

**FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY OF STEUBENVILLE
DISCIPLESHIP**

QUAD

GUIDEBOOK

PART 4 • BY BOB RICE

**STEUBENVILLE
CONFERENCES**

FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY OF STEUBENVILLE

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 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 33

Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment 3

It was about 10 weeks ago that you completed the second Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment as a personal reflection. You were given a brief amount of time to discuss this with your Discipleship Quad the following week. This third Self-Assessment is the entire content for the week (rather than in addition to another lesson). Therefore, this week, the Discipleship Quad preparation is a bit different from previous weeks', as you will discuss the characteristics of a disciple for a third time and have an opportunity to evaluate where you are on the journey of discipleship at this point. Your goal this week is to read through the characteristics of a disciple, referencing your answers from Week 13 and Week 22 in order to see your growth. Consider how you have grown and what further commitments you want to make in the areas of these characteristics. Remember, these Self-Assessments are here to help you to identify how you can work toward 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 the Discipleship Quad program: 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/daughter of God
2. Has an active, daily prayer life
3. Regularly receives the sacraments
4. Is in fellowship with other disciples
5. Devotes his or her time to serving others
6. Shares the Gospel with those around him or her
7. Is obedient to what the Church teaches

Read the following descriptions of each characteristic and answer the questions.

Is rooted in the identity of being a son/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?

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?

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?

How has your experience of attending Mass changed or been transformed?

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?

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 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?

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)?

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 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?

Obedient to what the 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?

Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment

3: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for calling us to be your disciples. We give you our lives today, aware of the areas in which we are strong and also in which we need to grow. Open our minds and hearts so we can be transformed more deeply by your love. We take a moment to give you all our anxieties and fears and ask you to meet us where we are on the journey.” (Take a quiet moment.) “Thank you again 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 you identified how you would like to grow deeper in prayer, considering contemplative prayer. How did you do with practically implementing this growth?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

Before discussing each person’s answers that correspond to each characteristic of a disciple, give everyone a moment to share how they experienced doing the Self-Assessment for the third time.

- Did you find it easier or harder to reflect on this Self-Assessment than it was the previous two times you’ve done it? Why do think it was easier or harder for you?
- Overall, what kind of growth have you seen in yourself?
- What benefit do you see from taking the time to regularly consider these characteristics?
- When you consider starting a Discipleship Quad yourself after the completion of this one, how does that make you feel?

Timing Note: There is not enough time to go through each of the following questions one by one. Therefore, go through each characteristic of a disciple, and spend some time asking each person to share their answer to the question that is most meaningful to them.

1. Rooted in the identity of being a son/daughter of God

- 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

- How have you grown in your prayer life?
- What is your next step to grow in prayer?

3. Regularly receives the sacraments

- How have you grown in living a sacramental life?
- How are you doing with attending Sunday Mass?
- How has your experience of attending Mass changed or been transformed?
- 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

- How have you grown in experiencing Christian fellowship and community?
- Considering 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

- 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

- How have you grown in 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. Is obedient to what the Church teaches

- How have you grown in your commitment level to what the Church teaches?
- What is your next step to grow in obedience to Scripture and Church teaching?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

Read the following reflection out loud: "Again, we reflect on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians where he shared about a time he was struggling and the Lord said to him, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). It can be overwhelming to identify areas of our lives that need growth and hard to figure out where to start. No matter how long you've been a disciple of Jesus, there are always going to be areas where you can grow."

Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: Consider each of the "next steps" you identified while doing the Self-Assessment this week, as well as the growth you have desired from the previous two Self-Assessments. What overall area do you need to focus on? Do you see a pattern from your previous Self-Assessments that would point to a general area of weakness? Make a plan this week to take that next step and start to grow in that specific area of being a disciple.

Closing Prayer (three minutes) Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

WEEK 34
The Spiritual Battle
Main Point

We need to be aware of the spiritual battle around us.

Scripture to Memorize

“Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” – James 4:7-8

In the late '90s, Jim Carrey starred in a movie called *The Truman Show*. The premise was that a television network was allowed to adopt a baby that they named Truman. They created a reality TV show about his life, though Truman thought it was real. He had no idea that there were people behind the scenes who were writing scripts, building sets, and running cameras. He was also unaware that there were a number of people who were protesting the network because they felt Truman had a right to know what was going on. The movie is about Truman slowly realizing the truth of his situation and how he had to make a decision on what to do about it. In a similar way, our reality is not what it seems. In writing to the Church in Ephesus, St. Paul told them, “our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:12). That doesn’t mean that the natural world we live in is fake, like it was for Truman. However, it does mean that there is a lot more going on “behind the scenes” than we can see. Scripture reveals a difficult truth: we are in the middle of a spiritual war.

Know Your Enemies

You can’t win a battle without understanding your enemy. St. Ignatius of Loyola in his book, *The Spiritual Exercises*, defined the “enemy” as anything that pulls us away from God, which he summarized as the world, the flesh, and the devil. The first enemy we face is the “world.” The culture in which we live often makes us focus on ourselves. We “look out for number one.” We become obsessed with “worldly” things such as money or power. Jesus warned us, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Matthew 16:26). The second is what St. Ignatius called the “flesh.” St. Paul wrote, “The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). Neither Ignatius nor Paul believed that our bodies were evil. The use of this word referred to the weakness of the flesh (Romans 8:3) or the sinful desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Another word the Church uses for this is concupiscence. “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle” (Catechism 405). Our souls are weakened by the fall just like our bodies were. For just as our bodies were created for immortality and now experience suffering, sickness, and death, so also our souls are weakened and even “inclined to evil.”

The Devil

The third thing that St. Ignatius referred to as the “enemy” was the devil. Jesus said that the devil was a “murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Other titles for the devil are “the tempter” (Matthew 4:3) and the “accuser of brothers” (Revelation 12:10). Scripture and Tradition teach us that the devil was created as a good angel, but then sinned (2 Peter 2:4). He and some other angels who followed him (who are now known as demons) were cast out of heaven: Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it (Revelation 12:7-9).

Errors About the Devil

There are two errors that people often believe about the devil. The first is that he doesn’t exist and is just a biblical metaphor. This is (unfortunately) not true. The devil and demons are real. The other error people often believe is that the devil is as powerful as God. This is also completely false. The devil is a creature of God, not his equal. The scriptures show that he is perhaps equal to St. Michael the Archangel, but even St. Michael beat him in a fight. However, the devil is certainly smarter and stronger than us. Without help, the devil and demons would tear us apart. But we do have help! (More on that in the next section.) The Catechism says this about the devil: The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God’s reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries—of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature—to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but ‘we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.’ (395).

Questions for Reflection:

1. How aware are you of the spiritual battle in which you are fighting? How (or in what ways) do you see it in your life or the lives of those around you?
2. What did you learn about “the enemy” (world, flesh, or the devil) that you didn’t know before (or had forgotten about)? Which “enemy” do you feel like is your biggest struggle in your daily life?

Scripture Reading

The apostle John wrote, “The Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.” The beginning of the Gospel of Matthew describes a dramatic confrontation between Jesus and Satan: Matthew 4:1-11.

Questions for Reflection:

3. With what kind of things did the devil tempt Jesus?
4. What did Jesus's responses teach you about how to respond to temptations from the devil?

Faith into Life

Learning about the devil and demons can be a pretty scary thing! Sometimes we can imagine ourselves in the scene of a horror movie, running through a dark forest with demons right behind. Though the devil might want you to think that way (remember, he is the lord of lies), the truth is that we are never alone in the spiritual battle. We are a part of the army of God, which includes the angels and the saints—an overwhelming fighting force that is far stronger than the power of death and hell. If you ever feel isolated and alone, spiritual reinforcements are just one prayer away.

The Angels

What comes to mind when you think of angels? For many, it is the famous painting by the renaissance artist Raphael: two chubby babies with wings. This is not what angels are. Scripture describes them as helpers, messengers, and warriors. The Catechism says, “The whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels” (334). They are seen throughout Scripture:

[T]hey closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples. Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself (Catechism 332).

The word “angel” comes from the Greek and means “messenger.” Angels are spiritual, non-corporeal beings (meaning they don't have physical bodies). “Spirit” is what they are; “angel” is what they do (Catechism 329). “As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness” (Catechism 330). As much as I like the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, it isn't theologically accurate. We don't become angels when we die! We don't become angels, just like angels don't become human. The angels love God... and they love us! From the moment we are born to the moment we die, we are under their watchful care and protection. We even have our own “guardian angel” (Catechism 336)! So whenever you pray, praise, or petition, remember the angels are doing it with you. St. Bernard wrote:

Angels are here; they are at your side, they are with you, present on your behalf. They are here to protect and to serve you... Let us be devoted and grateful to such great protectors; let us return their love and honor them as much as we can and should. Yet

all our love and honor must go to (God), for it is from him that they receive all that makes them worthy of our love and respect (Office of Readings, October 2).

The Communion of Saints

When we say the Creed, we say, “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the communion of saints...” The Catechism notes that it is not an accident that the saints are mentioned right after the Church, for, “What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?” (946). A saint is defined as a “holy one” who lives his or her life in union with God. There are “holy ones” in heaven, in purgatory, and on earth. These three states are also known as the Church triumphant, suffering, and militant. The “triumphant” are those who have fought the battle, been purified by grace, and are now in the presence of God, interceding for us. On his deathbed, St. Dominic (founder of the Dominicans) told his followers, “Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life.” St. Thérèse of Lisieux said something similar: “I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth.” Those holy men and women who have gone before us in faith intercede for us now, so that we can end up where they are! The Church “suffering” are the holy souls in purgatory. Remember, purgatory is not an “in between” place between heaven and hell. The souls in purgatory loved God in this life and are in need of further purification before entering heaven: “Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective” (Catechism 958). Finally, there is the Church “militant,” those who are fighting the battle of faith on earth. That is us! Both St. Paul and St. John referred to the people they were writing to as “saints,” even though they had not yet attained the glory of heaven. “The communion of saints is the Church” (Catechism 946). We can ask the intercession of the saints in heaven, purgatory, and on earth to help us fight the spiritual battle. The first two can be done through prayer, and the third can be done in many different ways, like an in-person conversation or a phone call. When I am struggling with the Enemy, I find texting a fellow saint a source of great comfort and grace.

Victory in Christ

The Letter to Hebrews said the world was not worthy of the saints (Hebrews 11:38). The Letter to the Galatians said that those who live by the Spirit won’t end up gratifying the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). And the book of Revelation tells us that St. Michael and the angels have defeated Satan and the demons. With the Holy Spirit, the angels, and the saints on our side we need not fear the world, the flesh, or even the devil. “Do not fear!... The Lord will fight for you” (Exodus 14:13-14). Though we fight worldly battles on our feet, we fight spiritual battles on our knees. Jesus has already won the victory! It’s like when a sports team blows out their opposition so much that they let their third string players on the field so they can share in the victory. The game isn’t over, but the outcome is clear.

As St. James wrote, “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8). We don’t make this journey on our own, but we are surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) who guide us, comfort us, fight with us, and intercede for us every step of the way. All the angels and saints... pray for us!

Questions for Reflection:

1. What did you learn about the angels and saints that you didn't know before?
2. How does this understanding about angels and saints help you in the spiritual battle?

Daily Readings

The importance of being aware: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-22

Jesus casts out a bunch of demons: Mark 5:1-20

The followers of Jesus given power over demons: Luke 10:17-20.

The Spirit over the flesh: Galatians 5:16-25

The armor of God: Ephesians 6:10-17

Question for Reflection:

3. How have these scriptures given you a better understanding of the spiritual battle?

Going Deeper: Questions about the Devil

Here are some common questions people have about the devil. You can also read more in the Catechism, 391-395.

Can the Devil Possess Me?

As a person falls deeper into sin, he or she falls deeper into the power of the devil. Those who repeatedly and seriously sin give more and more authority to Satan. At some point, one can totally give themselves over to Satan and can become “possessed.” This can happen by either deliberately allowing the devil into one’s soul, or by deliberately persisting in seriously evil actions. The gospels tell many stories of people who were possessed by demons, some who were even possessed by many demons (Mark 5:9 and Luke 8:2). However, those same Gospel stories show how with just a command from Jesus, those people were set free. The Church trains certain priests, known as exorcists, with special prayers to free people from demonic possession. They also work with a team of people, which include psychologists, to try to ascertain whether or not the person’s problem is something spiritual (such as possession) or something mental (such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, etc.) Actual possessions, though real, are rare.

Can the Devil be Saved?

There is no hope for salvation for the devil or demons, for though they were in the presence of God they still sinned against him. As St. John Damascene said, “There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death” (Catechism 393).

Can the Devil Read My Mind?

No. God is omniscient (all-knowing), but the devil, though far more intelligent than we are, is not.

Then Why Does It Seem Like He Can?

When my four-year-old asks for a cookie and storms away in anger when I tell him he can’t have one, I don’t have to be a mind-reader to know that he will likely head for the cookie jar. Remember that Jesus compared us to sheep; this was not a compliment. Let’s face it, we are pretty predictable. The devil might “figure out” what we are thinking, and then try to make us believe he can read our minds (remember, Jesus said he is the “father of lies”), but only the Spirit knows our thoughts.

What About Ghosts? Is There Such a Thing as Ghosts?

If by “ghosts” you mean dead people haunting the world, then no. There are demons, but not ghosts. But I Saw a Video on the Internet... Please stop. Again, the devil is known as the “father of lies.” Demons will fake being “ghosts” to lure people away from God. The same is true for things like fortune telling. When someone goes to a fortune teller, they might be told something will happen. Then the devil makes it happen, which leads the person to think that fortune tellers are right, thereby putting their trust in that instead of the providence of God. In the spiritual realm, things are either of God, or they are of the devil. There are no “neutral”

spirits. If you are trying to discern which is which, Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:16). If it doesn’t lead you to God, it isn’t from God, which means it is a lie.

Can Things Be Cursed?

Yes. Just as objects can be blessed, objects can also be cursed. If you think something is cursed, throw some holy water on it. Boom! Curse lifted. Blessings always beat curses. Now That I’m Trying to Be Holy, Will I Be under More Spiritual Attack? Just as God can’t love you more, the devil can’t hate you more. Since he can’t destroy God, he tries to destroy his children—those who are made in his image. You aren’t more “attacked” when you attempt to be holy, you just become more aware of it. For example, a man who does not take his faith seriously gets a promotion that gives him more money and power at his job, but also requires him to spend far more time at work, thereby neglecting his family and faith. This is an attack of the devil, and a common one at that. But the man has no idea. He doesn’t realize that he is “gaining the world, but losing his soul.” The devil is happy to give someone moments of happiness in this life if it means they will have none of it in the next. Another example: A person who is Christian is about to go on a retreat and their car breaks down, their bank account gets hacked, and they have a fight with their spouse, all within the same week. However, he or she recognizes what is happening and offers these sufferings to God. Is the Christian “more attacked” than the work-obsessed person who just got a promotion, but now will spend less time with their family? No. It is just a different kind of attack. We are always in the middle of a spiritual battle, and as baptized Christians we are always protected by the angels, the saints, and the Holy Spirit.

Why Does God Allow the Devil to Exist?

This is a “great mystery” (Catechism 395). Without trying to fully explain it, I believe there are two things to consider. First, not everything is from the devil. The devil might want you to think that way, because that makes him appear more powerful. Sickness happens, accidents happen. Remember there is also “the world” and “the flesh” that lead us away from God. Bad things that happen are not always demonic. Second, instead of asking, “Why does God let the devil exist?”, I’d like to propose a different question: “Why do we let the devil exist?” The devil did not force Adam and Eve to sin, nor does he have the power to make us sin. Humanity’s sinfulness keeps the devil and demons very active in this life. What Should I Do If I Feel That the Devil Has Power over Something in My Life? Renounce him! This is what we do in our baptismal promises: “I renounce Satan, all his lies, all his empty promises.” You are the best person to renounce the lies of the devil—nobody can do that for you. Invoke the Trinity! For example, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I renounce the lie of the devil that I am not lovable.” Through the love of the Father, the blood of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit given to you in your Baptism, you can tell the devil to go to hell. It is good to recall the words of St. James: “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8). Believe in that promise. The devil isn’t afraid of you, but he trembles at Christ in you. Don’t worry about fighting the devil; just focus on drawing near to God. He will take care of the rest.

What is the Best Prayer Against the Devil?

The Rosary. Our Blessed Mother is the Queen of all Saints and Our Lady of the Angels. Her “yes” overcame Eve’s “no” and undid all that the devil tried to do. Her intercession is powerful, as are objects of devotion to her, such as a Miraculous Medal or the Scapular. Scripture tells us that St. Michael is the one who defeated the devil and asking for his intercession is another great weapon in the spiritual battle. If you don’t already, pray this every day:

St. Michael, the archangel, defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray.
And do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, By the power of God
Cast into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits,
Who prowl around the world seeking the ruin of souls, Amen.
What Else Can I Use?

Holy water is powerful. That is the same water by which you were baptized and renounced the devil in the first place. Use it to bless yourself, your house, sacred objects, etc. Finally, check out the St. Benedict medal. You can find out more about it online, and it should be available at any Catholic bookstore.

One Last Piece of Advice...

The devil would rather you think that he and the demons don’t exist. That way he can work in the background and really mess up your life. However, when you realize he exists, he pushes you the other way and makes you afraid that he is just like the all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing God, which he most certainly is not. If this is the first time you’ve thought about the devil, he is likely trying to freak you out. And then, a few days later, will have you think, “Nah, that’s just a bunch of hooey.” Perhaps he won’t use the word “hooey,” but you get the idea. Be aware of the devil, but don’t worry about the devil. Think of your guardian angel. Think of the saints who intercede for you, be it St. Ignatius or someone in your family. Most importantly, “Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

The Spiritual Battle: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for helping us to be aware of the spiritual battle going on around us. Help us today as we discuss the enemy and protect our hearts and minds in your truth. We take a moment to give you all the things going on in our lives 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 the characteristics of a disciple and making a plan for growth. How was the experience of going through this process for a third time?
- How did you do with creating a plan to grow in the characteristics of a disciple?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. How aware are you of the spiritual battle in which you are fighting? How (or in what ways) do you see it in your life or the lives of those around you?
2. What did you learn about “the enemy” (world, flesh, or the devil) that you didn’t know before (or had forgotten about)? Which “enemy” do you feel like is your biggest struggle in your daily life?
3. With what kind of things did the devil tempt Jesus?
4. What did Jesus’s responses teach you about how to respond to temptations from the devil?
5. What did you learn about the angels and saints that you didn’t know before?
6. How does this understanding about angels and saints help you in the spiritual battle?
7. How have these scriptures given you a better understanding of the spiritual battle?

Resolution and Commitment (5-10 minutes)

Read the following reflection out loud:

“This week’s Scripture to Memorize was, ‘Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you’ (James 4:7-8). It is important to remind all of us that the devil and all

involved in the spiritual battle are not something to fear like the horror and zombie apocalypse type movies may tempt us to do. God is stronger, bigger, and have defeated evil. The battle has been won. We just have to unite our efforts with his so that we are on the winning team.”

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 in which you want to grow or do differently based on this knowledge? This could be focusing more on the angels and saints, or it could be spending time thinking about the ways in which you are tempted in the spiritual battle and how you want to work against those temptations. Write down what you would like to focus on and how you will practically remember to do it this week.

Closing Prayer (three minutes)

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

WEEK 35
Receiving Mercy, Sharing Mercy
Main Point

God's mercy should not only be freely received, but freely given. Jesus gives us the grace to do that.

Scripture to Memorize

"As the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do." – Colossians 3:13

Peter and Judas had a few things in common. They were both called to be apostles. They both betrayed Jesus. Also, they both realized their sin. Peter "began to weep bitterly" (Matthew 26:75) when he realized he had denied Jesus, and Judas tried to return the money he was given, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). And yet one is considered to be one of the most important saints in the life of the Church, and the other recognized as one of the greatest "sinners" in human history. The difference between a sinner and a saint isn't in whether or not we sin, for we all do. The difference is how we receive and share God's mercy.

The Natural Way: Make Amends

Though they had both sinned and had recognized their sin, how they repented was very different. This is an important lesson for us to learn. Judas was given 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus. When he realized that what he did was wrong, he went back to the Pharisees and tried to return the money. This is a natural and proper response for when we sin—we try to "undo" what we had done. When we can't undo it, we try to make amends. For example, if I get in a car accident and I am at fault, I'll pay for whatever damages I caused. Perhaps I even pay more than that to compensate any "pain and suffering." And though I would probably say I was sorry and hope they might forgive me, the situation would not be reconciled by mercy, but by restitution. But what happens when the harm we have caused can't be solved by our insurance company writing a check? What happens when it is too late to change our behavior, for the damage has already been done? What happens when there is nothing we can do to fix the problem we have caused? In the "natural" order, we fall into despair. This is what Judas did. When he realized that couldn't make amends for what he did, he hanged himself.

The Supernatural Way: Mercy

After Peter realized his sin, what did he do? Unlike Judas who committed suicide, the next time we see Peter is with the other apostles, doing what Jesus wanted him to do: "I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). The final chapter of John's gospel makes it clear that, even though he had denied Jesus, Jesus did not revoke his call for him to be a leader (John 21). How did Peter know to not despair? He knew that Jesus was more than just a great prophet. When Jesus asked the apostles, "Who do you say that I am?", it was Peter who replied, "You are the

Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Because he knew this, Peter was able to trust in God’s mercy. He did not focus on what he had done; he focused on who he loved, even though he realized he did not love Jesus as he should have. Though we don’t know what Judas thought about Jesus (all we know is that “he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions”—John 12:6), it seems reasonable to suggest that if he had known who Jesus really was, he might have behaved differently. Judas looked at what he had done and assumed that, since he couldn’t make reparation for what he did, his only option was his own death. Pope Benedict XVI said:

After his fall, Peter repented and found pardon and grace. Judas also repented, but his repentance degenerated into desperation and thus became self-destructive. For us it is an invitation to always remember what St. Benedict says... ‘Never despair of God’s mercy.’

Guilt and Shame

We should all feel sorrow when we sin. However, St. Paul tells us there are two kinds of sorrow: “For godly sorrow produces a salutary repentance without regret, but worldly sorrow produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). The first comes from God and leads us to accept his mercy, the other comes from the world and can lead to our death. “Godly sorrow” can be compared to guilt. Guilt is when we recognize, “I did something wrong.” God uses guilt to lead us to repent and accept his mercy. “Worldly sorrow” can be compared to shame. Shame says, “There is something wrong with me.” This is what happened in the Garden when Adam and Eve, who before the Fall were “naked, yet they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25), and after the Fall were grabbing leaves to cover themselves. God never makes us feel shame—that comes from the Enemy (world, flesh, and devil). If we have the attitude that there is something wrong with us, as opposed to us doing something wrong, we can fall into despair. If we think we need to make amends, as opposed to accepting mercy, we quickly realize that we can never pay the debt, so we either ignore it or obsess about it.

Repentance without Regret

God does not want us to beat ourselves over the head about our sins. This is a tactic of the Enemy. God’s desire is “repentance without regret.” One of the beautiful gifts of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to hear the words of Jesus, “I absolve you of all your sins,” and know that “if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:32). There is a difference between putting our hope in God’s mercy or in our ability to fix our mistakes. There is a difference between acting out of godly sorrow or worldly shame. There is a difference between knowing we are loved because of who we are or judging our value (or lack thereof) based on what we do. What is that difference? It is the difference between a sinner and a saint.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the comparison between St. Peter and Judas?

1. Do you usually experience “repentance without regret” or “worldly sorrow” (shame)? How has this reading helped you distinguish between the two?

Scripture Reading

I'd like to give you two readings for your prayerful reflection. The first is a story of David, whom Scripture refers to as "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22). This is the same David who beat Goliath with a sling and became king of Israel. He is one of the preeminent figures in the Old Testament and is known for his incredible faith. However, he was not perfect. At a time when he should have been at war, he stayed home and... 2 Samuel 11:1-12:7. After a story like that, you might wonder what made David so special. Yes, he sinned greatly, but he also knew how to trust in God's mercy. After this happened, he wrote a psalm which is one of the most beautiful prayers of repentance in all of the scriptures: Psalm 51.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What did David's story teach you about the nature of sin?
2. What did David's psalm teach you about how to seek God's mercy?

Faith into Life

Trying to earn mercy would be like trying to purchase poverty. It simply can't be done! The Church talks about things we need to do to "merit" our salvation, such as spending time in prayer, serving those in need, and sharing the Gospel with others (we have covered many of these things in our lessons). Acts of penance for our sins also fall into this category. However, "merit" should never be confused with "earning": "With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable inequality, for we have received everything from him" (Catechism 2007). Any meritorious actions we have are a response to God's initiative: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The lives of the saints attest to this truth. St. Francis of Assisi gave away everything he owned to live in extreme poverty. He tirelessly preached the Gospel by his words and actions. He did rigorous acts of penance and frequently fasted. He began a religious order that, even in his lifetime, showed fruits of transforming the Church (today, no religious order has as many saints as the Franciscans). Did he think, after doing all that, that he "earned" his sainthood? No. At the end of his life, he told the other friars, "Let us begin again, brothers, for up until now, we have done little or nothing."

Accepting Mercy

One of the biggest obstacles in receiving mercy is rejecting mercy. Sometimes we are not even aware when we do. The world, flesh, and the devil all try to use "false reason" to keep us from the mercy of God. Thoughts such as, "If I try harder, God will love me more," "It's no use; I will never be holy," or, "God must be sick of me confessing the same thing," come when we forget that God is not like us: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). At St. Paul wrote, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). Imagine if the prodigal son told the father, "No! Didn't you hear me? I don't deserve to be called your son. Just give me a job; that is all I want." Sadly, I feel like I've done that to God many times without being conscious of it. When I obsess about my own sinfulness

or motivate my actions out of guilt instead of love, those are all signs that I'm not humbly receiving the gift of mercy he wants to freely give because he loves me so much.

Sharing Mercy

If we don't fully receive God's mercy, then we are unable to fully share it with others. If we think we are only partially forgiven, then we will only partially forgive. Think of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He stood outside and would not go and join in the party because he would not forgive his brother as his father did. Not forgiving others is another obstacle to receiving God's mercy. Jesus made it clear that if we hope to receive mercy, we must be merciful with others. One of the petitions of the Our Father prayer is, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (I love what the Catechism says about this: "This petition is astonishing" —2838.) After teaching that prayer, Jesus gave an added emphasis: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15). How often should we be merciful? Always. Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4). This goes against "worldly" wisdom that says you need to get payback or treat someone who wrongs you poorly. In fact, Scripture says the opposite: Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' Rather, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good (Romans 12:19-21). The command to forgive others isn't a punishment; it is freedom. It is a participation in the very heart of God. We should work for justice in this world, but we should know that the only real justice happens in the next. Let God take care of that.

Choosing Mercy

Showing mercy is a choice, not an emotional response. You can forgive someone while still being angry with them. If you think about it, if you aren't angry or hurt in some way, then there really isn't anything to forgive, is there? In an earlier lesson we examined how agape love is different from an emotional response of being attracted to something or someone. In a similar way, "mercy" is also misunderstood. It isn't about not caring or not feeling hurt, nor is it about acting as if nothing bad happened. Pretending that everything is all right when it isn't actually prevents mercy from being shared and can cause long-term resentment. Forgiveness isn't what happens after you are healed from being hurt; forgiveness is the action that starts the healing. It means that we seek no revenge. It means that we don't change who we are because of who they are, even if they show no remorse for what they did. We continue to treat that person with dignity and even love (Jesus told us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" —Matthew 5:44). We can't control others; we can only control ourselves... and we're not even very good at that!

Increase Our Faith!

Is this difficult? Absolutely. It is no surprise that after Jesus told the apostles to always forgive, the next thing they asked was, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). They knew there was no way they could do this on their own. Jesus knows how hard it is to forgive. Creation was easy, in comparison—God just had to speak a few words. But forgiveness? He had to become flesh, live among us for 33 years, and brutally die on a cross. With agonizing breath, he spoke the words, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Through his cross and resurrection, Jesus gives us the grace and freedom to forgive, if not from our head then from our heart: “It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession” (Catechism 2843). It is part of our human experience that we have all been hurt and have hurt others. God’s grace can heal us of these wounds, whether they be things we have done or things that were done to us. As sons and daughters of a God who is love, we are transformed into his image by receiving and sharing his mercy.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What spoke to your heart in the above reading?
2. What do you find hard to forgive? How did the reflection give you a new perspective on that?

Daily Readings

Saved by grace: Ephesians 2:1-10

“As the Lord has forgiven you, so must also you do”: Colossians 3:12-17

The Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6:9-15

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant: Matthew 18:21-35

Mercy from the cross: Luke 23:33-42

Question for Reflection:

3. How have these scriptures inspired you to more fully receive or share God’s mercy? For more on this, read the Catechism 2838-2845.

Frequently Asked Question: Is Judas in hell?

Many artists and writers at different times in the life of the Church have portrayed Judas in hell. He may well be, but that is not a formal teaching of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI said, “Even though he went to hang himself, it is not up to us to judge his gesture, substituting ourselves for the infinitely merciful and just God.” Though the Church tells us who is in heaven by canonizing saints, it does not have a “list of the damned.” We know there are people in hell, as Scripture reveals. But we do not know who is suffering eternal damnation. Our God “wills that everyone be saved and ... come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). That’s what we focus on. We don’t know who is in hell because the Church isn’t about hell. It is about heaven!

Receiving Mercy, Sharing Mercy: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for teaching us about the power and freedom that comes from forgiveness and receiving your mercy. We ask you to bless our discussion 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 discussed one way in which you want to grow or do differently based on the lesson about the spiritual battle. How did that go?**

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. What stood out to you in the comparison between St. Peter and Judas?
2. Do you usually experience “repentance without regret” or “worldly sorrow” (shame)? How has this reading helped you distinguish between the two?
3. What did David’s story teach you about the nature of sin?
4. What did David’s psalm teach you about how to seek God’s mercy?
5. What spoke to your heart in the above reading?
6. What do you find hard to forgive? How did the reflection give you a new perspective on that?
7. How have these scriptures inspired you to more fully receive or share God’s mercy?

Resolution and Commitment (5-10 minutes) Read the following reflection out loud:

“This week there was a lot of content that could be challenging to apply to our own lives. Shame (as opposed to guilt), lack of forgiveness of others, and a lack of receiving God’s mercy (forgiving ourselves) can all be big obstacles to living a life of peace and freedom in Christ. Some of the things that may come up in our hearts and minds this week may be tough to ponder and consider changing. We need to take time to be patient with ourselves and follow God’s lead in guiding us to peace and forgiveness in any areas that have been brought to our attention.” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: This week we talked about the importance of receiving mercy and sharing mercy. In what areas of your life (past experiences/sin) do you need to focus on receiving God’s mercy more? In what ways do you need to share God’s mercy by forgiving someone for past hurts or sins they committed against you? Be specific and honest with yourself. Forgiveness is a powerful action that gives freedom to the person who forgives!

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 last rotation of facilitation. Please ensure that the last person who has not yet facilitated the Quad gatherings is aware that they will be facilitating the rest of the 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. 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 last Rotation of Facilitation, so therefore, at this point, 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 36
Full, Conscious, and Active Participation
Main Point

The more you know about the Mass, the more you can enter into it.

Scripture to Memorize

“Therefore, we who are receiving the unshakable kingdom should have gratitude, with which we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe.” – Hebrews 12:28

Have you ever tried watching a game, but you had no idea what was going on? One time I was at a pub in England and there was a cricket game on the TV. I didn't know anything about cricket. To me, it looked kind of like baseball. Everyone else was very excited about it. I think at some point someone yelled, “A sticky wicket!” and the bar erupted in cheers. I finished my meal and left before the game was over (which, I later learned, was hours later!). How was it that I was bored and left early while a room full of people were screaming in excitement and glued to the TV? Simple. They knew what was going on and I didn't.

Understanding the Liturgy

I think that is the same reason why many people are disengaged when it comes to Mass. They not only don't understand “the rules of the game,” but they don't even realize that they aren't spectators, but a part of the team! The Church desires everyone to have “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (Catechism 1141). The more we understand what the liturgy is about, the more we can participate. St. Jean Vianney wrote, “If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy.” As mentioned in an earlier lesson, the liturgy is a prayer to the Father from the Son, in which we participate through the Holy Spirit. Because “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26), the liturgy allows us to enter into Christ's life, Christ's prayer, and Christ's sacrifice. The ideal setting for Mass is in a church (there can be some exceptions) because a church is consecrated to the worship of God, just as we are. As we cross through the threshold into the church there is a font of holy water where we bless ourselves by making the sign of the cross. This is the same holy water through which we were baptized and is a reminder of our call to be a priest, prophet, and king.

The Liturgy of the Word

Just as Jesus revealed the heart of the Trinity in what he said and did, the Mass has two parts to it: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We will focus on the Word in this section and Eucharist at the end of this lesson. Mass begins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to “call to mind our sins and ask for God's forgiveness.” It is important that our attitude toward God is that of humility. It is only through his mercy that we can be there at all. On most Sundays, we sing the Gloria. This is a song of praise based on what the angels sang at the birth of Jesus. Here we are entering into one of the

great mysteries of our faith, the Incarnation, when “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The Readings

We then attentively listen to that living Word. We hear from the Old Testament, we respond with a psalm, and then hear something from the New Testament (on weekdays, there is not a reading after the psalm). Even if the readings aren’t directly about Jesus, in a mystical way they are all about Jesus. As St. Melito of Sardis wrote:

[Jesus] is the Passover that is our salvation. It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Issac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonored in the prophets. Then we sing the highest word for praise in Hebrew, Alleluia (except in Lent), and we stand to hear a reading from one of the gospels. The gospels are “preeminent” in all of Scripture “because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior” (Catechism 125). St. Therese of Lisieux wrote: But above all it’s the gospels that occupy my mind when I’m at prayer; my poor soul has so many needs, and yet this is the one thing needful. I’m always finding fresh lights there, hidden and enthralling meanings.

Being Attentive

The readings for the Sunday liturgy are chosen so they would complement each other. We participate in these readings by giving the appropriate responses (whether that be the psalm response, saying, “Thanks be to God,” the Alleluia, etc.) and by being attentive. Do you remember the first reading by the time you hear the Gospel? Do you remember the Gospel by the time you receive the Eucharist? Do you understand how these readings fit together and what the Mass is trying to say, or do you hope the homilist will explain it for you? These are questions with which I challenge myself when I go to Mass. Though the homily should provide a deeper insight on the readings and perhaps even give a quick recap, it won’t make sense unless we are prayerfully listening to the Word of God as expressed in Sacred Scripture. A beautiful way to prepare for Mass is to read the scriptures ahead of time.

“I Believe”

How do we respond to the Word we just heard? On Sundays (or feast days during the week) we stand and proclaim the Creed, which comes from the Latin word *credo*, or, “I believe.” This is more than just a statement of beliefs. The Church has stood for 2,000 years on these proclamations of truth. Many saints have died defending this sacred “deposit of faith” (1 Timothy 6:20). I know many faithful Catholics who are unable to say the creed without being surrounded by a group who says it with them (can you do it?). Like everything about the liturgy, if we don’t understand what we are saying or doing, we are likely to have our minds wander and miss an opportunity for grace. St. John wrote, “And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). So we follow our confident proclamation of what we believe with petitions for our community. This concludes the portion of the Mass known as the Liturgy of the Word, and we move into the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Catechism states that “the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist together form one single act of worship; the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and of the Body of the Lord” (1346).

Questions for Reflection:

1. How attentive are you at Mass? What did you read that will help you be more attentive?
2. What new insight(s) did you gain about the Liturgy of the Word?

Scripture Reading

The Catechism beautifully describes how, at the Mass, we are joined with all the faithful at the cross of Jesus: To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven. In communion with and commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, the Church offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharist the Church is as it were at the foot of the cross with Mary, united with the offering and intercession of Christ (1370). Our Scripture reading takes us to the foot of cross: John 19:1-37.

Questions for Reflection:

3. What part of the scripture spoke your heart the most? Why?
4. How might this reading help you enter more fully into the Mass?

Faith into Life

Now the Liturgy moves from the ambo (the place where the Scriptures are proclaimed) to the altar. Here we enter into the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Preparation of Gifts

This begins with the preparation of gifts. As a community, we bring forward the bread and wine that are needed to create the Eucharist. By doing so, we also symbolically bring forth ourselves. For what is bread but broken grain? What is wine but crushed grapes? So we, broken and crushed, offer ourselves to be transformed into the presence of our Lord. This is also a time of financial giving: “From the very beginning Christians have brought, along with the bread and wine for the Eucharist, gifts to share with those in need” (Catechism 1531). This is not a “pay your dues” moment, it is a prayerful sacrifice. Remember the words of St. Paul: “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). This is a weekly opportunity to show that Jesus is Lord of our lives, not money.

The Gift of the Eucharist

Gathered at the altar, we sing with the angels, “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord, God of hosts!” And we cry out as the people did on Palm Sunday: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9) Just as we entered into the Incarnation of Jesus at the beginning of Mass, so now we enter his Paschal Mystery—the suffering, death, resurrection,

and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Catechism explains, “Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal Mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated” (1103). In the Mass, we are present at the Last Supper. We are present at the cross. We are present when Christ appears to the apostles after having risen from the dead! St. John Chrysostom gave a powerful reflection that connects the cross to the Eucharist: [The] water and blood (flowing from Christ’s side on the cross) symbolized baptism and the holy Eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born: from Baptism, the cleansing water that gives rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit, and from the holy Eucharist. Since the symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist flowed from his side, it was from his side that Christ fashioned the Church, as he had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam... As God then took a rib from Adam’s side to fashion a woman, so Christ has given us blood and water from his side to fashion the Church. God took the rib when Adam was in a deep sleep, and in the same way Christ gave us the blood and water after his own death. Do you understand, then, how Christ has united his bride to himself and what food he gives us all to eat? By one and the same food we are both brought into being and nourished. As a woman nourishes her child with her own blood and milk, so does Christ unceasingly nourish with his own blood those to whom he himself has given life.

Receiving the Eucharist

What can we say to this? The only response we can properly give our Lord in the Eucharist are his own words, and so we pray the Our Father. Recalling that we will be forgiven only as we forgive, we turn to each other and give the sign of peace. We humbly repeat the words of faith that were spoken in Scripture: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you under my roof...” Then, if we are properly disposed*, we consume the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Though it is true that Christ is present in the scriptures, in service to others, and when “two or more are gathered” (Matthew 18:20), Jesus is present “most especially in the Eucharistic species” (Catechism 1373). St. Maximilian Kolbe said, “If angels could be jealous of men, they would be so for one reason: Holy Communion.” We cannot be more physically intimate with Jesus on earth than when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

From Earth to Eternity

After a final blessing, we are sent forth as living tabernacles to “go and announce the Gospel to the world.” This isn’t just a way of saying, “Go home; show’s over!” This is the very point of the Mass: “The liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (missio) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God’s will in their daily lives” (1332). As mentioned in an earlier session, the very word “mass” comes from that sending forth, missio, which is the root word of “mission.” It is important that we don’t leave before we are “sent.” When Jesus gave us the Mass, he said we should “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). The Greek word for “remembrance” is anamnesis. It is more than a recollection of past events. It is the proclamation of his saving works that makes his grace present and real (Catechism 1363). The opposite of anamnesis is amnesia, a condition so serious we might forget our own name! It is easy to get caught up in this world and suffer from a sort of amnesia in our spiritual lives. The remedy for this is in the Bread of Heaven, for in heaven, “The elect live in Christ, but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name” (Catechism 1025).

In the Eucharist we encounter God and, by doing so, are reminded of who he is and who we are meant to be. When we enter into the Mass, we participate in the heavenly liturgy. Though it might seem like you are just a mile or so away from your home, “you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering” (Hebrews 12:22). Heaven reaches earth in the Eucharist, and by receiving that sacrament we go out to bring God’s kingdom to the world.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What new insight(s) did you gain about the Liturgy of the Eucharist? What stood out to you in this reading?
2. How is the Lord inspiring you to participate in the liturgy in a more “full, conscious, and active” way?

Daily Readings

The “one sacrifice for sins”: Hebrews 10:11-25 “Do this in remembrance of me”: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 Angelic worship (lion, man, ox, and eagle became images of the four Gospels): Revelations 4:1-7

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

“Offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe”: Hebrews 12:18-29

Question for Reflection:

3. How have these readings given you a new perspective on the Mass?

* “Properly disposed”: The Church says we should always receive the Eucharist at Mass when we have the “proper dispositions” (Catechism 1388). The first of those is that one is a practicing Catholic. This isn’t about excluding other brothers and sisters in Christ. Since the Eucharist is the source and summit of what we believe as Catholics, having a non-Catholic publicly receive the Eucharist would be like having him or her stand before a congregation and say, “I believe what the Catholic Church teaches!” The US Bishops state, “Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion” (from their website, usccb.org). There are physical dispositions proper to receiving the Eucharist. We are to fast an hour before Communion. “Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) out to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of the moment when Christ becomes our guest” (Catechism 1387). Finally, there are spiritual dispositions. “Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic Communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive Communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance” (Catechism 1415). Many parishes offer Reconciliation on Saturday morning (or even before Sunday liturgies) for those parishioners who might need that sacrament before receiving the Eucharist. Jesus said, “Take this, all of you, and eat it” (Matthew 26:26). He wants us to receive him in the Eucharist, and so does the Church. “The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion when they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist” (Catechism 1417).

Full, Conscious, and Active Participation: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for giving us the Mass as a place to worship and receive Jesus fully in the Word and Eucharist. Help us today as we discuss this great gift. We take a moment to give you all the things going on in our lives 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 areas of your life (past experiences/sin) where you need to focus on receiving God’s mercy more or giving God’s mercy (forgiving others). Were you able to consider taking action on any of these areas that came to mind?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. How attentive are you at Mass? What did you read that will help you be more attentive?
2. What new insight(s) did you gain about the Liturgy of the Word? What part of the Scripture spoke your heart the most? Why? How might this reading help you enter more fully into the Mass? What new insight(s) did you gain about the Liturgy of the Eucharist? What stood out to you in this reading? How is the Lord inspiring you to participate in the liturgy in a more “full, conscious, and active” way? How have these readings given you a new perspective on the Mass?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

“This week’s lesson was all about the Mass and how to participate more fully and actively in the worship. The reality is that the prayer of the Mass is to be fuel and food for the journey of the spiritual life. This is why God ‘requires’ that we go once a week. He knows we need it! It is in some ways him saying, ‘You can’t do this life without me, so be sure to go at least once a week to receive me in the Eucharist and worship me so as to put your life in right order.’ God loves us and all of his commands are for our good.” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: Look back at your answer to question 6 above. What are some practical steps you can take in order to respond to how God is inspiring you to participate more fully in the liturgy?

Closing Prayer (three minutes)

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

WEEK 37
Take Up Your Cross
Main Point

God will turn our suffering to salvation, but only when we offer it to him.

Scripture to Memorize

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.’” – Matthew 16:24

Jesus had just told the apostles for the first time that he was going to suffer and die in Jerusalem. Peter responded in shock, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). It was a natural response. Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the “Messiah, son of the living God” (16:16). He knew that Jesus had the power to cast out demons and calm storms. How could anything so bad happen to someone like him? The response from Jesus was swift and firm: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as humans do” (Matthew 16:23).

Human Thinking

What do humans think about suffering? Avoid it. At all costs. In this, we are not so different from the animals. Animal trainers will use brief moments of pain or discomfort to train the animals to behave as they want. The animal, wishing to avoid that pain, does what the trainer wants. The Enemy (world, flesh, and devil) uses this tactic on us, as well. Many people live their lives with no other purpose than to avoid pain and pursue pleasure. Jesus warned against this attitude: “The gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life” (Matthew 7:13-14). It is more comfortable to go through a wide gate than one that is narrow and constricted—but that only leads to death. That is why Jesus calls out Satan for this type of “human” thinking. Peter had just listened to the voice of the heavenly Father when he called Jesus the Messiah (16:17), but now he was listening to the voice of the devil when he told Jesus that he shouldn’t have to suffer.

Divine Thinking

So how does God think? “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). This must have been absolutely shocking for the apostles to hear. Take up your cross? 2,000 years later, we have become so used to the cross that that phrase is almost cliché. However, in their time, you could not walk into Jerusalem without seeing people slowly dying while writhing in pain on that instrument of torture. Saying, “Take up your cross,” would be the modern equivalent of, “Strap yourself into your electric chair.” On the surface, this seems cruel. Why would God want to “torture” us? But it is “human thinking” to assume that all suffering is bad, and all pleasure is good. Jesus used shocking language to wake us up from our natural tendencies and see life in a new way. In response to

what must have been astonishment from the apostles, Jesus explained, “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Matthew 16:26).

The Suffering Servant

500 years earlier, Isaiah prophesied about one who would be “spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain, like one from whom you turn your face... Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured” (Isaiah 53:3-4). This was about Jesus. He came to bear the suffering of our sin so that we could be saved. Some would like to think that because Jesus suffered, we don’t have to suffer. This “health and wealth Gospel” promises that, once you give your life to Jesus, everything will be fine. But what of the command to “take up your cross?” The whole Christian understanding of suffering revolves around this reality: on the cross, Jesus did not take away our suffering. He transformed our suffering. What once led to death now leads to life. Jesus leads the way, but we all have to take the same path: “The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross” (Catechism 2015). There is not another way.

Joy and Suffering

One of the words rarely associated in our culture with “suffering” is “joy.” But in Christ the two can be found together. The Letter to the Hebrews said, “For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God” (12:2). James began his letter by saying, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials” (1:2). And the Catechism stated, “From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings” (787). Mission, joy, and suffering—they all go together. St. Paul compared the spiritual life to athletics: “Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one” (1 Corinthians 9:25). An athlete, on a mission to win, suffers through hard training for the joy of victory. If one only wishes to be comfortable, they will never be a good athlete. In the same way, comfort can be the enemy of holiness. If we live our life to avoid suffering, we end up avoiding the very cross by which we can be saved. However, if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can find purpose—and even joy—in suffering. Suffering is unavoidable in this life. The question is whether we will suffer alone or invite God into that pain. When we unite our sufferings to Jesus, we know that for every Good Friday through which we go, Easter Sunday will follow.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How did the reflection give you a new understanding of suffering?
2. When has a moment of suffering been a cause for deeper transformation and even joy in your life?

Scripture Reading

On the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). This was the first line of Psalm 22. The Jews who heard him say that would have known what the rest of the psalm was about, as it not only expressed anguish but also hope for salvation. Reflect on this following passage from the Catechism, and then read Psalm 22: Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned. But in the redeeming love that always

united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all,” so that we might be “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (603).

Questions for Reflection:

3. What stood out to you in this psalm?
4. By quoting this psalm, what was Jesus trying to say from the cross?

Faith into Life

Jesus suffered. It is important to reflect on that. Heaven is a place of no sorrow or death, but he left the heavens so he could suffer with us. He took on a nervous system so he could feel pain. He got a stomach so he could experience hunger. He was born so he could experience death. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me” (Luke 22:42). He did not want to suffer and die. St. Luke wrote, “He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground” (Luke 22:44). However, he offered his suffering to the Father, saying, “Still, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:43). And an angel appeared to give him strength.

Help in Suffering

We can learn three things from that scripture. First, to state the obvious, suffering is difficult. Reflecting on the suffering of Christ can give us strength: “Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3). Second, we are never alone in our suffering. God sends his angels to help us: “For he commands his angels with regard to you, to guard you wherever you go. With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone” (Psalms 91:11-12). There is also the help of the saints—those in heaven and on earth: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Suffering is an experience that unites us with each other, for we have all suffered in different ways. That is why small faith-sharing groups like your Discipleship Quad are so important.

Thy Will Be Done

Finally, though we can pray fervently to not suffer, when suffering comes, we should accept it as God’s will. Like a child at the doctor’s office flailing around trying not to get a shot he needs to get better, we can make our trials worse by fighting them rather than accepting them. In the Our Father, we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Our suffering reveals if we want “thy will” or “my will.” It is easy to pray for God’s will when it brings us pleasure or success. But what about when it leads to trials and persecutions? In the garden, Jesus prayed, “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:43). This is one of the most difficult prayers we can pray, and it was arguably the most difficult prayer for Jesus to pray, too. Thankfully, we have his Spirit dwelling in us, for this is not something we could ask for on our own. Reflecting on this prayer, the Catechism states, “We are radically incapable of (praying for) this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father” (2825).

Turning Pain into Prayer

Because of the suffering of Jesus, we can do more than endure our trials. We can actually use them to help others! St. Paul wrote to the Church in Colossae, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). In our sufferings, we have “the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (Catechism 618). Think about that: our pain can make us partners in the Paschal Mystery! When we unite our suffering with his suffering, he will use it to bless others. This is such a powerful prayer that the Church encourages us to not just lift up the sufferings we aren’t in control of, but to actually intentionally suffer for the sake of others. Another word for this is “fasting.” God’s grace can turn our pain into prayer. One of the best examples of this can be found in the book of Psalms, many of which were written while the Jews were suffering in exile. They praised God, not because of their present suffering, but because of their confidence in future glory. They were able to bring the joy of what was to come into the pain of what was occurring, and by doing so transformed their sorrows into a “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15).

“Take up Your Cross”

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). There isn’t another way: “There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle” (Catechism 2015). St. John of the Cross wrote: Would that men might come at last to see that it is quite impossible to reach the thicket of the riches and wisdom of God except by first entering the thicket of much suffering, in such a way that the soul finds there its consolation and desire. Suffering is a part of life. The world tells us to avoid it at all costs. However, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can “consider it all joy” when we see how God transforms our pain into praise and our sufferings into salvation, both for ourselves and for others. “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Questions for Reflection:

5. Assuming that you had heard the phrase “take up your cross” before, how has your understanding of that changed while reading this lesson?
6. What are some practical ways in which you will use your suffering to help others?

Daily Readings

By his wounds we were healed: 1 Peter 2:19-25
Our sufferings make up what is lacking: Colossians 1:21-29
Agony in the garden: Luke 22:39-46
Take up your cross: Matthew 16:24-28
Strengthened through the Spirit: Ephesians 3:13-21

Question for Reflection:

1. How have these readings helped you to more joyfully “take up your cross?”

Discipleship in Action: Fasting

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about the right way to fast: When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you (Matthew 6:16-18). There are a couple of things we can learn from this passage. First, Jesus didn't say "if" you fast, but "when" you fast. Fasting is supposed to be a regular part of the prayer life of his disciples. Second, our fasting is supposed to be something private between ourselves and God. This was contrary to the practice at the time, when people made a big deal of the fasts they did so they could look holy.

Fasting on Fridays

Almost all Catholics know they should fast from meat on Fridays in Lent. Unfortunately, many don't realize that the Church encourages the faithful to fast every Friday. The Church used to require fasting from meat every Friday throughout the year (under penalty of sin), but changed it because: Meat was once an exceptional form of food; now it is commonplace. Accordingly, since the spirit of penance primarily suggests that we discipline ourselves in that which we enjoy most, to many in our day abstinence from meat no longer implies penance, while renunciation of other things would be more penitential (Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence, 19-20). By removing the requirement of fasting from meat as well as the penalty that went along with it, the Church hoped that our fasting would be more meaningful because 1) we choose it ourselves and 2) we do it out of love, not obligation. To be honest, I didn't even know this document existed until I researched it for the Discipleship Quad program, so don't feel bad if it is new to you as well! You can read the whole thing on the USCCB website. Just as we remember the Lord's resurrection on Sunday, we recall his crucifixion every Friday: "Friday should be in each week something of what Lent is in the entire year" (Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence, 23). One does not need to fast from meat on those days, though the US Bishops say it is especially recommended. You can also fast from alcohol, coffee, social media, etc. I would recommend keeping it simple. The devil doesn't want you to fast, but when you decide to, then the devil will push you towards something so extreme that you will get frustrated and give up. Remember that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Power of Fasting - In the eyes of the world, fasting makes no sense. Why deny yourself something that is pleasurable? Scripture has revealed to us how our intentional sacrifices unite us to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. That practice of self-denial is an exceptional way to grow in virtue. It is also a powerful prayer for others. When Jesus, Peter, James and John came down from the mountain after Christ's transfiguration, they found that the other apostles were having a problem: they were not able to cast a demon out of a boy, even though they had previously cast out many evil spirits from others. After Jesus expelled that demon, he explained to the apostles, "This kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). That shouldn't be so surprising to us. The Enemy, who uses pleasure to lead people away from God, must hate it when people willingly and joyfully fast. By uniting those sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice, it can be used in the conversion of others. If you haven't yet, start fasting for those to whom you are sharing the Gospel. It will make a big difference! Fasting is one of the best ways we can reject the comfort of this world, and it is a powerful intercessory prayer.

Take Up Your Cross: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for entering into our humanity and transforming how we approach suffering. Help us today as we discuss our crosses and the suffering we have experienced. We take a moment to give you all the things going on in our lives 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 some practical steps you can take in order to respond to how God is inspiring you to participate more fully in the liturgy. How did that go?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. How did the reflection give you a new understanding of suffering? When has a moment of suffering been a cause for deeper transformation and even joy in your life? What stood out to you in this psalm? By quoting this psalm, what was Jesus trying to say from the cross? Assuming you had heard the phrase “take up your cross” before, how has your understanding of that changed while reading this lesson? What are some practical ways in which you will use your suffering to help others? How have these readings helped you to more joyfully “take up your cross?”

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

Read the following reflection out loud: “This week’s lesson taught us about how God can use our suffering for good in our lives and in the world. Some suffering occurs as a natural part of life. We also experience suffering as a consequence of our sins and the sins of others. Perhaps we have pain from our past, such as childhood wounds from divorce, abuse, or other’s bad choices, or we could have wounds that we have experienced more recently. However and whenever the suffering occurred, it can lead us closer to God and be transformed for his glory, if we offer it to him and allow him to take it.” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: As you consider the suffering you have experienced due to emotional wounds in your life, is there anyone that comes to mind that you might need to forgive? When you look back on these places in your heart, is there still pain or a feeling of resentment or hatred? If so, take some time this week to bring these things to Jesus. Ask him to give you the grace to forgive, if that is what is needed. Ask him to show you where and how he is redeeming these wounds in your life if you still have feelings of pain, resentment, or hatred.

Closing Prayer (three minutes)

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

WEEK 38
Upon This Rock
Main Point

The Church is not just a building or an organization; it is the means by which Jesus saves his people!

Scripture to Memorize

“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” – Matthew 16:18-20

It is difficult to succinctly describe the woman I married. She is the one with whom I fell in love, my best friend. I could describe her by what she looks like: brown hair, blue eyes, and a great smile. Or I could describe her by what she does: runs a non-profit, excellent cook, and amazing with the kids. I could speak of her faults and failings. I could tell of her hopes and dreams. All of these things—the visible and the invisible, the good and the bad, her past and potential—weave together to make up who she is. In a similar way, it is hard to simply describe the Catholic Church. There is the visible element, such as the buildings where we worship or the pageantry of the pope. There is the invisible element, like the graces of the sacraments and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is ugliness, from bureaucracy to scandal. There is beauty, from works of charity to spiritual conversion. As stated in the Catechism: The Church is essentially both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, but as a pilgrim, so constituted that in her the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest (771). The Church was neither an afterthought of Jesus nor was it an idea people came up with after he ascended into heaven. It was in the plan of God to give us a Church where we can encounter him and through which he can save the world. As St. Clement of Alexandria said, “Just as God’s will is creation and is called ‘the world,’ so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called ‘the Church.’”

The Marks of the Church

In the Nicene Creed, which we say every Sunday, we state that we believe in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” These are known as the four marks of the Church. They are more than just a list of adjectives. A “mark” is a distinguishing characteristic that sets something apart from something else. “To believe that the Church is ‘holy’ and ‘catholic,’ and that she is ‘one’ and ‘apostolic’ (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Catechism 750). The Church is one. St. Paul wrote that there is “one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one

faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). An earlier lesson mentioned that, as Catholics, we don’t see Christianity in terms of “many churches,” as some do. Though we acknowledge the differences and division among Christians, we hold fast to the belief there is just one Body of Christ, one Church. The Church is holy. She is the “bride of Christ” and is made holy by the blood of Jesus. It is a group of sinners who are purified into saints: “The Church, however, clasping sinners to her bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal” (Catechism 827). Everything the Church does is for the end goal of making her members holy. The Church is catholic. Remembering that “catholic” means “universal” or “total,” the Church is catholic because she proclaims the “total” faith to all of mankind. She is not lacking any truth—she has all that is needed to proclaim the faith. She is also “catholic” because of her mission to “all nations”: “She is sent out to all peoples. She speaks to all men” (Catechism 867). The Church is apostolic. Jesus told St. Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Founded on St. Peter and the other apostles, she is indestructible! What we know of Jesus came through the teaching of the apostles which the Church continues to infallibly proclaim. Christ continues to lead the Church through the successors of the apostles: the pope and the bishops. Christ Present in the Church Though it is made up of men and women, the Catholic Church is not a “man- made” organization. Nowhere is this more evident than when you study her history. If this was something purely conceived by humans, it would have never made it this long! (One of my favorite quotes is from Cardinal Consalvi who, when Napoleon threatened to destroy the Church, humorously responded, “If in 1,800 years we clergy have failed to destroy the Church, do you really think that you’ll be able to do it?”) Jesus didn’t build the Church on St. Peter to abandon it. He told the apostles, “I will not leave you orphans” (John 14:18), and, “Surely, I am with you always, even until the end of time” (Matthew 28:20). It is Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who makes the Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Church is like the moon that reflects the light from the sun but is not the source of it: In the Apostles’ Creed we profess ‘one Holy Church’ (Credo... Ecclesiam), and not to believe in the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God’s goodness all the gifts he has bestowed on his Church (Catechism 750).

Questions for Reflection:

1. Which mark of the Church do find the most attractive?
2. When you consider that the Church is not man-made, but built and sustained by Christ, what aspects of the Church do you think of that points your mind and heart to God and his work?

Scripture Reading

The world had never seen anything like Christianity before! Previous religions were based on a specific place or a specific ethnicity of people. St. Paul explained to the Church in Ephesus what makes our faith unique: Ephesians 1:15-2:22.

Questions for Reflection:

3. How did St. Paul describe the Church?
4. What aspects of the Church (as described by St. Paul) stood out to you?

Faith into Life

In the language of Scripture, the word “church” means a religious convocation or assembly (Catechism 751). As we have already discussed, there is much more to the Church than that! She is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Some people argue against “organized religion” (to which I say, “Become Catholic! We are very disorganized!”). They instead believe their faith is more one-on-one, “me and Jesus.” They ask, “Why do I need a community if I have a personal relationship with God?” The answer is because God wants us to be more than a group of individuals who love him, he wants us to be a “people of God,” a family: “[God] willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness” (Catechism 781). Jesus did not just die for “me”—he died for “us.” That is why it is so important that we love our brothers and sisters in Christ... even when we disagree with them.

Never Be a Cause for Stumbling

The early Christians in Rome argued about what to fast from and what days were more sacred than others. It caused enough of a disruption that St. Paul felt he had to write them about it: [For] one person considers one day more important than another, while another person considers all days alike. Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Whoever observes the day, observes it for the Lord. Also whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while whoever abstains, abstains for the Lord and gives thanks to God... Then let us no longer judge one another, but rather resolve never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother (Romans 14:5-6, 13). In our culture of excessive tolerance and relativism, it is easy to roll our eyes when we hear “don’t judge,” as it is often used as a defense for behavior that is obviously sinful. St. Paul had no problem calling out moral judgements when he had to (in the case of someone who was involved in an incestuous relationship, he said, “deliver this man to Satan”—1 Corinthians 5:5). However, in this case St. Paul made a distinction between things that were moral and what he called “disputes over opinions” (Romans 14:1). It is imperative that we don’t confuse our personal preferences with moral prerogatives. When the Church in Corinth argued over which apostle was better, St. Paul replied: While there is jealousy and rivalry among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving in an ordinary human way? Whenever someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human? (1 Corinthians 3:3-4). Some contemporary examples of this can be when we compare parishes, pastors, or even popes! In this context, St. Paul told us to “never put a stumbling block or hinderance in the way of a brother” (Romans 14:13). Instead of judging and fighting with each other, which is the desire of the Enemy, “we must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). We must always be mindful that we are in the same family: “Thus a true filial spirit toward the Church can develop among Christians. It is the normal flowering of the baptismal grace which has begotten us in the womb of the Church and made us members of the Body of Christ” (Catechism 2040). Our lack of agreement on certain issues should never become a lack of charity for each other. Disagreement should not lead to division.

The Church as our Teacher

The Catechism states, “In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility” (889). This means when the Church teaches about the faith and morals, she is “infallible,” which means “without falsehood” or “never wrong.” The boldness of this statement is shocking. How can one say the Church has never been wrong? What of the scandals? What of the corruption in certain times in history? In truth, at times the Church has not lived up to what she herself taught. However, even with the worst popes, the teaching was never changed. In regard to faith and morals, the Catholic Church has never taught something that was wrong. She has also never changed her doctrine, meaning that there was something regarding faith or morality that we used to believe but now we don’t, or vice versa. St. John Henry Newman wrote a treatise on the development of doctrine and explained that just as a child grows into an adult but retains the same parts, so our understanding on matters of faith and morals have grown yet have remained intrinsically the same. The Church has expressed the faith differently over time, has celebrated it in different ways in different cultures, and has used variations of language to answer new cultural challenges. It is important to separate these expressions of faith from doctrine. One can charitably disagree with the way the Church is trying to do something while still believing in what the Church teaches—in fact, this happens all the time!

Difficult Teachings

There are times when faithful men and women struggle with something the Church teaches, usually on matters of morality. For example, they may in their conscience (their use of reason to determine right and wrong) believe something the Church says is wrong is actually right, or at least permissible. In those cases, the Church says: [T]he conscience of each person should avoid confining itself to individualistic considerations in its moral judgments of the person’s own acts. As far as possible conscience should take account of the good of all, as expressed in the moral law, natural and revealed, and consequently in the law of the Church and in the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium on moral questions. Personal conscience and reason should not be set in opposition to the moral law or the Magisterium of the Church (Catechism 2039). We must first form our conscience before we can follow it, for sin darkens our mind and callouses our hearts (Ephesians 4:18-19). To accept the Church as our teacher, we must accept our role as student. We must prayerfully and humbly come before God and pray for wisdom while we learn what the Church teaches on the subject. The Catechism is a great place to start. After giving a difficult teaching about sexual immorality, St. Paul cautioned his readers, “Whoever disregards this, disregards not a human being, but God” (1 Thessalonians 4:8). The Church does “make up” doctrine. She proclaims the teaching of Christ as passed down through the apostles. Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) and when Jesus gave St. Peter the “keys to the kingdom,” he gave his truth to the Church.

The Church as our Mother

“After speaking of the Church, her origin, mission, and destiny, we can find no better way to conclude than by looking to Mary” (Catechism 972). Like Jesus, Mary is active within the life of the Church, continuously leading us to her Son and interceding for the salvation of souls. St.

John Paul II proposed that the Church is more “Marian” than “Petrine” because, though it is founded on the rock of Peter, it sees in herself in the image of our Blessed Mother: “Mary goes before us all in the holiness that is the Church’s mystery as ‘the bride without spot or wrinkle’” (Catechism 773). As Mary brought Jesus into the world, so also does the Church. We can rightly refer to the Church as “mother”: In her motherly care, the Church grants us the mercy of God which prevails over all our sins and is especially at work in the sacrament of reconciliation. With a mother’s foresight, she also lavishes on us day after day in her liturgy the nourishment of the Word and Eucharist of the Lord (Catechism 2040). The Church is our mother and we are God’s family. As the Church “militant” on earth, we face many trials and tribulations. But we look forward with great hope to our brothers and sisters who are “triumphant” in heaven, and we honor the means by which Jesus gave us to get there: the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We should be proud to be Catholic! “Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her” (Ephesians 5:26). Should we not do the same?

Questions for Reflection:

1. What do you love about being Catholic? With what do you struggle?
2. What can you do to overcome divisions within the Church?

Daily Readings

Upon this rock: Matthew 16:13-20

Unity in Christ: Ephesians 4:1-24

Never put a stumbling block in the way: Romans 14:1-23

A comparison to marriage: Ephesians 5:25-33

Hold to our confession of faith: Hebrews 10:19-25

Question for Reflection:

3. How have these readings, and this lesson overall, given you a new insight on the Catholic Church?

Upon This Rock: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“Thank you for the Catholic Church. Thank you for teaching, guiding, and sanctifying us through the Church’s actions. We ask you to bless our discussion 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 discussed if there were any people you needed to forgive for past hurts and consider how God is redeeming past wounds. How did that go?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. Which mark of the Church do find the most attractive?
2. When you consider that the Church is not man-made, but built and sustained by Christ, what aspects of the Church do you think of that points your mind and heart to God and his work?
3. How did St. Paul describe the Church?
4. What aspects of the Church (as described by St. Paul) stood out to you?
5. What do you love about being Catholic? With what do you struggle?
6. What can you do to overcome divisions within the Church?
7. How have these readings, and this lesson overall, given you a new insight on the Catholic Church?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

Read the following reflection out loud: “The Church is a gift to us. As our Holy Mother Church, she guides us, sanctifies us, and gives us the pathway to union with God. Yet, it is easy to see the Church not as a guiding, loving mother but rather as a strict, overbearing, rule-setting parent that is always breathing down our necks or watching over us to see when we fail. Consider what the Church means to you personally. Do you see the Church as a gift or as a rule-setting organization that stifles you?” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: Consider your answer to the question above. Think about the lesson this week and choose one thing about the Church that stood out to you as a positive thing for your personal life. Write down that one thing and choose how you can embrace that truth in your life this week. For example, if the one thing that stood out to you about the Church was that she is holy, and her goal is making her members holy, then consider how you are being made holy through and in the Church.

Closing Prayer (three minutes) Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

WEEK 39
Body and Soul
Main Point

We are embodied spirits. What we do with our bodies, we do with our souls.

Scripture to Memorize

“You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body.” – 1 Corinthians
6:20

I remember watching *The Empire Strikes Back* when I was a kid. There was a scene where Yoda taught Luke the ways of the Force. At one point, he said, “Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter.” I later came to learn he was only half right! Yes, we are “luminous” beings—there is more to us than our physical bodies. However, one cannot refer to our flesh simply as “crude matter.” When Scripture says we are created “in the image of God,” it refers to both our bodies and souls. Nothing made in God’s image can be considered “crude!” Unlike the angels (and demons) we are not pure spirit. We are both physical and spiritual.

Saved in the Flesh

The beginning of the Gospel of John simply states a complex and mysterious reality: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). God, who is spirit, became flesh. Jesus is fully God and fully man, like us in all things but sin. In taking on our human nature, he took on our human flesh. He didn’t wear his humanity like a costume that he discarded when he ascended into heaven. He became flesh. On the cross, he used his flesh to save us. When he was resurrected, he was resurrected in his flesh. Now reigning in heaven, he still has flesh. The Catechism makes this abundantly clear: ‘The flesh is the hinge of salvation.’ We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh (1015).

Misunderstandings About the Body

From the time of the early Church, there have been a number of heresies that proposed that the body was evil, people shouldn’t be married, the devil created matter but God created the spirit, and more. The Church has always condemned those ways of thought. But if the teaching has been so consistent, why are there still so many misunderstandings? There are few things that, on the surface, could make it seem as though Christianity thinks the soul is good but the body is not. As we’ve already examined, there were times that St. Paul contrasted the flesh and the Spirit: “Live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). St. Paul used the word “flesh” to represent our carnal attractions, the things that make us behave more like animals than humans. But he did not mean our human bodies. One only

needs to look at what he says are the “fruits of the spirit”—such as charity, generosity, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)—to realize you need a body to express those things! When St. Ignatius referred to the “flesh” as an enemy, he was using the language of St. Paul. Perhaps another reason is because of the vow of celibacy required for priests and religious. This is not because the Church teaches that sex is “evil.” Celibacy is honored because Jesus was celibate. The same goes for poverty (Jesus owned no possessions when he died—it was all literally stripped away from him). Just because one thing is honored does not mean the other is disgraced. St. Paul encouraged celibacy so one could be totally focused on pleasing the Lord, but also recognized the beauty of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 9:38).

The Resurrection of the Dead

However, perhaps the biggest reason people are prone to believe the spirit is good and the body is evil is not realizing what happens after we die. Yes, if we die before Christ comes again, our souls are separated from our bodies. But that is only temporary. In the Creed, we profess that we believe in “the resurrection of the dead.” That doesn’t refer to our belief that Jesus rose from the dead (we already said that earlier in the Creed). It means we believe that we will rise from the dead. The Catechism recognizes that “from the beginning, Christian faith in the resurrection has met with incomprehension and opposition” (996). St. Augustine wrote, “On no point does the Christian faith encounter more opposition than on the resurrection of the body.” Though it is common for people to think the spirit lives after the flesh is gone, Jesus revealed there is something more to come: The hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). It sounds like something out of a horror movie, but it is true. Our bodies will rise from the graves— though we won’t look like zombies! Just as Jesus appeared after his resurrection with a glorified body, so we will also have glorified bodies. This leads to lots of wonder and speculation: what age will we be? How much will we weigh? Do we keep our tattoos? Though I think the answer to the last question is “no,” the specific detail of our resurrection “exceeds our imagination and understanding; it is accessible only to faith” (Catechism 1000). This is why, until recently, Catholics were not allowed to be cremated. We should honor our bodies even in death because they will rise again. In the beginning of the twentieth century, allowances were made for cremation due to places in the world where there might be unsanitary conditions, overcrowded cemeteries, or for financial reasons. However, the Church encourages the burial of the full body when possible, and if one is cremated there needs to first be a funeral and afterwards the ashes placed in a cemetery or sacred space (not at home, not scattered over the ocean, etc.— see the quote at the end of this lesson).

The Second Coming of Jesus

When Jesus first came, it was in humility and obscurity. Few in Bethlehem even knew what momentous event was happening in the manger at the edge of town, save some shepherds and some Magi who appeared from the East. However, when Jesus returns, “he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead” (Nicene Creed). The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am creating new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17). John had a similar vision in the book of Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven

and the former earth had passed away” (21:1). When Christ comes again, all souls will be reunited with their bodies to be judged by Jesus and will either experience the “resurrection of life” in the new heaven and new earth, or the “resurrection of condemnation.” When God made our first parents with a soul and a body, he liked what he made. It found it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). He wants us to live in eternity with him, body and soul. Sin tried to destroy that, but by taking on our very flesh, Jesus won both our souls and our bodies back for him. This is why St. Paul wrote, “You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Though there might be a brief moment of separation when we die (“brief” in comparison to eternity), our bodies and souls will be united forever.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you struggled (or do you struggle) with thinking that your body is “bad?” What new understanding did you get from the above reading?
2. How might Catholics view their bodies differently if they understood this?

Scripture Reading

The city of Corinth was known for its promiscuity and vice, which is probably why St. Paul wrote more to them than to any other church. In this reading, he tries to help them see their bodies (and what they do with them) in light of the resurrection—both of Jesus and ourselves: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.

Questions for Reflection:

3. What stood out to you in this scripture?
4. “Everything is lawful for me” and “food for the stomach and the stomach for food” were the kind of excuses people once used to justify their behavior. How do those relate to excuses we can make today about what we do with our bodies?

Faith into Life

Reflecting upon how we are made reveals the plan and purpose of God. Creation was neither arbitrary nor random. Those who don’t believe in God assume that things such as gender and sex are accidents. But if God exists and if God is truth, then everything he does has meaning. We can see in how we were created a “language” spoken by God, through which he reveals the truth about ourselves.

“In the Image of God”

Creation finds its culmination on the sixth day, when it says, “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We are the only things in creation that are made in “the image of God.” We are not just smarter animals. All of creation is beautiful and reflects God’s glory, but there is something special

about men and women. The wood of trees can be used for fire; the flesh of animals can be used for food. Human bodies have a higher purpose. St. John Paul II said, “[Man] is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a spiritualized body, just as man’s spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as an embodied spirit.” Think about that phrase: embodied spirit. What we do physically we also do spiritually; there isn’t a separation between the two.

Complementarity of Man and Woman

In the first chapter of Genesis, God created things that were complementary to each other: light and darkness, sky and earth, land and sea, sun and moon, birds and fish. These were things that can be defined in and of themselves but are also defined in relationship to each other. Then he created humanity as male and female. The Catechism states, “‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator” (369). God is neither man or woman (spirit does not have gender), but both the masculine and feminine are reflections of himself (Catechism 370). One is not superior to the other, they are complimentary: Man and woman were made ‘for each other’ — not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are equal as persons... and complementary as masculine and feminine (Catechism 372).

The Gift of Sex

We see the fullness of the complementarity of genders in marriage when a man and a woman actually become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), and by doing so bring new life into the world. Some think the Catholic Church is against sex. Actually, the opposite is true. We believe sex to be sacred. Marriage is a sacrament! The Corinthians seemed to have the attitude that “the food is for body and the body is for food.” Some have seen that as an analogy for sexual activity: “sex is for the body and the body for sex.” Yes, the body was created to have sex, and animals often do it whenever the mood suits them. But we are not animals. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, made in the image and likeness of God. God revealed that sex is a gift to be celebrated within the context of married love. It should always bring about the unity of the couple and be open to life. Sex outside marriage is an affront to the unity of the sexual act: the body speaks the language of being “one flesh” but the person is not fully committed (“one flesh... for now”). What was meant to bring life and love ends up bringing pain and death. If you think that sounds dramatic, just think about the devastation that has been caused by humanity using sex outside of God’s plan. Sexual abuse, human trafficking, prostitution, pornography, sexually transmitted diseases... the list goes on. Add to that list the number of babies who have been aborted, which is a direct result of sexual immorality. In the US alone the estimate is around 50 million legal abortions since the 1970s—that is the current population of New York City, multiplied by six. “The body... is not made for immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:13). We don’t need the Bible to tell us that: the proof is everywhere.

Openness to Life

Sex that is closed to life distorts the gift of God and can lead to “using” the other for pleasure. Since God did not create the female body to be fertile all the time, we can see that he did not

intend for every sexual act to create a child. There are many ways for a married couple who feel that the time is not right to have children to know when a woman is fertile, and in those moments abstain from sex. Contraception is used when a couple wants to have sex but the woman is fertile and they don't want the blessings of new life. Married love should not be about having sex whenever we want it— again, that is what animals do. Introducing chemicals or materials to block the very thing that sex was created for distorts its purpose, and diminishes (or destroys) the permanent, life-giving love that sex is meant to express: Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality (Catechism 2370).

The Language of Creation

God speaks his truth through the “language” of our sexuality. That also helps us understand what is not true. Men aren't made for unitive, life-giving sexual activity with other men, nor women with women. They might simulate the sexual act, but they are physically incapable of it. Plastic surgeons and hormone injections might change the appearance of a man's body to look like a woman, or vice versa, but their blood will still indicate whether they are a man or a woman. We live in a culture that is still affected by “I think, therefore I am”—if our physical bodies don't reflect what we think about ourselves, we should change them. However, God reveals we are embodied spirits. Our physical bodies (with their gender) can't be separated from our souls. We will live in them forever. Accepting the bodies God gave us does not limit us. It allows us to discover the fullness of life that God desires for us. For some, that path of discovery can be more difficult than others, and those who struggle with same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria deserve our compassion, prayers, and support.

Opening Our Eyes

Whenever St. Philip Neri saw someone in sin, he would say, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Another way of saying that is, “If God hadn't come into my life, I'd probably be doing the same.” I am so grateful that God has revealed these truths in my life and in my marriage. Had I not studied the Catholic faith, I'm sure I'd be doing what the rest of the world does. Even with that knowledge, I still sin. Jesus said, “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3). It is easy to turn a blind eye to the kinds of sin we are likely to commit but be overly judgmental toward those sins we are not inclined to do. For example, a heterosexual might get upset at the portrayal of a gay couple on TV, but not even blink an eye at hundreds of depictions of sinful heterosexual acts. Haven't we been programmed by our culture to rejoice when the hero and heroine end up in bed together? Sexual sins are all around us in the culture, in the Church, and even in ourselves, for if we look at another lustfully, we commit adultery with them in our heart (Matthew 5:28). Jesus says we need to remove the things that cause us to sin in this way, even if it is difficult: “Better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna” (Matthew 5:29—but please don't cut off a body part. Just get off the Internet).

More to Learn

This lesson touched on many hot-button issues: contraception, abortion, homosexuality, etc. There are countless books and video series on human sexuality, Theology of the Body, and Natural Family Planning (some are suggested at the end of this lesson). It is well beyond the scope of these Discipleship Quads to address them here. If you haven't researched what the Church teaches on these subjects, you will be blessed if you do! God reveals his truths about sexuality not to limit us, but to save us. Like always, the Catechism is a great place to start. Remember that our consciences must be formed before they are followed. If, after researching, there is something the Church teaches in this area with which you still don't agree, it might require the obedience of faith. The goal of this lesson wasn't about the behavior of others but to help you think about your own. Since your body is immortal and has been purchased through the blood of Jesus Christ, how might you glorify God more with our body? The world thinks the Church only teaches about what we can't do with our bodies. Instead of emphasizing what we are against, let us celebrate what we are for: respect for the world God created, the beauty found in both men and women, joyful celibacy, loving marriages, and faithful families.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How are you grateful for the body God gave you?
2. How might you give more glory to God with your body?

Daily Readings

He will come again in glory: Acts 1:6-11

Questions about the resurrection: Matthew 22:23-33

Man and woman made for each other:

Genesis 2:18-24 Teaching on adultery:

Matthew 5:27-30

Prayer of Tobiah and Sarah: Tobit 8:4-8

Question for Reflection:

3. What new insight stood out to you in the readings?

FURTHER READING:

☞ Theology of the Body: Theology of the Body for Beginners by Christopher West, Pornography: Delivered: True Stories of Men and Women who Turned from Porn to Purity by Matt Fradd, April Garris, and others, Catholic Understanding of Sex: The Conjugal Act as a Personal Act by Dr. Donald Ascii, Same Sex Attraction: Made for Love by Fr. Mike Schmitz, Contraception/Natural Family Planning: Sex Au Naturel: What it is and Why it is Good for your Marriage by Patrick Coffin ON CREMATION: The following is a quote from The Order of Christian Funerals: The cremated remains of a body should be treated with the same respect given to the human body from which they come. This includes the use of a worthy vessel to contain the ashes, the manner in which they are carried, and the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains on the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (no. 417).

Body and Soul: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes) “God, thank you for the gift of our bodies and souls. We ask you to open our hearts and minds today to discuss the plan you have for our bodies. 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? Last week we asked you to consider one thing about the Church that stood out to you as a positive thing for your personal life and choose how you can embrace that truth. How did that go?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. Have you struggled (or do you struggle) with thinking your body is “bad?” What new understanding did you get from the above reading? 2. How might Catholics view their bodies differently if they understood this? 3. What stood out to you in this scripture? 4. “Everything is lawful for me” and “food for the stomach and the stomach for food” were the kind of excuses people once used to justify their behavior. How do those relate to excuses we can make today about what we do with our bodies? 5. How are you grateful for the body God gave you? 6. How might you give more glory to God with your body? 7. What new insight stood out to you in the readings?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes) Read the following reflection out loud: “This lesson and discussion brought up a lot of issues that are very controversial in our culture today. There is an incredible misunderstanding and lack of knowledge on what and why the Church teaches on these issues. For some of you, these topics brought up some challenging feelings and questions within your hearts and minds. How do we love and yet still say that it’s not okay for homosexual relationships to exist? Isn’t it wrong to say people can’t follow their hearts? Why is contraception wrong in a loving happy marriage? Some of you may even feel anger towards the Church’s teachings on some of these topics.” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: Take some time to make a list of the topics that were brought up this week that brought tension in your heart or were hard for you to consider following. Make a commitment to finding a good Catholic resource that will help you to understand why and what the Church teaches on this topic. If none of the topics that were brought up this week were difficult for you, then consider one of the topics that you want to learn more about in order to have a greater ability to share with others why the Church teaches what they do about that topic. Take some time to inform yourself on this topic in order to better prepare yourself to share with others. **Closing Prayer (three minutes)** Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the Quad.

WEEK 40
Discerning God's Will
Main Point

Not my will be done, but thy will be done.

Scripture to Memorize

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; In all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths.” – Proverbs 3:5-6

Our first mother and father lived in paradise with only one commandment not to break: “You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Adam and Eve were created without sin in the image of God, so they had no need for other commandments or laws. They were made to do good. More importantly, they were made to love and to be loved. The ability to love was given to them by the gift of free will. If there was no free will, there could be no love, because love that is “forced” isn’t love at all. Unlike the stars that had no choice but to shine, or the sea that had no other option than to reflect the beauty of the sun as it rose into the sky, man and woman were allowed to choose if they wanted to follow God’s will or not. Unfortunately, they chose “not.” They ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As mentioned earlier, this “knowledge” of good and evil signified the desire to choose for themselves what was right and wrong, and in doing so, “be like gods” (Genesis 3:5). The scriptures also make it clear that the devil’s lie influenced their decision (“You certainly will not die!”). The devil led them to believe they could make whatever choice they wanted to without any negative consequence. This is what brought death into the world. Though Baptism removed the condition of original sin from our souls, we are still weakened by it (concupiscence). We are weakest where we are wounded, and our “wound” is turning away from God’s truth. Like holding a magnet up to a compass, our attraction to sin and selfishness pulls us away from understanding what is right and wrong. We need the grace of the Holy Spirit to lead us to “true north.”

Trials and Temptations

The Letter of James begins by examining the difference between trials and temptations. He wrote, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials” (James 1:2). Trials are an opportunity to grow in faith and perseverance. We need trials if we are to be strong—they are for a Christian what weights are for a body builder. My students would prefer that I never gave them any tests in the courses I teach, but they wouldn’t study without them. For our own good, God gives us tests and trials so that we can grow in faith. However, this is different from temptation. St. James wrote: No one experiencing temptation should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire (James 1:13-14). It is important that we are able to discern the difference between the two. God will “test” us to grow in holiness but will not “tempt” us to fall into sin—that comes from our own

sinful desires. The Catechism states: The Holy Spirit makes us discern between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man, and temptation, which leads to sin and death... discernment unmask the lie of temptation, whose object appears to be good, a 'delight to the eyes' and desirable, when in reality its fruit is death (2847).

Listen to the Good Spirits

St. John wrote, "Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). In an earlier lesson, we examined how St. Ignatius of Loyola described the spiritual battle between the Enemy (which he described as the world, the flesh, and the devil) and the Good Spirits (the angels, the saints, and the Holy Spirit). In his famous work, *The Spiritual Exercises*, he gave advice on how to discern which was which. For those who are heading toward sin, St. Ignatius wrote that the Enemy works in the imagination. For example, a man who is dating someone gets propositioned by another woman. He then begins to imagine how enjoyable that encounter would be, and those thoughts can lead him to give into that temptation. Temptation itself is not a sin, but how we respond to it can be. As St. James wrote, "Desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death" (James 1:15). We can get some great advice in these moments from the Greek poet Ovid, often quoted by Church Fathers: "Resist beginnings; too late is the medicine prepared, when the disease has gained strength by long delay." We can't control having a sinful thought, but we can quickly push it aside. As Dr. Scott Hahn says, "There is a difference between entertaining a thought and letting a thought entertain you." What are the Good Spirits doing in this situation? St. Ignatius wrote that they work in the intellect. They prick the conscience by asking questions like, "But what of your girlfriend? How will she feel?" The Good Spirits make things uncomfortable for the sinner because God, in his love, is trying to save him from sin. (As an aside, the reason so many who are intoxicated fall into sin is because their intellect—where the Good Spirits speak—is diminished while their emotions—where the Enemy is at work—are amplified.)

Guidelines for Doing What is Right

Sometimes what is right and wrong is obvious. But there are other times when we find it difficult to know the right thing to do in a given situation. Sin can "blind" us to the truth, and we can easily convince ourselves that something that God says is wrong is right, and even vice versa. How can we know what to do? We need to turn to the Word of God, as expressed in Tradition and Sacred Scripture. Remember the words from Hebrews: "Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" (4:12). Scripture isn't a fortune cookie, and the Catechism isn't a book of rules. They both express the Living Word (Scripture is the Word; the Catechism is an expression of it). That Word is "able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart." It helps us understand what our motivations are so that we can do what God wants, not just what we want. The Catechism also gives three "rules" in our moral decision-making. First, we can never do something evil in the hopes that good will come out of it. Second, we must follow the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Finally, we must always act in loving

consideration for our neighbor: [C]harity always proceeds by way of respect for one's neighbor and his conscience: 'Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience... you sin against Christ' (1 Corinthians 8:12). Therefore 'it is right not to... do anything that makes your brother stumble' (Romans 14:21) (Catechism 1789). When seeking the right thing to do, we should ask ourselves: What does the Bible say about it? What does the Church teach about it? God can speak to our hearts through those means. We must also realize that, no matter what temptation we face, God gives us grace so that we can overcome it and grow stronger because of it: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Questions for Reflection:

1. Write down and share a time when you were tempted by the Enemy and used your intellect to help you discern what was right in the situation. If you don't have any examples, consider a time when you wish you would have used your intellect more to make a decision.
2. What advice in the above reading was helpful to you in discerning right from wrong?

Scripture Reading

The book of Proverbs is attributed to King Solomon, to whom God said, "I give you a heart so wise and discerning that there has never been anyone like you until now, nor after you will there be anyone equal to you" (1 Kings 3:12). Reflect on some of this wisdom: Proverbs 3:1-4:9.

Questions for Reflection:

3. Which of these proverbs spoke to your heart the most? Why?
4. According to the scriptures you just read, what are some of the benefits of seeking wisdom?

Faith into Life

After the death of King David, his son Solomon (son of Bathsheba) took the throne. The Lord told Solomon, "Whatever I ask I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5). Take a moment to reflect on this offer. If the Lord appeared to you and said that, for what would you ask?

5. Which of these elements of having a conversation about the faith do you feel you do well?

6. On which ones do you need to work?

Daily Readings

The call of Isaiah: Isaiah 6:1-9

A gentle and loving proclamation: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13 “To whomever I send you, you shall go”:

Jeremiah 1:4-10

“We have spoken frankly to you”: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Proclaim the word: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Question for Reflection:

7. What insights did you get from these readings that empower you to share the faith with others?

“Here I Am, Send Me!”: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for allowing us to experience joy in sharing the Gospel. We ask you to open our hearts and minds today to discuss the ways in which you want to work through us to spread your love. 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? Last week we discussed doing a work of mercy on Sunday. How did that go? If you were unable to do it, how can you plan to do it in the future?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. What new insight did you gain from the reflection? 2. How enthusiastic are you in talking about your faith? How has your experience within your Discipleship Quad helped motivate you to share the faith with others. 3. What stood out to you in the Scripture reading? 4. What surprised you about the woman’s response? 5. Which of these elements of having a conversation about the faith do you feel you do well? 6. On which ones do you need to work? 7. What insights did you get from these readings that empower you to share the faith with others?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

Read the following reflection out loud: “Once you enter into understanding and knowing God’s love in your life, it is like most love relationships—you want to share it with the whole world. Yet this feeling can die down over the years, and you can become less inclined to want to share. Or if you have had a recent conversation or reversion to God’s love, you may still be on fire and desire to share about him at every moment. Regardless of where you are on the journey, it is true that it is transformative for us to share about God and what he has done in our lives. God can work apart from us, but he wants to work through us because he knows it is good for us to share in his mission.” Give one minute of silent reflection time to answer the following question and then discuss: As you think about sharing God’s love with others, what fears, if any, enter into your heart? Who are the top three or four people that come to mind when you think about those with whom you desire to share your faith?

Closing Prayer (three minutes): Close by offering up those resolutions and praying for any particular intentions of the

WEEK 43
The Call to Discipleship
Main Point

We are all responsible to take part in the Church's mission to evangelize.

Scripture to Memorize

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" – Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus' last words in the Gospel of Matthew are, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). This responsibility, and the grace that accompanies it, was given specifically to the apostles, whose authority continues in the pope and the bishops. As laity within the Body of Christ, we don't have a mandate to disciple "all nations." However, we do have a responsibility to make disciples within our family, friends, and community! St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that leading others to faith is "the task of every preacher and of each believer" (Catechism 904). The Church teaches that evangelization by lay people "acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world" (Catechism 905). Another way of saying that is that lay people can evangelize in a way that ordained clergy can't. A bishop can't walk into an office building and strike up a conversation about the faith, but someone who works there can. A priest might not be allowed to start a Bible study club at a public school, but a group of Catholic teens who go to that school could. In a famous meditation by St. John Henry Newman, he wrote: I am created to do something or be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's councils, in God's world, which no one else has... God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. It is worth taking a moment to reflect on these words. You are not only called to participate in the mission of the Church (to "go and make disciples") but also a specific mission within the Church, reaching people that only you are in the position to reach. If you don't do it, nobody else can do it for you. We all want those we know to experience the life-changing love of Jesus Christ. But as St. Paul asks, "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?" (Romans 10:15).

A Great Need

The US Bishops recognize, "Certainly, our families, parishes, associations, schools, hospitals, charitable works, and institutions give a powerful witness to the faith. But do they share it? Does their living faith lead to the conversion of minds and hearts to Jesus Christ? Does the fire of the Holy Spirit blaze in them?" (Go and Make Disciples, no. 37). For the faith to spread it needs the loving witness of disciples of Jesus serving others, and the explicit sharing of the Good News. It can be argued that the Catholic Church in the United States is sorely lacking in that last part. The decline of numbers within the Church over the past few decades are

shocking. There were 1.1 million Catholic baptisms in 1965. In 2018 there were only 615,000... and the population today is almost twice as large! Marriages within the Catholic Church are down 66%. In 1970, almost a quarter of the US population was Catholic. Should current trends continue, that will shrink to 17- 18%. What is even more alarming is that those who identify as Catholics are rarely active. Of the estimated 70 million Catholics in the US, less than a quarter go to Mass weekly, with that number being as low as 10% for many parishes. Jesus said, “The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Though the Church is seeing abundant growth in other parts of the world, it is diminishing in the United States. This isn’t just a concern that our parishes will close. The real tragedy is that people do not know Jesus Christ, who made them, saves them, and loves them. They are being led astray by the lies of the world and following the wide path to destruction. How can they find their way without Jesus, who is “the way, the truth, and the life”? (John 14:6).

Hope in the Spirit

Though there are many reasons to despair over these statistics, we only need one reason to hope: the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has transformed more difficult cultures than the ones we find in the United States. He just needs people to say “yes” to him, as Mary did 2,000 years ago. Specifically, he needs you. The goal of these Discipleship Quads is that you would grow in your faith so that you can share it with others. Your questions this week are not about a specific section of Scripture, but a reflection on all of the scriptures and Church teachings you have prayed with over this past year. As you realize what the Holy Spirit has done in you, you can start to see how the Holy Spirit wants to continue to use you in passing on the faith to others. It will also help you realize why it might be the Lord’s will for you to start a Quad on your own.

A New Experience

You may think, “Why would I go through this process again? I’ve already read it all.” However, there are a number of reasons why starting another Discipleship Quad with different people will give you a new experience. First, the scriptures and doctrine that have been the focus of every session are the living Word of God. When we prayerfully reflect upon that Word, it always speaks in new ways. Second, your conversations with others will give you new insights on what each lesson is about. I’m confident that there were many times when someone in your Quad offered a new perspective on the topic, something that really blessed you. I’m also sure you’ve done that for others. With new people come new insights! Finally, the lessons will be different because you are different. As God continues to conform us more and more to his heart, we are able to see and hear things in an altogether new way.

Part of a Chain

As we continue our journey of faith, there are two things that are always true: you have something to learn, and you have something to share. Like people climbing a mountain who are tethered to each other, we climb this mountain of holiness together. Imagine if all of you decided to start new Quads. Your group of four would jump to a group of sixteen. If, in the next year, all those groups committed to new Quads, that number would jump to 64. Think of the lives that would be changed, the families that would be blessed. Think about getting together

five years from now with your original Quad and celebrating the fact that what started with four people could five years later become over 1,000 (1,024, to be exact)! If that sounds crazy, it is worth realizing that this is how Jesus did it. He wanted to save the world... so he spent most of his time with twelve men, and of that really spent time with three of them. The original Discipleship Quad was Jesus, Peter, James, and John. We only know the faith because they decided to go out and share it with others. Now it is your turn.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What struck you from the content of the lesson this week? 2. Why did you originally say “yes” to participating in a Discipleship Quad? 3. What, if any, fears or concerns did you have when you first started? 4. What was the part of being in a Quad that had the greatest impact on you? 5. Was it worth the time and energy you had to invest? If so, why? 6. Why would you recommend that someone else participate in a Discipleship Quad? If you started a Quad, who would you invite? 7. What hesitations or fears do you have in regard to starting a new Quad?

Scripture Reading

For those of you who are going to start a new Discipleship Quad, it might take four to six weeks to get one off the ground. We’d recommend not waiting longer than that. Or perhaps the Lord has revealed a different way for you to share your faith with others. No matter how you are answering the call to be a part of the Church’s mission to “go and make disciples,” one of the best books of Scripture to reflect on is the Book of Acts. You will read about how ordinary, sinful people were aflame with the power of the Holy Spirit and changed the world. You don’t need to finish it by next week! Just read from this book each day as you continue to discern about how God is calling you to share his Good News with the world.

Discipleship in Action: Starting a New Quad

Unless you were the Coordinator of this Discipleship Quad, this information will be new to you. It is also available in the document called the Discipleship Quad Overview, which is available with the Discipleship Quad resources at <https://steubenvilleconferences.com/discipleship-quads>. The information below is a condensed version of what you will find in the Overview document, so we would recommend that you spend some time reading through that document as well.

Pray - Once you have decided that you want to start a new Discipleship Quad, the next step is to pray about who you are called by God to invite. This may sound intimidating at first, but trust that God will lead you to the people he is preparing. God is not out to trick you or lead you astray. He wants others to come into a deeper relationship with him, so he will guide you. Ask God to place on your heart the names of people that he wants you to invite to join the Quad. Keep in mind that in order for people to commit to meeting weekly and sharing about their spiritual lives, they need to have the desire to grow in Christ. Make a list of every name that comes to you, without discriminating. Don’t overthink or analyze whether or not you really will invite each person to join the group; just write down their names. Once you have your list written down, ask God to give you clarity on which three people you should invite. As you read over the list of names, pay attention to the people’s names that stand out or stay on your mind;

this is a sign that they may be the people you should invite. Trust that God will guide you to three specific names from the list you have made. Don't underestimate the power of prayer. This is the most important step. It would also be good to discuss these names with the people with whom you participated in this Quad, not only to get their input, but to be sure you aren't inviting the same people!

Invite - Once convicted that you are called to invite a particular person to join your Quad, set up a time to talk with him or her. During this meeting you should:- Explain what a Discipleship Quad is by sharing your own experience and referencing the information in the Overview document. Be sure to share how it benefitted you personally. Share about why have you felt a desire to be the Coordinator of a Quad. Tell the person that you would like to invite him or her to join this Discipleship Quad. If you think this person will understand the power of prayer, share with him or her that you prayed and felt like God was asking you to extend an invitation. Once the person shows interest, review the Discipleship Quad Commitment together and be sure that he or she understands the level of commitment. Provide a copy of the Commitment (or send a copy via email) and ask him or her to consider joining you in this Discipleship Quad process. Share the link to download the Guidebook from steubenvilleconferences.com and give the person some time to read through the material (this, too, can be done in your follow-up email). The Guidebook is available to download for free on steubenvilleconferences.com. Assure the person that there is no pressure to say "yes." (The Quad only works when each person freely commits and has a desire to grow as a disciple.) If someone says "no," do not worry; God will provide another person. Sometimes people aren't in a place in their lives where they can make that commitment just yet, but you might be planting a seed in their heart for a future Quad. Ask for the person's email address and follow up your conversation with an email so he or she can see all that you talked about in writing (a template for this email is available in the Overview document).

Follow-up - Three to five days after sending the email, follow up with the person you invited to ask how he or she is feeling about joining the Quad. Discuss any concerns or hesitations that he or she may have. Remind this person that he or she is free to say "no," and that it is okay if this is not the right time to join a Quad. Once they have said "yes," there is an outline of the next steps in the Overview document. You will need to coordinate the best time and location for everyone to meet, and you will ensure they have the Guidebook downloaded in order to start preparing for your first gathering. You will also find more information on how to facilitate the ongoing Quad gatherings.

Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment 4

It was about 10 weeks ago that you completed and discussed the third Characteristics of a Disciple Self-Assessment as a personal reflection. The goal for this fourth and final Self Assessment is to read through the characteristics of a disciple, referencing your answers from Week 13, Week 22, and Week 33 in order to see your growth. Consider how you have grown and what further commitments you want to make in the areas of these. 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. This process of growing as a disciple of Jesus is a life-long process. We would encourage you to keep coming back to these characteristics of a disciple and continue to assess your growth in each area on a regular basis. Having a tool like this allows you to ensure that you do not grow lax and continue to challenge yourself throughout all various stages and seasons of your life. Here is the description of a disciple we are using for the Discipleship Quad program: 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/daughter of God 2. Has an active, daily prayer life 3. Regularly receives the sacraments 4. Is in fellowship with other disciples 5. Devotes his or her time to serving others 6. Shares the Gospel with those around him or her 7. Is obedient to what the Church teaches

Read the following descriptions of each characteristic and answer the questions.

1. Is rooted in the identity of being a son/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?

1. 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?

1. 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 the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How have you grown in living a sacramental life? How are you doing with attending Sunday Mass? How has your experience of attending Mass changed or been transformed? 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?

1. 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 through 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 every week 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? 1. 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)?

1. 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 disciples, 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 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?

1. Obedient to what the 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?

Reflection Question for Discussion at your next (and final) Quad gathering:

After doing this final and fourth Self-Assessment, what are the top two ways in which you've grown over this last year?

The Call to Discipleship: Discipleship Quad Gathering Outline

Opening Prayer (three minutes)

“God, thank you for this Discipleship Quad and gathering the four of us together! Thank you for all you’ve done in all our lives during this time. We take a moment to give you all the anxieties we have on our minds.” (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 sharing God’s love with others and any fears that may enter your heart when you consider sharing about Jesus. You also identified the top three or four people that come to mind when you think about those with whom you desire to share your faith. As you prayed about these things this week, what came to mind?

Reflection and Discussion (45-50 minutes)

1. What struck you from the content of the lesson this week?
2. Why did you originally say “yes” to participating in a Discipleship Quad?
3. What, if any, fears or concerns did you have when you first started?
4. What was the part of being in a Quad that had the greatest impact on you?
5. Was it worth the time and energy you had to invest? If so, why?
6. Why would you recommend that someone else participate in a Discipleship Quad? If you started a Quad, who would you invite?
7. What hesitations or fears do you have in regard to starting a new Quad?
8. After doing the final and fourth Self-Assessment, what are the top two ways in which you have grown over this last year?

Resolution and Commitment (five-10 minutes)

This is your last Discipleship Quad gathering. Although it may be tempting to keep meeting as this group of four people, we encourage you to intentionally stop meeting in this same format. It would be very difficult for someone to maintain two 90-minute meetings each week, and we want each of you to have the ability to start a new Discipleship Quad if that is what you feel like God is calling you to do. For those of you that do go on to start a new Discipleship Quad, we do recommend a rhythm of meetings for you to keep meeting with this group of people (your original Discipleship Quad). We suggest that you meet together with your original Quad once a month for four to six months after the new Quads start. This will give you the opportunity to

support each other while you start your new Quads. We have outlined those four to six months of meetings in a document available for download at our website. With all this said, we know that some of you have developed great friendships during this time. Keep supporting each other and keep connecting together for accountability. Continue to get together socially and check in with one another. And for sure, keep lifting each other up in prayer! One last note: Consider getting together for a celebratory lunch or dinner to commemorate the accomplishment that it is to complete this Discipleship Quad process.

Closing Prayer (three minutes)

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

On behalf of Franciscan University of Steubenville, we would like to thank you for joining us on this Discipleship Quad journey. It is our strongest desire that your time spent here has been not only a blessing to you, but to your family, community, and parish. We invite you

to both continue on to form another Discipleship Quad and to stay in touch with Franciscan University and all that it has to offer.

Information on the Steubenville Conferences can be found at steubenvilleconferences.com.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about anything relating to Discipleship Quads,

please reach out to us at discipleship@franciscan.edu.

May God continue to bless you on your journey of discipleship!

Matthew Cooke

9:47 PM Mar 6

Resolve

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