost 60 years. He was tending his father-in-law’s flock when he saw a bush on fire in the distance—an unusual thing to see, but not a huge deal. He probably assumed it would burn out quickly. But it didn’t. It just kept burning. Curious, he approached the bush:

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, ‘Here I am.’ God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground (Exodus 3:4-5).

Moses quickly removed his sandals and hid his face, “for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6).

For Moses, God came out of nowhere. He wasn’t looking for God; God was looking for him. God appeared to Moses in a way that was both natural (a bush on fire) and supernatural (a fire that didn’t burn out). The Lord did something to get Moses’ attention, and when Moses “turned aside to look,” he called for him. Then God revealed to Moses who he was.

#### The Gift of Faith

The Catechism states, “Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him” (153). Faith is not something we discover; it is *revealed* by a God who has been looking for us since the Garden of Eden. What God did with Moses is just one of countless examples of this in the Bible.

In common usage, faith is usually associated with a purely intellectual activity, often synonymous with belief. We are talking about something richer and deeper here. It is not just a matter of our minds being convinced, but our hearts being converted—an action only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Catechism goes on to say that "it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act" (154). It is not something God imposes on us. We were made to have faith, which is why humanity has always instinctively believed that there was something more to this life. This is why faith is the "realization of what is hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1).

The more we study the faith, as you have been doing in these lessons, the more God gives the gift of faith to understand what he has revealed. I pray you are not just getting smarter, but holier! That is the result of the growth of the virtue in your soul.

## **The Obedience of Faith**

The right response to God's revelation is *the obedience of faith*. We don't just think he is right; we surrender our life to him. This isn't based on our own human reasoning but on the authority of God who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:8). This does not suggest that our faith is contrary to human reasoning, as if it were a blind faith that made no sense.

There is a difference between those who "agree" with God and those who have faith in him. For example, God says we should love each other. Someone says, "I agree!" God says that we were made in his image and likeness. Again, the person says, "I agree!" Then God says to love your enemies, and the person replies, "Hold on a minute..."

Sadly, there are those who approach God's revelation this way. I refer to it as an "arrogance of agreement." They want to go line by line and approve or disapprove, as if they were equal with God. They keep "fact-checking" the faith, unwilling to fully commit unless they are intellectually convinced.

## **"Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?"**

Though our faith is reasonable, our understanding is finite, and we have to humbly acknowledge that. God will always know more than us and there will be times that we are confused by what is happening. Even though we may have many questions about God, as St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "10 thousand questions do not make a doubt." The gift of faith provides the "evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1), an ability to continue to have faith even in the face of confusion or difficulty.

A beautiful example of this is in the Gospel of John, Chapter 6. Jesus said things such as, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53). He probably sounded like a madman! As a result, many disciples left him.

But not the apostles. When Jesus asked if they also wanted to leave, Peter responded in *faith*: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the

Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). He didn't say, "I think transubstantiation is a great idea!" His confusion over what Jesus was saying didn't change his conviction in who he believed Jesus was.

This is what faith is—a grace given by God rooted in the authority of who he is: "It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie" (Catechism 157).

### Questions for Reflection

1. Define the virtue of faith. See CCC 1814
2. What is the difference between a question and a doubt? Do you have either of those?

### Scripture Reading

The Letter of James was written to challenge believers who said they had faith, yet did not show it by their actions: **James 1:19-2:26**.

### Questions for Reflection

3. Why is faith alone without works dead?
4. How does St. James explain what it means to live by faith?

## Faith into Life

St. Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). This was a favorite verse of Martin Luther (he even gave it more emphasis by translating it as "faith *alone*") and he accused the Catholic Church of teaching that one must earn their way to heaven. Though that was not Church teaching, unfortunately at that time it was the attitude practiced by many bishops and priests.

Luther hated the Letter of James, calling it a "letter of straw," because he felt it contradicted what St. Paul wrote about in Ephesians and his other letters. Another Protestant reformer named Calvin took this a step further by stating that, since faith was a gift and there was nothing we could do to earn our salvation, believers were pre-destined to go to heaven or hell, and it didn't matter what they did. (Few Protestants believe this extreme view today.)

## Faith and Works

The answer is that St. Paul was right: we are saved by faith, which is a grace given by God. However, St. James was also right: the fruits of faith are works. These aren't contradictory statements. One sheds light upon the other. If I said I knew the winning lottery number, but was unwilling to pay for a ticket, you'd likely conclude that I don't really believe it. Even if I was right, it would have done me no good. Because faith, if there is no works, is useless.

There is a difference in believing *that* there is a God and believing *in* God. As St. James mentions earlier in the letter, even the devil believes that God exists! Believing *in* God means following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, who is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

When you read Chapter 11 of Hebrews, often called the "Hall of Fame," the author goes through the figures of the Old Testament and acknowledges their acts of faith. Noah built an ark, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, Moses parted the Red Sea, and Rahab saved the Hebrew spies. They had faith, they acted in faith, and were "approved because of their faith" (Hebrews 11:39), for "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6).

## Love of Neighbor

The virtue of faith can't be something that stays in our head. It must be expressed in our lives. St. Teresa of Avila proposed that the way we really know if we are living out our faith is the way we love those around us:

The surest sign that we are keeping these two commandments is, I think, that we should really be loving our neighbour; for we cannot be

sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbour (*Interior Castle*, ch. 3).

St. John gives this thought added emphasis: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

St. Teresa warned her sisters of "imaginary virtue." We can imagine doing holy actions, and feel great about those thoughts, but we don't actually do them. She wrote, "The wiles of the devil are terrible; he will run a thousand times round hell if by so doing he can make us believe that we have a single virtue which we have not."

## Consequences of Faith

Growing in the virtue of faith changes your entire perspective on life. No longer can you ignore the homeless person on the street. Though you might not have money to give, you can at least look them in the eye and acknowledge their human dignity. You start to pray for the person who bothers you the most (and not just for them to "go away"). You speak up when others insult someone behind their back. You get persecuted when you stand up for what you believe in. You become more aware of how God is working around you. You see miracles. You receive a "peace the world cannot give" (John 14:27), even in the midst of adversity. You do things you never thought you would, because you are confident in the One who is calling you to do it.

Remember, "faith is a gift" (Catechism 153). The apostles begged the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). This is a great prayer for us, as well! It isn't about doing things by our own strength or earning our salvation. Because he loves us, God gives us this gift of faith so we can see him more clearly and be more like him.

## Questions for Reflection

5. Can you see yourself having any "imaginary virtues"?

6. Did anything in the reading challenge you?

7. How can you plug yourself more into your faith community so as to put your faith into action?

## **Daily Readings**

**Examples of faith:** Hebrews 11:1-16

**More examples of faith:** Hebrews 11:17-40

**Saved by faith:** Ephesians 2:1-10

**“Help my unbelief!”:** Mark 9:14-29

**“I am not worthy to have you under my roof”:** Luke 7:1-10

## **Question for Reflection**

8. In what new ways is God calling you to more deeply put your faith into action?

# Living in Faith: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, thank you for the gift of faith. Thank you for being "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:8). We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful for this week?
- **Last week we talked about God as a good and loving Father. Each person chose one thing from the lesson that was most striking to their heart and focused on that thing. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

“This week we read about faith guiding us through various truths that our mind may not be able to comprehend fully just yet. The example given was in reference to St. Peter’s response in John 6 to Jesus talking about the Eucharist being the ‘flesh of the Son of Man’ (John 6:53). Questioning truth in an effort to more fully understand it is not a bad thing, and in fact, may actually be a very good step along the journey of faith. This line of thinking may be hard for some of us to grasp, as it’s not something that our society practices much of in this day and age. There is a pressure to be much more black and white about our beliefs and if we don’t understand it, then there is a temptation to disagree with that which we don’t understand.”

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

*As you consider all the insights you received from this lesson, are there any truths about the Catholic faith that you have more questions about and want to discover more? Is there an area with which you have already determined you disagree? Pray for the gift of faith this week. If there is a specific area to which you want to give more faith, pray about that topic specifically. If not, ask God to increase your faith and see where he takes you in regard to living out your faith.*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up a general prayer for the Quad and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

# WEEK 27

## Overcoming Fear

### Main Point

Faith is the antidote to fear.

### Scripture to Memorize

"Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said... 'Do not be afraid; just have faith.'"

– Mark 5:36

There is a story of a man who walked a tightrope over Niagara Falls on a windy day. "Do you think I can do it?" he asked the small crowd that had gathered. They weren't sure. So he grabbed his balancing pole and walked across and back without a problem.

"Do you think I can do it without the pole?" he asked the crowd that had now grown larger. Some were concerned, but others were convinced that he could. They cheered as he walked without a pole from one side to the other.

He pointed to a wheelbarrow that was nearby. "Do you think I can roll this wheelbarrow on the tightrope?" Some gasped, but many shouted, "Yes!" He did it with ease.

"Do you think I could do it again, with someone *inside* the wheelbarrow?" The crowd was enthusiastic now.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" they cried.

"Great!" he exclaimed. "Who

wants to get in?" And

nobody moved.

### Faith over Fear

Some believe that the opposite of faith is doubt, and to a certain extent this is true. However, it is also *fear*. When the apostles thought their boat would sink in the storm, Jesus calmed the seas and then asked them, "Why were you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" (Mark 4:40).

Jesus was on his way to heal a sick girl but was told the girl had already died. "Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said... 'Do not be afraid; just have faith'" (Mark 5:36). Often in the gospels, we hear Jesus suggest that fear is the opposite of faith.

This is not just a theme of the gospels. The phrase, "Be not afraid," appears in the Bible an astonishing 365 times! That can't be a coincidence—God wants us to "not be afraid" 365 days out of the year. (Except on a leap year. Be afraid on a leap year.\*)

## **Fear and Sin**

The first time we see fear in the Bible is after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Adam explained why he hid himself from God: "I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10). Fear wasn't something God gave us; it is a result of sin.

Fear not only comes *from* sin, but it can also lead us *to* sin. Though Pilate knew Jesus was an innocent man, the people shouted for him to be crucified and "he became even more afraid" (John 19:8), so he handed him over to be killed. I have too many examples in my own life of when I did the wrong thing or didn't do the right thing, because I was afraid.

## **Fear and Pride**

The first sin was about man and woman wanting to be their own gods, choosing for themselves what was right and wrong. The Catechism says that Adam and Eve became "afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image" (399). Sin distorts our image of God. St. John Paul II said, "Original sin attempts to abolish fatherhood." We start to think that he has abandoned us, or is out to get us, or doesn't care enough to help us. No wonder the first result of sin was being afraid!

Sin also gives us a distorted image of ourselves. Our pride can make us think we are better than we are, or that it is all up to us. Like an arrogant person who thinks they could fly an airplane without any training, it wouldn't take long for that confidence to be replaced with terror.

## **Humility and Faith**

If pride causes us to fear, then it is humility that gives us peace. The Catechism defines "humility" as "the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good. Humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer" (2559).

It is worth reflecting on that definition. What the world says is humility is often just *false* humility: saying one isn't as good as one really is. Humility is truth. It is a truth that we recognize because of the gift of faith. It is knowing that God is God, God is good, you are not God, and God loves you.

St. Peter wrote, "So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7). If I thought everything was up to me, and I sometimes do, I'd have more than 365 reasons to be afraid. When I look at the cross and see the love of Jesus, a love so fierce that it conquered death, I remember my

place and find his peace.

### Questions for Reflection

1. This is a pattern in a number of Gospel stories: First, something bad happens. Second, the apostles freak out. Third, Jesus fixes the situation. And the story concludes with Jesus asking, "Why were you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" Why is fear one of our greatest enemies?
  
2. Do any of these fears apply to you? Fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of criticism, fear of abandonment, fear of other people's opinions. If so how?

### Scripture Reading

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most popular stories, not just in the Bible, but in our culture. It is the classic underdog story. However, there is much more to it than that: **1 Samuel 17:1-51**.

### Questions for Reflection

3. What details of the story stood out to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What did David have that nobody else did? How can we imitate him?

## Faith into Life

St. Paul wrote, "So we are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:6-7). Faith is the "new sight" by which we see the world. This is important, because often what we see in the world can make us afraid that everything is lost:

Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice, and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it (Catechism 164).

### Ways to Grow in Faith

The Catechism proposes a number of ways we can persevere in faith during trials (162-165).

*The Word of God:* "To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God" (Catechism 162). When we reflect on God's revealed Word, whether in Scripture or tradition, we turn away from a distorted reality and toward the truth. The Book of Psalms is filled with laments from those who felt God had abandoned them, only to realize that he was there the whole time, working in a way they did not expect. God's Word helps us see our lives in the light of faith, not fear. (The opposite can be said of 24-hour news networks.)

*Pray for faith:* The apostles begged Jesus, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). A man who brought his son to Jesus to be cured cried, "I do believe! Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). These are great prayers for us to pray as well. Faith is not something we make up on our own; it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. We must continue to ask for it!

*Charitable works:* Fear wants to isolate and immobilize us. Faith calls us to community and service. When we live out our faith by loving others, we see God at work. Maybe we only make a small difference, but at least a difference is being made.

*Witnesses of faith:* We have plenty of stories of unlikely people doing incredible things through the power of the Holy Spirit, both in Scripture and in the history of the Church. We have an incredible inheritance of the lives of the saints—men and women in every culture and every conceivable situation, people of whom it can be said, "The world was not worthy of them" (Hebrews 11:38). Read about their lives. They were ordinary people transformed by faith.

## Faith to Move Mountains

When Jesus went back to his home in Nazareth, "he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:5-6). Those from his home didn't believe in him, and so he couldn't help them. Lack of faith equals lack of God's activity.

However, the opposite is true! Jesus told his followers, "Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Have you seen a mustard seed? It is like a grain of sand. Why would he use the smallest of all seeds as an example? To show us that we only need a little faith for God to do amazing things.

## The End of the Story

Jesus said, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Many of us would have preferred him to say, "Hakuna matata! You'll have no problems if you follow me!" But that isn't what he said. There are two important statements in this verse: The first is that we will have problems. The second is that Jesus has already overcome them.

Even when things look dark, faith lets us see the future. It is the "beginnings of eternal life" (Catechism 163). Every story has a moment when all seems lost, but we keep reading because we trust that the author will make things right in the end, no matter how bad it gets. God is the perfect author. Though we might not know what will happen in the next few pages, we know how this story will finish:

Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

## A Prayer of Faith

I'd like to conclude with a simple prayer that has helped me many times when I've been afraid, written by St. Teresa of Avila:

Let nothing trouble you / Let  
nothing frighten you Everything  
passes / God never changes  
Patience / Obtains all  
Whoever has God /  
Wants for nothing  
God alone is enough.

## Questions for Reflection

5. What are the "Goliaths" in your life that you need faith to overcome?  
What would your life look like if you weren't afraid?
6. Which type of fear is of the Holy Spirit? See CCC 1831

## Daily Readings

**The faith of the prophet Elijah:** 1 Kings 18:19-39

**Walking on water:** Matthew 14:22-33

**"Daughter, your faith has saved you":** Mark 5:21-34 **"Do not be afraid; just have faith":** Mark 5:35-43 **The end of the story:** Revelation 22:1-5

## Question for Reflection

7. Have you been inspired by these stories of faith?

\* That was a joke. Don't be afraid on a leap year.

# Overcoming Fear: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, this week we reflect on overcoming fear and having faith in you! We pray for the continued gift of faith, especially in light of our deepest fears. We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we talked about the gift of faith and praying for an increase in faith. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"This week we read about how fear can keep us from doing God's will. This can be true in regards to our life's dreams and potential. Fear is one of the biggest things that holds people back from becoming the person God created them to be. St. Catherine of Siena said, 'Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.' The world needs you to have faith in God and be not afraid. This act will change the world."

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss:

*Look back at your answer to Question 5 this week: "What would your life look like if you weren't afraid?" Perhaps there are a few areas where your life would look differently. Choose one this week to focus on and ask for the gift of faith to help you to trust and not be afraid. Concretely determine how you can ask for faith in God in this area of your life rather than succumb to fear. Look back at the four ways to grow in faith that were mentioned this week and choose one of them to work on this week.*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

# WEEK 28

## A Treasure to be Shared

### Main Point

It would be selfish to keep the Good News to ourselves.

### Scripture to Memorize

"Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ."  
– Romans 10:17

When I was younger, I saw a t-shirt that displayed a quote from St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel to all nations, and when necessary, use words." At the time, I thought it sounded like a great idea! We should witness the Gospel with what we do, not what we say. I even bought the shirt.

When I got older, I learned two important things about that quote. First, St. Francis didn't actually say that. Second, it isn't entirely true.

### The Importance of Witness

Let's start with what is right about the quote. We need to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ with our lives *first*. We need to "walk the walk" before we "talk the talk." St. Pope Paul VI, in his document on evangelization, wrote, "Modern man will listen to witnesses more than teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41).

In the First Letter of Peter, St. Peter gave some advice to women who had just converted to Christ but their husbands hadn't, suggesting that "they may be won over without a word by their wife's conduct when they observe your reverent and chaste behavior" (1 Peter 3:1-2). (It is worth mentioning that, in that society, a woman would not be allowed to "preach" to a man, especially her husband.)

Jesus told his followers, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to radiate God's love, joy, and peace. Pope Francis wrote, "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 10).

Catholicism isn't an idea to believe, but a life to be lived. Others need to see the beauty of that life before they will want to live it themselves.

### The Power of Words

But seeing isn't enough. This is where the phrase, "When necessary, use words," can be misleading. It implies that words are only used in rare

occasions, as if it wasn't usually necessary to explain the faith.

St. Peter wrote, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and kindness" (1 Peter 3:15-16). Another way of saying it is this: Live your faith in such a way that people will ask you questions about it. Know your faith in such a way that you are ready to explain it at any moment.

St. Paul wrote:

For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? ... Thus, faith comes from what is heard (Romans 10:13-15,17).

Though someone may be inspired by the witness of another, "faith comes from what is heard." If we don't explain our reasons for why we are living the way we do, they might assume we are just "nice" people, but never come to know the saving power of Jesus Christ.

## **A Treasure to be Shared**

The Good News isn't something that we are supposed to keep for ourselves, nor is it something that only a few are called to proclaim to others. St. John Paul II wrote, "The Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind" (*Redemptoris Missio* 11). It wouldn't be right to keep it to ourselves!

Perhaps you think you are unqualified? Join the club. Moses was a murderer, David was an adulterer, St. Peter was a denier and St. Paul was a Christian executioner. In fact, the more unlikely of an evangelist you seem to be, the more likely it is that God will use you, so it is clear that the power is from God and not from us!

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. Why is it important that we talk about Jesus with others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What fears do you think people have when they think about having those conversations? Who is supposed to comfort us or give us courage and inspiration when we have those conversations?

## Scripture Reading

St. Peter and St. John had just cured a crippled man and claimed it was by the power of the Jesus they had done so. Remember, this was only a few months, or even weeks, after the resurrection of Christ and descent of the Holy Spirit, so they are speaking in front of the very men who condemned Jesus to death: **Acts 4:1-22.**

### Questions for Reflection

3. What stood out to you in this reading?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. "It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). As you read that sentence, of what can you think that God has done in your life that you feel in some ways is impossible for you not to share?

## Faith into Life

There are a number of things that our reading from Scripture reveals about how we should pass on the faith to others.

*"By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7).* It started with a miracle. They healed a cripple and everyone wondered how they did it. You might already think, "Well, I can't do that!" However, the greatest miracle is a transformed life. It is joy in the face of despair, faith in the face of fear. It is love that knows no boundaries. The witness of your life is a miracle of God's love and grace. When they take notice of that, they look "for a reason for your hope."

It might take them time to see this. Maybe they are a work colleague that you have known for years, or a friend you know from school. Sometimes evangelization happens in a dramatic moment; I've had some great conversations with strangers on airplanes. But often it is slow and in stages. Before you can start sharing your faith, a person needs to know two things: First, they need to know that you love God. And second, they need to know that you love *them*. This is what makes it clear that you are sharing what you believe, not selling something.

*"Filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8)*. Scripture makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is doing the work. Peter proclaimed the Gospel because the Holy Spirit told him to. St. Paul VI wrote, "Even the most advanced techniques of evangelization are nothing in comparison to the gentile action of the Holy Spirit" (EN 75).

From the way that the story was told in Acts, it didn't seem that St. Peter and St. John had planned on speaking to the Sanhedrin that day. Evangelization rarely happens when we schedule it. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit to share the faith wherever and whenever he wants. Since the Spirit doesn't force himself on us, we also need to ask for the grace to share the faith with others. If you haven't had many opportunities to talk about your faith, it is probably because you haven't told the Lord you were willing!

*"It was in the name of Jesus the Nazorean" (Acts 4:10)*. Sharing the faith is not about winning an argument. It is talking about someone that you love. It can't just be an intellectual debate about a certain doctrine of the Church. I have a PhD in theology and I can argue with the best of them. But, in my experience, it rarely ends well. Even if I convince someone of my point, that doesn't mean they grow in *faith*. We need to talk about Jesus, how he loves us, how we love him, and how he has changed our life.

Focusing on what Jesus has done in your life moves the conversation from a debate into what hopefully becomes a dialogue. You're not getting on a soapbox with a megaphone. You are talking to a friend about another friend (Jesus). That would naturally lead to more questions from the other person. It's okay if you don't know all the answers; you can find those out later. (Hey, it is a good excuse to bring up the subject again!)

*"There is no salvation through anyone else" (Acts 4:12)*. This can be a tough one in today's society (it is a good thing that you are speaking in the power of the Spirit!). People are often okay if you are excited about your faith as long as the other faiths are just as true. Well, they're not. Jesus is the only way—the Scriptures couldn't be clearer on that point. Jesus isn't just for some but for everyone. It would distort the Gospel message to say anything less.

For the most part, the world already accepts Jesus as a good teacher. But the Bible says that he is God, our Lord and Savior. Most people haven't heard that before. "And how can they hear without someone to preach?" (Romans 10:14).

Pope Francis beautifully summed up the Good News: "Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you, and now he is living at your side, every day, to enlighten, strengthen and free you" (EG 119). He loves, he saves, he lives! He is not for a few, but for all. He is not one of many; he is the only way.

All of this could be communicated in one conversation, but likely will happen over many of them. Be patient, but keep persevering. Listen and pray.

*"Observing the boldness of Peter and John, and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed" (Acts 4:13).* Another translation of "boldness" is "audacity" or "enthusiasm." We can't proclaim the Good News like the "Meh News." This is the greatest love story we can know, the most important message of our lives!

Pope Francis wrote about temptations that can stifle our enthusiasm:

One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses.' Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and bury our talents. While painfully aware of our own weaknesses, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to St. Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (1 Corinthians 12:9). (EG 85).

Our boldness is not rooted in our ability to convince, but in the Spirit's power to convert. It is not because we are perfect but because we are forgiven. It is not about us but about him. And we can say with St. Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

*"It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).* As humans, we are wired to automatically share good things that happen to us. When something exciting happens, we often can't wait to tell someone. The same should be said of our relationship with Jesus. St. Paul VI said, "It is inconceivable that someone would receive the Good News and not share it with others."

There are many reasons to be afraid of sharing our faith. What if they reject us? What if I don't say it right? What if I turn them off from being Catholic? We must call to mind the words of Jesus that we memorized last week: "Do not be afraid; just have faith" (Mark 5:36). You don't need to know all the answers. You have great news to share! It will change people's lives. They might reject it, and that is their right. Don't let that stop you from sharing it.

And don't worry that you might make a mistake. Oh, if only the biggest problem in the Church was that too many Catholics shared their faith badly! The real problem is that they don't share their faith at all. God uses us, broken as we are, to proclaim his glory. Keep asking the Spirit to guide those conversations. You will find that the more you share your faith, the

more you will increase in it.

### Questions for Reflection

5. What did you read that gave you a new understanding of how to share the Good News of Jesus Christ?
6. What is the difference between a religious debate and sharing the faith, or proselytizing as opposed to witnessing?

### Daily Readings

**“Always be ready”:** 1 Peter 3:8-17

**“Faith comes from what is**

**heard”:** Romans 10:5-17 **The**

**prophetic responsibility:** Ezekiel

33:1-9 **“Proclaim the word”:** 2

Timothy 4:1-5

**The Great Commission:** Matthew 28:16-20

### Question for Reflection

7. Have these readings inspired you to share the faith with others?

## Discipleship in Action: Proclaiming the Good News

One of the most powerful ways to share about Jesus in your life is to share about what he has done for you personally. This is often called your “personal witness.” If you have allowed Jesus into your life at any time, then you have a witness to share. This does not have to be the wild story that you may hear in the lives of the saints, where they were absolutely awful people, met Jesus, and changed into the holiest people you’ve met (though, if that’s your story, share it!). Most of us have more ordinary stories of what God has done in our lives.

### Many Small Things Equal a Changed Life

Our relationship with God is a love relationship. Think about someone that falls in love for the first time. They often can’t stop talking about that person and all the ways in which they have impacted their life. Our relationship with God is similar. He changes our lives in big and small ways through our relationship with him, and it is those things that we want to share with others. Though, in a relationship over many long years, we continue to be transformed in love with that person. So, our personal witness of God is not just our first experience of love with him, but there will be many more encounters as we continue to have a relationship with him. Those many small encounters with God often result in our lives being changed in the long run.

### “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope...” – 1 Peter 3:15

As Christians, our lives should be different because of Jesus. People like to hear stories, and personal stories are even better. The power of your personal story is that it is yours! No one can look at you and argue that it didn’t happen to you (well, they could, but they wouldn’t get very far because it’s your experience with which they are arguing). Your personal witness can usually lead you to a place where you can share more theological truths about God (who he is, what he did for humanity, etc.) because it opens someone’s heart to listen.

### Preparing Your Witness

For the sake of a definition: *A witness is an account of a specific experience of God working in our lives and hearts.* Any account of God working in your life is a witness. It is good to take time to reflect on some of your encounters with God. This allows you to thank God once again for working in your life and reminds you of his grace. It also allows you to recall the ways God has worked in you so you can be more readily able to share your witness when you have an opportunity.

There are usually three parts to your witness:

1. *Your life before the encounter with Jesus*

Explain how life was prior to whatever encounter you are sharing. This doesn't need to be your entire life leading up to that point, but just give details that are needed to set up that specific encounter with Jesus. Try not to glorify or focus too much on any sin in your life by going into specific detail regarding sins. Just speak generally to what was going on in your life and how you may have struggled.

2. *The encounter with Jesus*

This is the heart of your witness. It is best if you spend the most time talking about this portion of your life. This is what people need to hear the most! Give a lot of details on how God worked in your life. Try to avoid speaking generally in this part, but rather, be specific about how God moved in your life and heart. It is okay if this section happened over a period of time (rather than in one moment). Just speak to the details as they happened. It is sometimes hard to put words to what God does, as it can be pretty powerful, yet subtle, but try to give it as much description as possible. Think about what was going on in your mind and heart. How did you feel? What did God do? How did that make you feel? Use analogies to help people understand. People want and need to understand that God does indeed work in people's lives.

3. *Your life after this encounter with Jesus*

Paint a picture of what your life is like after this encounter with God. The goal is not to make it seem like your life is perfect and that Jesus fixed everything, but rather to show that Jesus worked in your life and continues to transform you. Try to think of practical ways in which you have changed and how that has impacted your life. Connect the changes in your life (which may have happened over a period of time) to the things you mentioned in your first part of how you were prior to the encounter with God. A great way to end your sharing is to connect back to the person with whom you are sharing by giving some kind of invitation or encouragement. For example, "I know God can forgive you like he forgave me," or, "I invite you to be open to God's love in the same way because I know he wants to heal you and show you his love."

## **Sharing What We Believe**

Our first step in proclaiming the Good News is sharing *why* we believe (our witness). However, that alone isn't enough to help someone to come to know Jesus Christ. We need to explain *what* we believe as well. There is no need to be afraid of this; you don't need a degree in theology! In fact, the Gospel message is less complicated than explaining the rules of some professional sports or storylines of popular shows.

One simple way to explain the Gospel message is to unpack what Pope Francis meant when he said, "Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you, and now he is living at your side, every day, to enlighten, strengthen, and free you" (EG 119). There are three things he emphasizes in that statement: Love, mercy, and immediacy.

*Jesus Christ loves you...* As we've examined time and time again, "God is love" (1 John 4:12), and the life of a follower of Jesus is a life of love. He became flesh so he could model a new way of love, and he sends us his Spirit so we can be like him.

*He gave his life to save you...* He took on our life so he could destroy our death. Why? Because "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

There is nothing we could do that can separate us from his love and mercy. St. Catherine of Siena had a vision of man separated from God by a chasm of sin, but then the cross of Jesus provided a bridge that we can walk across. This is a very effective image in explaining how Jesus saved us.

*And now he is living at your side, every day, to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.*

Jesus is alive! He is risen! He is here! Christianity is not a thing of the past, but the present. The same Jesus that called St. Peter off his boat 2,000 years ago is here now and calling all of us to be part of his family. As St. Paul wrote, "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). The world often leaves us confused, weak, and enslaved. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus offers us enlightenment, strength, and freedom: "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

## **Let the Spirit Lead**

It is unlikely that you will unpack all of this over one cup of coffee, but over time we can have different opportunities to share various aspects of the faith. You should let your friends know that you are excited to talk about your Catholic faith, and any question to which you don't know the answer you will find out for them. Your best resource is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

But even if you knew every answer, it wouldn't be enough. Only the Holy Spirit can change hearts. You are doing *his* work, not the other way around. I find myself saying over and over, "Come, Holy Spirit," when I have the chance to share the faith with someone. I'm not trying to prove a point; I'm trying to share a person—Jesus Christ—who loves us, gave his life to save us, and is living at our side right now to enlighten, strengthen, and free us.

# A Treasure to be Shared: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, this week we reflect on sharing what you have done in our lives and the good news about your love. We pray for wisdom and guidance as we discuss how to best share about you with others. We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we discussed choosing one area of your life where you could grow in faith rather than succumb to fear. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

“St. Peter wrote, ‘Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and kindness’ (1 Peter 3:15-16). This week we talked about how important it is to share in words about what God has done in our lives and why we love him. For some, the thought of this may be a bit intimidating. Yet we have to remember that the Holy Spirit speaks through us. God wants people to see how he works in others’ lives so they can relate to the good he can and will do when they allow him into their lives. Your witness and experiences are some of the most powerful tools for sharing about God’s love with others.”

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question:

*As you read the lesson this week, is there someone with whom you felt that the Lord was asking you to share the faith? If so, start praying for an opportunity to do so. If not, ask the Lord with whom he wants you to share his message of love.*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## WEEK 29

### Eyes on the Prize

#### Main Point

In hope we desire eternal life and trust that God will give us all we need to get there.

#### Scripture to Memorize

“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.” –  
Jeremiah 29:11

In the movie *The Return of the King* the hobbit Pippin looked at the gathering army and despaired over the forces of evil that were about to overtake them. There was no way they could win the battle. He said to the wizard Gandalf, “I didn’t think it would end this way.”

Gandalf looked at him with surprise. “End? No, the journey doesn’t end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The gray rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it...”

The wizard paused and Pippin asked, “What? Gandalf? See what?”

Gandalf smiled. “White shores... and beyond. A far green country under a swift sunrise.” Pippin imagined it and was filled with hope. “That isn’t so bad,” he said.

“No,” Gandalf replied. “No, it isn’t.”

#### The Virtue of Hope

The Catechism describes “hope” as:

[T]he theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (1817).

Like the virtue of faith, this is a gift from God and often misunderstood. The world usually uses the word “faith” to describe an intellectual belief and “hope” to describe something you’re not sure if you believe or not. To say, “I have faith that the Steelers will win this Sunday,” is confident. To say, “I hope the Steelers will win,” is less so, and it implies you don’t think they will.

This is not the kind of hope (or faith) we have in Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews describes it as “an anchor of the soul, sure and firm” (Hebrews 6:19). The virtues of faith and hope (and love, which we will discuss more later) all work with each other. If faith is *what* we do and believe, then hope is *why*: the promise of eternal life.

## Life After Death

Jesus told the apostles, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2). Jesus frequently taught about the glory after death that awaits those who become his disciples.

This was a new understanding. Though the Jewish people believed in a “place of rest” for those who were righteous, it was not necessarily considered as better than this life. They felt the blessings were here and now. Jesus revealed that something greater was to come. As St. Paul wrote, “Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard... what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Jesus not only talked about heaven, but he also spoke about hell. He referred to it as “Gehenna,” the “unquenchable fire” for those who refuse to believe: “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28). He warned his followers, “The gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Many in society think the opposite—that most go to heaven and few go to hell. Others doubt the existence of hell, asking, “If God is so loving, why would hell exist?”

## Not a Place, but a Person

That question usually comes from a misunderstanding of heaven and hell. Too often we think of them as places. The Book of Revelation describes heaven as a wedding feast. Whose wedding? *Ours*. We enter into the life of the Trinity! It’s not just about going to a place, but about fully giving yourself to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Those who want heaven but not God can be compared to someone who wants to marry someone only for their money. You can’t have one without the other. If we reject God in this life, he doesn’t force himself upon us in the next. For those who ask the “If God is so loving...” question, I usually respond, “It is *because* God is so loving that he doesn’t make us spend eternity with him if we didn’t want to do so in this short life.”

We need to go beyond the visual stereotypes here. Heaven isn’t a sunny day in the Caribbean; hell is not a pit of fire with devils and pitchforks. Heaven is *way* better: “Eye has not seen!” Those who get married often say it is the happiest day of their lives. Multiply that by a million. However, hell is also far worse. In

hell, one is removed from God who is perfect love, peace, and joy: "The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs" (Catechism 1035).

## Paradise Opened

Our first parents' sin closed us off from heaven, but "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, so that all who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). It is God's desire that "all men be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4) and he has done *everything* he can to let us know that we are loved and we are saved through Jesus Christ. The gift of eternal salvation is the greatest gift God could give us!

Even if our life feels like a ship during a storm, hope is our "sure and steady anchor" that keeps us grounded in the reality that we were made for something more. The virtue of hope allows us to rejoice and look forward to this gift. We can say with St. Paul, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

## Questions for Reflection

1. How has this reflection given you a better understanding of the virtue of hope?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you think about heaven? How did the reading give you a better understanding of it?

## Scripture Reading

Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the hope of Abraham, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice (Catechism 1819).

It was said of Abraham that because he believed he would have a child even in his extreme old age, he "hoped against hope" (Romans 4:18)—meaning

that when there was no “natural” reason to hope, his “supernatural” hope won out. God gave him Isaac and when Isaac was a teen, God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him. This command sounds shocking to us today, but at the time human sacrifice was common in religions. God was simply seeing if Abraham would do for God what others did for their gods. However, the point of the story is that God was *not* a God that desired human sacrifices. The only human sacrifice was something he would do himself.

Read **Genesis 22:1-18**.

### Questions for Reflection

3. What allusions do you see to the life of Jesus in this story?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How is what Abraham did an example of both faith and hope?

### Faith into Life

St. Paul wrote, “Let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet that is hope for salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). A helmet is one of the most important pieces of armor, for if you are knocked unconscious you can’t defend yourself! Hope is an essential virtue for disciples of Jesus. Though it is a gift, there are many ways we can (and need to) cultivate it.

### Despair and Presumption

If you imagine a virtue being the top of a mountain, there are two sides from which you can fall. For faith, it is either doubt or fear. For hope, it is either presumption or despair.

Presumption takes the saving power of God for granted. This was the sin of the Pharisees. They thought they would be saved because they were children of Abraham and because they were “righteous.” Their hope was in themselves, not in the mercy of God.

The scene described in the beginning of this lesson was one of despair. Pippin

looked at the army and lost hope—there was no way they were going to win. Despair occurs when we don't think God is strong enough or cares enough to take care of us. Psalm 77 gives an example of this. The psalmist, overwhelmed by difficulty, states, "My sorrow is this, that the right hand of the Most High has abandoned us" (Psalm 77:11).

### **Reflecting on God's Promises**

Whether we think too much of our own power (presumption) or doubt God's power or willingness to save (despair), the virtue of hope can be nurtured when we reflect on his promises. Immediately after making that statement of despair, the psalmist provides a solution: "I will recall the deeds of the Lord; yes, recall your wonders of old. I will ponder all your works; on your exploits I will meditate" (Psalm 77:12).

One beautiful promise of hope is found in the prophet Jeremiah. The Jewish people had just witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and were led away in chains to Babylon. Things couldn't get much worse. They were expecting a call to arms, but instead Jeremiah told them to build houses, let young people get married, and work for the good of the town. Though they were confused by this prophecy, the Lord said through Jeremiah, "For I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

That is your memorized verse for this week. I'm not sure if you've kept up with these verses, but I would strongly recommend that you commit this one to memory. It is a great way to keep your "helmet" on when things look bleak and you don't know what is happening.

For those of us who struggle with presumption, there is another promise we can meditate upon: "You have no idea what your life will be like tomorrow. You are a puff of smoke that appears briefly then disappears" (James 4:14). This is not to scare us, but to help us put things in perspective. God has a plan, and it is a plan for our good, not for our destruction. He is for us, not against us.

### **Absolution and Penance**

When the priest says the words of absolution, "I absolve you of all your sins," he is acting *in persona Christi*, the Person of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus himself who says those words to us. The same voice that spoke creation into existence now speaks the sin out of our soul. We are returned to the waters of our baptism. By his grace, we are without sin.

However, the journey isn't over: "Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused" (Catechism 1459). The priest prescribes a penance, an action of some sort that can help us with the wounds that were caused by sin: "It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we much bear" (Catechism 1460). The purpose behind anything we are prescribed to do is to configure us more closely with Christ.

## Eyes on the Prize

The Catechism states, "Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire" (1820). In hope we realize that God would not put desires in our heart that he didn't mean to fulfill. Our desire for love, for peace, for justice... all of these will happen fully in the next life. When we pray, "Your kingdom come and your will be done," we are not so much *requesting* for this to happen as resting in the knowledge that this *will* happen. Christ will come again!

Hope keeps us looking forward. St. Paul wrote, "Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Athletes will go through lots of difficulty if they think they can win the game. We need to have confidence, not in ourselves, but in the grace and love of God! He would not bring us this far to leave us. Our sins are not so strong that he can't save; our distance is not so far that he can't reach.

"What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Pray for an increase of the virtue of hope. Meditate on the promises of God. Reflect on the lives of saints and their stories of miraculous deliverance. Trust in the Lord. "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

## Questions for Reflection

5. How is the virtue of hope an antidote to despair or presumption? How are hope and presumption different?
6. How have you come to a deeper understanding of the importance of the virtue of hope?

## Daily Readings

A psalm of hope in the face of despair: Psalm 77

**"In my Father's house there are many rooms":** John 14:1-7

**Heirs of hope:** Titus 3:1-8

**Hope for the exiled:** Jeremiah 29:4-14

**"Hope does not disappoint":** Romans 5:1-10

## Question for Reflection

7. Which of these scriptures spoke to you about hope in your personal life and why?

## Going Deeper: Purgatory

In the previous lesson, we examined heaven and hell. But what about purgatory? The Catechism describes it as this:

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven (1030).

Purgatory is not "in between" heaven and hell. It is at the gates of heaven, and all who go to purgatory are going to heaven. One cannot "fail" purgatory! This is a common misunderstanding.

Our understanding of purgatory comes from the Jewish tradition of praying for those who have died and the subsequent practice of Christians praying for the souls of the dead. That moment of "purgation" eventually became a formal title of "purgatory."

### A Place of Mercy

Jesus told us to "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Certainly, that is not something we can do on our own! We need his grace and mercy to make us perfect, to purify us. That is what God wants to accomplish in this life, to free us entirely from sin so we can enter heaven, where there is not a hint or stain of sin. The many saints the Church has canonized have shown that it can be done!

But what if we die before we have been perfected by grace? What if we desire God but are still attached to sin? God has provided a place of mercy—purgatory—so we can be freed from our sinful attachments and desire only him. It isn't pleasant, for we know that the struggle against sin is painful. But it is unlike the "fires of hell"—it is not a place of punishment.

Imagine it was your wedding day, but you were out playing in the mud with friends. You are unexpectedly told that everyone is waiting for you in the Church, and you are a mess! Would you expect to run to the altar, poorly dressed and covered in mud? No, you would beg that you could have some time to shower, get dressed, and make yourself presentable.

That is what purgatory is. It is a place of preparation when the wedding day catches us unaware. We are called to be holy and always vigilant, for "we know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13). However, God in his love allows us yet another opportunity of mercy before we can be with him in heaven. I don't want to go there, but I'm so glad it exists!

### Tension with Protestants

This doctrine of the Church has historically been a source of tension with our Protestant brothers and sisters for a number of reasons. One of Martin Luther's biggest complaints against the Catholic Church was the selling of indulgences, which promised a shortened time in purgatory for financial donations. He was correct—this was not a right thing to do, and many reformers within the Church also argued against this abuse.

However, Luther's response was to throw out the entire teaching of purgatory. In his canon of Scripture, he removed books that made reference to praying for the dead (1 and 2 Maccabees, to be specific). His theology of salvation was more about how we are clothed in Christ, not transformed into holiness. His famous image is that we are "dung covered in snow"—sinful on the inside, but clothed with the righteousness of Christ on the outside. If we are clothed and not transformed, then there is no need for a place like purgatory.

(Wondering about indulgences? Yes, we still believe in them, although they are no longer sold as they were in the Middle Ages. They are powerful opportunities to grow in holiness in this life so we need not be purified in the next. The best explanation can be found in the Catechism, paragraphs 1471-1479).

## Unity in Christ

There have been a number of times I've tried to explain the difference in theology between Catholics and Protestants, but that is always difficult to do because there are so many different Protestant denominations (the biggest one, ironically, is "non-denominational"). So, it is impossible to say that *all* Protestants believe in one thing or another. One of the reasons for the over 10 thousand denominations in the United States alone is because of their disagreements over theology.

However—and I can't stress this enough—even if I critique that theology I *never* mean to critique the holiness of life that so many disciples of Jesus Christ in different Christian churches are trying to live. We have more that unites us than divides us. We should be focusing on that, not our divisions.

When we face Jesus at the end of our lives, he won't ask us what we think about purgatory. He will ask us if we loved "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40). If we allow God to work in our lives, loving him and our neighbor with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, then we don't need to worry about being purified after we die, for we would have allowed God's grace to do that purification here on earth.

# Eyes on the Prize: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"Thank you for the gifts of faith and hope. Thank you for the promise of eternal life. We ask you to bless our discussion today about hope. We take a moment to give you all our anxieties and concerns and ask you to speak to us." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Please bless our time together and help us to grow closer to you today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we asked you to identify if there was someone with whom the Lord was asking you to share the faith. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## Resolution and Commitment (*five-10 minutes*)

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"This week hope was described as the 'why' behind our faith. Hope is the desire for 'the kingdom of Heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit' (Catechism 1817). We also read about heaven as the wedding feast, where we give ourselves fully to the Trinity. All of this may be new ideas for you in regard to heaven and hope. Yet in the end, it's good news."

## Closing Prayer (*three minutes*)

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## WEEK 30

### Grace for the Mission

#### Main Point

We participate in the mission of Jesus to be priests, prophets, and kings, and we are given the grace to do that in the sacraments.

#### Scripture to Memorize

"I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received."

– Ephesians 4:1

The grace that God gives us to be his disciples comes from the sacraments. The three Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—give us all the grace we need to live out our vocation (or calling) of holiness as single people in the world: "They ground the common vocation of all Christ's disciples, a vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world" (Catechism 1533). This is why those who become religious brothers or sisters don't receive a separate sacrament. They have all they need already! (The Sacrament of Holy Orders is only for deacons, priests, and bishops. More on that later.)

However, we are not perfect. Our bodies suffer from sickness and our souls suffer from sin, so we need more sacramental grace to be healthy. That comes through the two Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

#### Sacraments at Service of Communion

So far, we've covered five out of the seven sacraments. The remaining two sacraments are Matrimony and Holy Orders. They are known as "sacraments at the service of communion." What makes these two sacraments similar to each other and different from the other five is that they are "directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so" (Catechism 1534).

Though the Sacrament of Matrimony personally leads me to holiness, its real purpose is that I would be given grace to *lead my wife* into holiness. Though a man who is ordained a priest certainly grows in his faith by living out that vocation, the real purpose is to *lead others* to salvation.

The Sacraments of Initiation give us grace to share the Gospel with the world and to serve others in love. However, those who receive these Sacraments of Service take on a specific obligation for the salvation of others, and for that one needs a different kind of sacramental grace.

## Holy Orders

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his apostles to "go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). This responsibility was given specifically to the apostles and, through them, the Church. The sacramental grace that accompanies this responsibility is found in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Some call this priesthood, but that doesn't convey the fullness of the sacrament. There are three "orders" in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The first is the *diaconate*. Deacons can either be transitory (meaning that the person is preparing to a priest) or permanent (such as married men in the Latin rite who will not go any further). "Deacon" is another word for "servant." Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:28), and the diaconate is a sacramental sign of that mission.

The second order is the *presbyterate*, or priesthood. These are men who are celibate (though there are exceptions) and are "co-workers" with the bishop. A priest can celebrate five of the seven sacraments (all but Holy Orders and Confirmation, though he can do the latter when a bishop is unavailable, such as at the Easter Vigil).

The fullness of Holy Orders resides in the *episcopate*, or the bishops. They can celebrate all the sacraments and are in direct lineage with the apostles. It is their role to teach the faith, govern the Church, and lead their flock to holiness. This requires a great deal of delegation, which is why deacons and priests are so important to that mission, as well as the lay faithful.

There are not separate sacraments for the other titles that one who is ordained a bishop might have, such as "Archbishop," "Cardinal," or even "Pope." Men in those roles may have different responsibilities, but the same sacramental grace.

Though only a few men become deacons, priests, or bishops, everyone benefits from Holy Orders. The Church cannot exist without the graces that come through this important sacrament!

## Matrimony

The Sacrament of Matrimony, as revealed by Jesus Christ and taught in the Catholic faith, is different from the secular idea of marriage. In today's society, two people who have committed themselves to a long-term romantic relationship can be considered married, even if they don't intend to make a life-long commitment, or if they are of the same gender.

People can love each other deeply without receiving this sacrament. However, just as the Sacrament of the Eucharist transforms bread and wine into Jesus' Body and Blood, and the Sacrament of Baptism transforms water from something that cleanses the body to something that purifies the soul, so the Sacrament of Matrimony transforms human love to something supernatural: "It

gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church" (Catechism 1661).

In Christian matrimony, the husband and wife make a sacrificial offering of themselves to each other to create a "domestic church." That is so much more than just romantic love! Though one who has received Holy Orders should be there to bless the union, the man and woman confer the sacrament on each other. This is why marriage preparation is so important. They aren't just preparing to receive a sacrament; they are preparing to give one to their spouse.

### **Nature, Elevated by Grace**

Before the Word became flesh, people had gotten married. Jews broke bread together at the Passover. Priests served in the temple. St. John the Baptist and others before him baptized those who wished to repent. Sacrifices were offered to receive mercy from God. Physicians used oil to help heal the sick.

Jesus took all these natural things and changed them through his death and resurrection. Baptism is now rebirth into the family of God. The Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus. Priests and bishops act in the person of Christ. Those who are married become an image of the love within the Trinity!

The sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation, and the Anointing of the Sick can and should be received often. However, the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, and Holy Orders are sacraments that you receive only once (though one can receive Matrimony again if the spouse passes away). It is not uncommon to forget the reservoir of grace that is available to those who have received those "one-time" sacraments. We do not receive them over and over again because we do not need to. But we do need to call upon that grace so it can transform our lives and the lives of those around us!

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How are Matrimony and Holy Orders different from the other sacraments?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Define sacraments: see CCC 1131. What new insights did you gain about the sacraments?

## Scripture Reading

“On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign—at his Mother’s request—during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus’ presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence” (Catechism 1613): **John 2:1- 12.**

### Questions for Reflection

3. Why do you think Jesus chose the transformation of water into wine at a wedding celebration to be His first recorded miracle?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How is the transformation of water into wine a symbol of what Jesus does in the Sacrament of Matrimony (and the Eucharist)?

## Faith into Life

When Peter Parker was bit by a radioactive spider and became Spider-Man, he first used his powers to make money for himself. He even let a thief pass by without stopping him. However, when that same thief killed his uncle Ben, he realized that he wasn’t using his powers in the way he should. It took a tragedy, but he realized his calling to help others.

To use the language of the Church, Peter Parker found his *vocation*.

### Vocation to Holiness

The word “vocation” is based on the Latin word meaning, “to call.” Just as Jesus called Simon to be a “fisher of men,” Jesus calls us all to be his disciples. When Catholics hear the word “vocation,” they often think of priests or religious. The “vocations crisis,” for example, most often refers to that.

However, every one of us has a vocation and it is rooted in our baptism. Some might be single, others married, and others enter into religious life, but the foundation of it all is a vocation to holiness.

What that call looks like can be different for different people. It is not just about getting married or being a nun. It is about the job we do or the ministry where we volunteer. St. Paul wrote, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

The 10 Commandments tell us that there are only 10 ways to sin. The history of saints in the Church show us that there are thousands of ways to be holy. Though our vocation to holiness can manifest itself in different ways, it is through the same power: the Holy Spirit working in the sacraments. "Sacraments are 'powers that comes forth' from the Body of Christ" (Catechism 1117). They are our "super-powers" that help us to be like Jesus, who was Priest, Prophet, and King.

## **Priest**

St. Peter wrote, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). In Jesus, God fulfilled his desire to make a "kingdom of priests," about which he told Moses (Exodus 19:9).

In the Old Testament, a priest was one who was set apart from others and mediated between God and man. They were consecrated for a special mission. For example, only priests could serve in the Holy of Holies in the temple. However, when Christ died on the cross, Scripture said that the veil that separated the people of God from the Holy of Holies was torn in two (Matthew 27:51).

God did not remove the priesthood from his people, he expanded it to include all believers! All the baptized share in this "common priesthood," and "the ministerial priesthood (priests and bishops) is at service of the common priesthood" (Catechism 1547).

Our participation in the priesthood of Christ reminds us that we are "set apart" and sacred. How could you expect to receive something as sacred as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ unless you were a priest?

## **Prophet**

In the Old Testament, prophets were people who delivered the revelation of God. They would reveal things about God that were not known before through their words and actions.

Our faith is a supernatural gift; it is not something "of this world." Living out

our faith—in our words and actions—points others to Jesus Christ. All disciples of Jesus are prophets in that we become “Christ’s witness in the midst of this world” (Catechism 785).

## King

Since we are adopted by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, we are all royalty. However, unlike the kings and queens of this world, “Christ, King and Lord of the universe, made himself the servant of all” (Catechism 786).

We live out our Christian vocation of kingship by serving others, especially those who would need it the most and have nothing to offer in return: “For the Christian, ‘to reign is to serve him’” (Catechism 786).

## Grace for the Mission

In our common priesthood, we are consecrated as a sacred people set apart for God. As prophets, we use what we say and do to point to a supernatural reality and reveal God to those around us. As royalty in the image of Jesus, we serve those around us, especially those in most need.

The grace we receive from the sacraments roots us in this threefold mission of Jesus, not only to be *like* him but to *be* him to the world. I believe the reason many are unaware of the graces available to them in the sacraments is because they are also unaware of the mission given to us by Jesus to be priests, prophets, and kings. If we forget *why* we receive the sacraments, we are likely to stop receiving them, or at least not call upon the graces we have received from them.

God calls us to be holy and he equips us to be holy in the sacraments. One of the things that Peter Parker’s uncle Ben used to tell him was, “With great power comes great responsibility.” The sacraments are the “great power.” The threefold mission of Christ is the “great responsibility.” And Jesus gave these sacraments to the Church to fulfill the “Great Commission” to make disciples of all nations.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways is God calling you to live out your calling to be priest, prophet, and king?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What sacramental grace do you need to call upon (or receive) to answer that call?

## Daily Readings

**A royal priesthood:** 1 Peter 2:1-10

**Moses thinks he can't do it, God gives him the power:** Exodus 4:1-17

**Different gifts, same Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

**"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church":** Ephesians 5:21-33

**"Live in a manner worthy of the call":** Ephesians 4:1-16

### Question for Reflection

3. What spoke to your heart in this week's readings?

**ABOUT MATRIMONY:** I refer to the Sacrament of "Matrimony" to distinguish it from a secular understanding of "marriage," but I don't mean to imply that we can't use also the word "marriage" for the sacrament.

**ABOUT ANNULMENTS:** The Sacrament of Matrimony is a life-long commitment between a man and a woman, "until death do us part." An annulment is an investigation into a separated marriage that determines whether or not one or both spouses properly administered the sacrament to the other. This is not to say that the couple didn't love each other, nor does it seek to nullify the relationship they had.

The Church wants to be more than a building where two people get married. As the dispenser of sacramental grace, she desires to properly prepare those who wish to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony and, if the relationship falls apart, to see what happened. This can be an extremely painful time for the couple, and unfortunately the process of annulment can be seen as an added burden. However, the goal is to give those who might have not properly received the Sacrament of Matrimony the ability to receive that sacrament with someone else if they desire to do so.

*Please read and prepare the questions in the next Reviewing the Commitment section prior to the next Discipleship Quad gathering.*

## Reviewing the Commitment

*Please prepare the following questions prior to meeting with your Discipleship Quad next week.*

It's time again to review the Commitment in order to review what each person committed to and see how everyone is doing with the commitment process. As mentioned before, over time it is possible to become lax about the original commitments. Hopefully you found value in reviewing the Commitment back after Week 14, and you will probably find value in doing this again (this is the final time of reviewing the Commitment).

These questions below will help to lead the Discipleship Quad to refine any areas that need adapting and recommit to accomplishing the original goal of helping each other to grow as disciples. The questions will be discussed as a group next time you meet.

1. Review the Commitment that everyone signed and committed to at the beginning. On a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being highest, rate yourself on your accomplishment of each of the five elements in the Commitment. Share your rating with your Discipleship Quad and explain its meaning to each other.
  
2. As you reflect on the discipling process, what have been the benefits for your growth in Christ up to this point?
  
3. What have been the disappointments or the unfulfilled expectations? How might these be overcome?

4. What changes would you like to make in the Commitment, if any?

5. To what do you need to recommit yourself in order to be faithful to the covenant?

*The above is adapted from Greg Ogden's "Reviewing Your Covenant," in his book Discipleship Essentials.*

# Grace for the Mission: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"God, this week we reflect on our call to partake in your role as Priest, Prophet, and King. Thank you for entrusting this work to us, and we ask for the grace to fulfill it. We take a moment to give you all the things on our minds today and we ask you to help us enter into this time together." (*Take a quiet moment.*)

"Thank you for calling each of us here. Please bless our time today."

## Recap of the Week (*five minutes*)

Shorten the update this week to five minutes in order to accommodate discussing the recommitment to the Commitment. Discuss the following question during this shortened Recap of the Week:

- **Last week we discussed ways that you plan to cultivate the virtue of hope in your life. How did that go?**

## Reviewing the Commitment (*20 minutes*)

Go through each of the five questions from Reviewing the Commitment that everyone prepared this past week. As you discuss the questions, determine as a Quad if you'd like to make any changes to your commitment to each other. You may write in your changes on your Commitment or just verbally commit to the adaptations your Quad has decided to make.

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"This week we discussed how Matrimony and Holy Orders are known as 'sacraments at the service of communion.' Although some people in this Quad may not be married or have received Holy Orders, we all have experiences with others that have received these sacraments. As you reflect on the call to grow as a disciple and become a disciple-maker by helping others to grow as disciples, it is important to see how the grace of these sacraments helps all of us grow closer to Jesus."

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question:

*How has this lesson made you think differently about your vocation? If you are not married or haven't received Holy Orders, how does it make you think differently about how you are affected by these two sacraments? Is there anything in your life that you want to approach differently, now that you have reflected on this lesson?*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

# WEEK 31

## Christian Charity

### Main Point

We should love God above all, and love others for the love of God.

### Scripture to Memorize

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God." – 1 John 4:7

I love bacon. I know that sounds cliché, but it is true. I usually have scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast. Or, if I'm feeling fancy, pancakes and bacon. Sometimes I go to a bagel place that is near my house, and I might get a toasted bagel... with a side of bacon.

I like my hamburgers with nothing on them, except bacon. I don't need things like lettuce, ketchup, or cheese to get in the way of me tasting that glorious, crunchy meat. I usually ask my server for extra bacon, explaining that "bacon is awesome." They always agree.

I also love my wife. We've been married for over 20 years. She is my best friend and we've raised seven amazing kids together. Growing old with her has been one of the greatest joys in my life, and I can't wait to see what the future will bring.

I love my wife... and I love bacon. I think it is a huge fault of the English language that it would have me use the same word for both a food that I enjoy and a person to whom I've committed my entire life. This linguistic confusion doesn't help us when it comes to our faith, because we are supposed to "love God" and "love our neighbor." So... what kind of love are we talking about?

### Different Words for Love

Other languages don't have this problem. In Greek (the language in which the gospels were written), there are four different words that we often translate into "love." C.S. Lewis famously examined these words in his book *The Four Loves* (highly recommended). Here is a brief summary.

The first word for love is *storge*. This refers to something about which we are affectionate. Were I writing in the Greek, I would use this word when I speak of my love for bacon, Star Wars, the Pittsburgh Penguins, and playing role-playing games. It is most often directed to things or activities. This kind of love can become twisted when we put things before people. "Love, having become a god, becomes a demon," Lewis wrote. We can become obsessed or even addicted. The "love of money" is this kind of love.



## Scripture Reading

The “supper” about which the scriptures talk is the Passover meal, the “Last Supper” of Jesus and his apostles. This was one of the final moments Jesus would have with his disciples before he was crucified, and he needed to teach them an important lesson: **John 13:1-35**.

### Questions for Reflection

3. What Scripture verse stood out to you?
4. Christian love is willing the good of another. How is that different from the cultural definition of love? What is the greatest good you can will for another?

## Faith into Life

The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity. They are called “theological” because they are gifts that come from God and God alone (we will take a look at natural, or “cardinal,” virtues in a future lesson):

They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being (Catechism 1813).

If faith is *what* we do, and hope is *why* we do it, then charity is *how*.

### Nothing without Charity

In his first Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul dramatically expresses the importance of charity (translated here as “love,” which is *agape* in the

original language):

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Think about the ramifications of what he said. Faith without charity is nothing. Hope without charity is nothing. If you sacrifice your very body “so that I may boast,” it means nothing. Charity is the foundation of all virtues and is the very way we can come before the Father as his children. St. Basil beautifully wrote:

If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages... we resemble mercenaries. Finally if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands... we are in the position of children (as quoted in the Catechism, paragraph 1828).

God is not our master, of whom we should be afraid, nor our boss who we try to impress. The gift of the virtue of charity changes the way we relate to God and, in turn, the way we relate to others.

## The Opposite of Charity

People often think the opposite of love is hate, but this is because our language is deficient. True, the opposite of *storge* love would likely be hate. For example, I love bacon but I hate lima beans.

But hate is not the opposite of *agape*, or charity. As suggested in earlier lessons, envision these virtues as a mountaintop, from which there are two ways to fall. Faith has fear and doubt. Hope has presumption and despair.

Charity also has two opposites. The first is pride. This is the most common. If charity is about self- sacrifice, pride is about self-satisfaction. Our pride asks, “What is in it for me?”, the opposite of charity, which asks, “How can I serve others?” The second opposite is apathy, or indifference. We just simply don’t care about the needs of other people. We block them out of our minds, like you might block someone on social media—it is as if they no longer exist.

## A New Commandment

Jesus gave us the “Golden Rule” when he said, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). However, I think many people misread this as, “Treat people like you treat others.” No, it is to treat people *as you would like to be treated*. Personally, I would like to be treated very well! I would love it if everyone around me made great sacrifices to help me. Wouldn’t everyone? Well, that is the way we should behave.

The Book of Leviticus says, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Leviticus

19:18). In that context, a "neighbor" was a fellow Jew. Jesus elevated this command in two ways. First, he extended the term "neighbor" to include everyone—even our enemies! "For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32). Second, he said, "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34). After he said this, he carried a cross and died for us.

If you feel like you are incapable of this kind of love, you are right! This is why we need to ask the Holy Spirit for this grace. It is supernatural. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (*agape*) for one another" (John 13:35). People who love like this stand out in a selfish, uncaring world.

## Charity in Action

Because we use our bodies to express our emotions, all of these kinds of love have physical manifestations. I might wear a Star Wars t-shirt to express my *storge* love. I would invite many friends over to watch a Penguins game to express my *philia* love. Then I would kick them out to be alone with my wife to express *eros*.

I express *agape*, or charity, in the way I serve those around me, especially those in greatest need. This is why Jesus gave the "new" commandment after he washed the disciples' feet, saying, "I have given you a model to follow" (John 13:15). Early in these lessons, I challenged you with a question: If being Catholic was against the law, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Hopefully you do enough good deeds for a conviction.

But this understanding of the virtue of charity goes even deeper and searches not just our actions, but our motivations: "God does not see as a mortal, who sees the appearance. The Lord looks into the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). I could show up to Mass every Sunday out of a fear that if I don't, God will punish me. I could donate a large sum of money to a charitable cause, but mainly because I want something to be named after me. That is not charity. Truly charitable actions are not done out of fear or self-advancement, but out of a joy that comes from loving as God does. St. Paul wrote, "Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

## Come, Holy Spirit!

Just as we must ask the Spirit to increase our faith and hope, we must beg that he increase our charity as well. It is a gift that we cultivate through prayer and through service. It is the thing that makes us stand out in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ.

To conclude with the words of St. John, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

## Questions for Reflection

5. How does your pride, resentment, or indifference get in the way of charity?
6. When you do good works, are you motivated by charity? If not, what is your motivation?

## Daily Readings

**“God is love”:** 1 John 4:7-21

**A description of love:** 1

Corinthians 13:1-13 **The**

**greatest commandments:**

Mark 12:28-34 **Loving our**

**enemies:** Luke 6:27-36

**No greater love:** John 15:9-17

## Question for Reflection

7. How did these readings inspire you to express the virtue of charity more in your life?

# Christian Charity: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"Thank you for giving us the grace to love others as you loved us. We ask you to bless our discussion about charity today. We take a moment to give you all our anxieties and concerns and ask you to speak to us." (*Take a quiet moment.*)  
"Please bless our time together and help us to grow closer to you today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **Last week we reflected on Matrimony and Holy Orders being sacraments at the service of communion. We discussed how you may want to approach something in your life differently after reflecting on the lesson. How did that go?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## Resolution and Commitment (*five-10 minutes*)

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

"This week we discussed the theological virtue of charity. This is a love that is beyond our human abilities, which is why it is a grace. Often in reflecting on the call to love in this radical way, we can become overwhelmed and feel like we cannot do it. This is precisely the place where we must remember that God gives us the grace to love in this way. It is through having a receptive heart and mind that we are able to love with charity."

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question:

*What can you do this week to increase agape love (charity) in your life? (Remember that asking for it and receiving the grace to love is the first step.)*

### **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

## **WEEK 32**

### **Growing Deeper in Prayer**

#### **Main Point**

“Contemplative prayer, in my opinion, is nothing more than a close sharing between friends.”

– St. Teresa of Avila

#### **Scripture to Memorize**

“All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.” – 2 Corinthians 3:18

The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are gifts of grace that we need to love God with our whole minds, hearts, souls, and strength, and to love each other as he loved us. We manifest this love through prayer and service, though it would be incorrect to say that prayer is only “loving God” and service is only “loving our neighbor.”

The commands to love God and neighbor are inseparable. I love my neighbor by praying for her; I love God by serving the man who is in need. Living a life of prayer and service is like walking with two feet—one naturally leads to the other.

Let’s take a deeper look at how at how we might grow deeper in the life of prayer.

#### **Praying Always**

St. Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and St. Gregory of Nazianzus said, “We must remember God more often than we draw breath.” As disciples of Christ, we must always be mindful of the Spirit at work in our lives and be in constant conversation with him. I love this quote from St. John Chrysostom: “It is possible to offer fervent prayer even while walking in public or strolling alone, or seated in your shop... while buying or selling... or even while cooking.” This kind of prayer is essential, but not enough.

Just as in any relationship, we need to set aside time to be alone with our Beloved. These become the intimate moments upon which our relationship is built. Otherwise, God becomes like someone with whom we work, or a friend we occasionally see. Jesus wants to be so much closer to us than that!

The Catechism says that “we cannot pray ‘at all times’ if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it. These are the special times of Christian prayer, both in intensity and duration” (2697).

## **Faith + Hope + Love = Prayer**

When I'm not spending intimate time with Jesus, it isn't because I'm lacking in time. That might be my first excuse, but then I think of all the other things for which I seem to find time! No, it is often because I'm lacking in faith, hope, or love.

Do I doubt his power or am I afraid of what he might ask of me? That's a lack of faith. Do I assume that he doesn't care about me (despair) or presume that I don't need his help? That is a lack of hope.

I hate to admit this, but the virtue with which I struggle the most is the one that is the most important: love. Too often I make the prayer about me (pride)—the things I want and the things I am doing. That kind of prayer is never fruitful. As St. James warned, "You ask but you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3). In those moments, I'm reminded that I need to sit before the Lord without an agenda. I must be willing to "waste time" with the One who loves me.

Our prayer moves to a new level as we grow in faith, hope, and love, and one of the most important things we can ask for in prayer is an increase in those virtues! Those are the virtues that lead to our salvation. An active life of prayer here on earth is a sure sign that we are heading in the right direction for the next life, for as St. Alphonsus Ligouri wrote, "Those who pray are certainly saved; those who do not pray are certainly damned."

## **God Invites, We Respond**

St. John wrote, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We can only pray because Jesus is the one who starts the conversation, just as he did when he encountered the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4):

It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him (Catechism 2560).

We do not bother God with our prayers—this is what he wants! He wanted to speak with us so much that he became flesh to dwell among us. And so Jesus encourages us to pray with great confidence: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

At times I've read that verse and immediately thought about something for which I asked that I didn't get. Many times, that is because I was "asking wrongly." Jesus isn't encouraging us to ask, seek, and knock so we can get the things of this world. No, we seek a far greater prize: intimacy with the Father who made us, the Son who saved us, and the Spirit who breathes life within us. The most important prayer he can answer is our desire to be with him forever. That is what he wants, too!



## Faith into Life

The 17th century philosopher Descartes famously said, "I think therefore I am." This became one of the most significant ideas of what became known as the Enlightenment, a period of history that had great impact on Western culture. Because of Descartes and other philosophers from that time, we often see ourselves as thinkers and believe our brain is the center of who we are.

This has an unfortunate consequence in the way our society treats those whose intellects are not as developed as others', such as the unborn or the mentally disabled. If our humanity is based on our intelligence, those with less intelligence can be seen as less than human.

Our obsession with our intellect can also be a barrier towards deeper prayer.

### Praying from the Heart

Some view prayer as a purely psychological exercise of positive thinking. Others busy their prayer with lots of activity, treating it more like working out at a gym than going on a date with someone to whom you are attracted.

Deeper prayer requires that we pray "from our hearts." In fact, Scripture tells us to pray from our hearts over a thousand times! This isn't a reference to the organ that pumps blood through our veins. As stated in the Catechism:

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place 'to which I withdraw.' The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives (2563).

In this context, the "heart" represents the fullness of who we are, for "it is the whole man who prays" (Catechism 2562). The message is not, "Pray with your heart and not your mind." Instead, it is understanding that though our intellect is a part of our prayer, there is a deeper place where the Lord wants to take us that we can only experience through the power of the Holy Spirit. So how do we get there?

### Expressions of Prayer

The Catechism describes three different expressions of prayer, all of which are important in our spiritual lives. The first is "vocal prayer." When the apostles asked Jesus how to pray, he taught them a vocal prayer, the Our Father. Vocal prayer is the prayer of community—it is how we can pray together. However, it also can be done in private, for it includes the interior conversations when we speak to God.

Then there is the prayer of "meditation." Christian meditation is not like Eastern meditation, where the goal is to clear your mind of all thoughts. Christian meditation is focused on Jesus. Reading and reflecting on Scripture, holy icons,

or even experiencing the wonder of God in nature are all examples of meditative prayer. "Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ" (Catechism 2708). Praying the Rosary and meditating on its mysteries is a great example of both vocal and meditative prayer.

However, the goal of both vocal and meditative prayer is to lead us to what is known as "contemplative prayer." For some, that sounds lofty or mystical, but it is simpler than we think. In fact, "Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty" (Catechism 2713).

### **The Gaze of Faith**

St. John Vianney tells a story of a peasant who used to pray every day in his church. He sat in the front pew and looked intently at the tabernacle; it was clear that God was moving in his soul. So Vianney asked the man what he did when he prayed, to have that kind of experience with God. The man simply replied, "I look at him and he looks at me."

The Catechism refers to this story when it explains about contemplative prayer:

Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus... This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men (2715).

There used to be a veil between God and his people that only a priest could cross. By elevating us all to priests in our baptism, God allows us to look directly at him (as we do in Eucharistic Adoration), and we can see him look directly at us. That gaze of God transforms us into his image: "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### **Persevering in Prayer**

We are naturally "active" people and not "passive"; human "doers" rather than human "beings." It can be difficult for us to quiet ourselves and hear the "soft, whispering voice" that Elijah knew was God (1 Kings 19:12). The Spirit can lead us to this kind of intimate prayer, but we have to give him the time to make it occur.

Contemplative prayer does not just "happen." People who wish to be romantic with each other don't hope to bump into each other. They pull out their calendars and make time with each other on a regular basis. Prayer is a sacramental activity and time is what is transformed. We can't have the Eucharist unless we offer bread and wine. We can't have baptism if we don't

have water. We can't have a deep prayer life unless we offer our time.

At times, we will receive great spiritual consolations. We will feel loved and affirmed. Other times, there will be dryness and difficulty. Though we certainly favor one over the other, we need both to continue to grow in our faith, lest we only pray for a "spiritual high" and treat God like some kind of spiritual drug dealer.

Much of what we experience in prayer is out of our control, but the one thing we can control is the time we put into it. The Catechism says:

The choice of the time and duration of the prayer arises from a determined will, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter (2710).

## **Intimacy in Prayer**

St. Teresa of Avila wrote: "Contemplative prayer, in my opinion, is nothing more than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."

Think of a couple just beginning a romantic relationship; they are always chatting with each other. Now think of a couple after decades of a loving marriage; they can silently sit in each other's presence and communicate a love far deeper than words can say. God wants to lead all of us to that place of intimacy—what the Catechism describes as "a silent love" (2724).

I am sure that many of you have experienced the "holy silence" of contemplative prayer before, but you might not have known what it was called or how to experience that grace again. When we pray to God with our heart (our whole self) and offer him frequent and consistent time, he will bless us with this gift.

This expression of prayer is "the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved and who wants to respond to it by loving even more" (Catechism 2712). It is our birthright as sons and daughters of the Father.

### **Questions for Reflection**

5. What does it mean to "pray from your heart," instead of from your mind?
6. How have you experienced contemplative prayer in your life?

## Daily Readings

How do we enter into contemplative prayer? The first is that we set aside a consistent amount of time for the Lord to work in our hearts. Then, while at prayer, it is good to begin with vocal and meditative prayer. *Lectio divina*, which we've discussed before, is a great style of prayer that can open us up for deeper contemplation. Instead of longer readings, we have provided short, simple verses, upon which you can meditate. As you do, be sensitive to the "still, quiet voice" of God that invites you into a time of intimate silence.

- **"With age—old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you."** – Jeremiah 31:3
- **"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you."** – Isaiah 49:15-16
- **"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."** – John 15:13-15
- **"When I found him whom my soul loves, I held him and would not let him go."** – Song of Songs 3:4
- **"When Jesus returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, 'So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" – Matthew 26:40-41**

### Question for Reflection

7. How have these readings encouraged you to grow deeper in contemplative prayer?

## Supplemental Reading

I like to think of vocal and meditative prayer as knocking on the door and contemplative prayer as God opening the door and drawing us more deeply into his heart. If you still have questions, Catechism paragraphs 2697-2724 include a beautiful explanation of these forms of prayer. If you'd like further reading, St. Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* and a book from an unknown author, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, are considered classics and will provide an even greater understanding of how to grow deeper in prayer.

## Discipleship in Action: Contemplative Prayer

As this past week's lesson pointed out, contemplative prayer can be summed up by the man who responded to St. John Vianney's question: "I look at him and he looks at me." This sounds so simple and beautiful, yet many people may wonder how to actually enter into contemplative prayer. This Discipleship in Action is meant to give you an overview of some practical steps in getting started. Please reference the books suggested as supplemental reading at the end of this past week's lesson for a more in-depth understanding of contemplative prayer.

### Where?

Contemplative prayer can be done anywhere; this is the beauty of it. If you are someone that is easily distracted, perhaps a quiet and less distracting place would be best. But it can also be done in the midst of a busy place. The key is to be in a place where you will not be personally interrupted.

Sit comfortably. There is no need to kneel or be in an awkward, uncomfortable prayer position.

### When?

Many saints have shared the value of praying in the morning. This may work best for some people. The biggest challenge in praying contemplatively is making the time to do it. "One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter" (Catechism 2710).

Though the Catechism doesn't propose a certain length, it does quote Jesus asking his apostles, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?" (Matthew 26:40). Earlier, we challenged you to do a weekly holy hour, and this is a great time to engage in contemplative prayer (if you haven't been doing so already). However, you don't need to be in the presence of the Eucharist for contemplative prayer.

St. Francis de Sales said, "Every one of us needs half an hour of prayer a day, except when we are busy—then we need an hour." Is there another time in the week where you could schedule an additional hour of prayer? Or can you find more 30-minute times during the week? The Catechism says, "Contemplative prayer is also the pre-eminently intense time of prayer" (2714). There is no shortcut to this; you have to give it more time.

Every moment of prayer does not need to be contemplative, but you want to make sure your prayer life has these "contemplative moments," which will take a longer duration of time than vocal and meditative prayers.

## How?

St. Teresa of Avila wrote: "Contemplative prayer, in my opinion, is nothing more than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." The Catechism describes it as "a silent love" (2724). The goal is to focus on God and

the love between the two of you. To put it more simply, the goal is to make an act of your will to love God for the time in which you are praying. You can do this by reading a simple scripture over and over again. We suggest starting with the scriptures listed in the Daily Reading section of this past week's lesson. If the one-sentence scriptures are too much for you, then you can just focus on one word about God that brings you delight and focuses on his love for you and your love for him.

Remember the phrase, "I look at him and he looks at me." When you imagine yourself doing that with God, what word or thought comes to mind? Focus on that thought. Be with God and love him. Contemplate his goodness, love, mercy, forgiveness, beauty, and everything else that comes to mind about who God is. Allow him to captivate your thoughts.

## Distractions?

Of course you will be distracted! That is the battle of prayer. Go back to a vocal prayer (such as the Our Father) or a meditative prayer (such as *lectio divina*) to return your focus to God. If it helps, write down your distraction so you do not have to try and remember something that keeps coming to mind.

Remember, contemplative prayer isn't something *we* do, it is something *God* does. We just need to give him our time and the proper disposition of our hearts. Once you start to experience this, you will understand why many saints became hermits or cloistered so they could spend their whole time this way!

# Growing Deeper in Prayer: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

## Opening Prayer (*three minutes*)

"Thank you for giving us the gift of prayer. Although it is sometimes difficult, we are so grateful that you want us to communicate with you and develop a deep intimate relationship with you. We ask you to bless our discussion about prayer today. We take a moment to give you all our anxieties and concerns and ask you to speak to us." (*Take a quiet moment.*) "Please bless our time together and help us to grow closer to you today."

## Recap of the Week (*20-25 minutes*)

Each person shares a brief life update since the last gathering. This should be a practical, general update on life, as well as an update on the spiritual life journey. The goal is to give a comprehensive update by sharing for at least three minutes but no more than five minutes. Use the following questions to facilitate this time (Use these only as a guide; the intent is not to answer all these questions. The question in bold is specific to last week's resolution.):

- How have you been since our last gathering?
- How was your commitment to personal prayer time this week?
- What did you hear God saying to you or see God doing in your life this week?
- If it was a difficult week, what made it difficult?
- What are some blessings for which you are thankful this week?
- **How did you do with focusing on increasing charity in your life this past week?**

## Reflection and Discussion (*45-50 minutes*)

Review the questions from this week's lesson.

## **Resolution and Commitment** *(five-10 minutes)*

*Read the following reflection out loud:*

“Many weeks ago, back in Week 12, we discussed setting up a daily prayer plan. How is that going? The first step to deeper prayer is getting into a rhythm of prayer. So, if you are struggling to make time for daily prayer in any fashion, it may be challenging to go deeper in prayer (because we have to give him time to give us the gift of contemplative prayer). Do you need to recommit to daily prayer? How can those in your Discipleship Quad help to hold you accountable? With that said, if you have worked on developing a habit of making prayer a priority in your schedule, then going deeper in your prayer is a good next step.”

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question:

*As you look at your daily prayer life over the last month, how do you need to grow in deeper prayer (remembering that contemplative prayer is a gift accepted in humility and poverty)? What can you do to practically implement that growth, starting this week?*

## **Closing Prayer** *(three minutes)*

Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.