



In the Word

WITH BISHOP MEDLEY

YEAR TWO

A NINE-MONTH SMALL GROUP
SERIES BASED ON THE MASS
READINGS FOR THE FOURTH
SUNDAY OF THE MONTH

Acts
2:42

Content: Dr. Jeff Andrini

Copyeditor: Elizabeth Wong Barnstead

Layout: Sara Lewis

Acts 2:42 Logo: Amanda Shanks, Red Pixel Studios

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DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

McRaith Catholic Center | Office of the Bishop

Dear Acts 2:42 Participants,

As we enter our fourth year of our diocesan small group effort, Acts 2:42, I would like to thank those who have participated for all four years and am equally grateful to those who are just beginning this year. I have heard from some of our parish priests that the members of these groups have become more involved in parish life, and participants have told me that they appreciate hearing from myself and others through these sessions.

Our mission as a Church is given to us in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you." To simplify our mission, we might say, "Go, teach, and baptize." We strive to live this as a diocese, and we wish to help you live this out in your parish. As each of us enters our workplaces and communities, let us be conscious to share the Good News by our example in how we treat others. We are both students of God's word and called to teach by our example. Thank you for living the mission of Jesus in western Kentucky and all you do to build the witness of your parish community.

Acts 2:42 is a scripture we hear proclaimed during the Easter Season: "They devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, the communal life, the breaking of the bread, and prayer." Today, small groups across our diocese continue to live this out and find like-minded friends to share in life and faith. I encourage you to keep making participation in a small group a priority in your life. It has been proven to bear great fruit.

Please pray for me and be assured of my prayers for you.

Sincerely,

Bishop William F. Medley

Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky



The Gospel According to MATTHEW

UNDERSTANDING THE LITERARY FORM OF GOSPEL

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In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. 'For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.'

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 110

Modern Catholic biblical scholarship presents various genres of writing within the Bible that all Catholics are encouraged to understand and embrace in their discipleship. Lest the idea of "modern" cause any feelings of fear, anxiety, or frustration, it is important to understand what the Church teaches about the Bible.

While the 19th and 20th centuries were a rich season in Biblical studies internationally, the Catholic community was slow to embrace this work, choosing instead our traditional theological interpretation. However, the 1940's marked a crucial turning point characterized by a formal shift toward accepting modern historical-critical methods. In 1943, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical titled *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (Inspired by the Divine Spirit,) often called the Magna Carta of modern Catholic biblical studies. It encouraged scholars to use critical methods, such as investigating original languages, archeology, and the history of text formation in the scriptures.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 was an incredible learning opportunity that confirmed the need for these new critical methods and much has been learned about how the Old Testament came into existence from an oral, storytelling culture through this discovery. For example, the Scrolls provided critical evidence that profoundly changed how scholars view the composition of the Pentateuch. To solidify this new openness to scripture scholarship, Dei Verbum, one of the 16 documents from the Second Vatican Council, revolutionized it by validating the historical-critical method, encouraging the study of literary forms and affirming the interplay between divine inspiration and human authorship.

To understand the genre, Dei Verbum outlines a three-stage process of how the Gospels were formed. The first is the life and teaching of Jesus, meaning the actual word and deeds of Jesus during his historical ministry. The second

But since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation, without which Scripture would remain a dead letter. Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 111

stage is the Apostolic Preaching, meaning the oral accounts of Jesus. After the resurrection, the apostles handed on what Jesus had said and done, aided by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. They preached with a clearer understanding of who Jesus was, not just a teacher, but the Messiah and Son of God. The third stage focuses on the written Gospels. The sacred authors selected certain materials from the oral tradition, synthesized them, and adapted them to the specific needs and situation of their own particular communities. The Council emphasizes that in this process, the evangelists did not merely record history; they "told the truth about Jesus" in a way that would lead their specific audiences to faith (Dei Verbum 19).

World-renown, biblical scholar, Fr. Donald Senior, CP, frequently taught that the Gospels are best understood as theological portraits rather than chronological biographies. His approach complements the teaching of Vatican II by focusing on how the evangelists acted as both "historians" and "theologians." He stressed that the evangelists were not modern biographers.



The key aspects of the Gospel genre, according to Fr. Senior, include: 1) They are not modern biographies. He points out that the evangelists were not interested in writing a modern, objective life of Jesus that tracks his psychology or every chronological detail. They were not writing "history" in the 21st-century sense of the word. 2) They were community-centered. Because the evangelists were writing for specific, struggling communities, they highlighted different facets of Jesus' life to answer the specific pastoral needs of those people. For example, Mark wrote for a suffering community, while Matthew wrote for a community grappling with its Jewish heritage.

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 115

3) The "Good News" (Euangelion) he insists is that the very genre is defined by its purpose. The term "Gospel" means "Good News." The genre is meant to be a proclamation of salvation. The story of Jesus is told because it is the "Good News" that transforms the life of the reader or listener. 4) The Power of Memory, which means the Gospels are the product of the early Church's memory. They represent the Church's attempt to preserve the memory of Jesus so that future generations could encounter the same Christ that the first disciples knew. In short, both the Council and



scholars like Fr. Senior invite us to read the Gospels not as dusty historical archives, but as living, inspired testimonies that reveal the meaning of Jesus' life for the reader today.

As we reflect this year on the Gospel of Matthew for Year A and then beginning with a new liturgical year in Advent with Year B, focused on Mark's Gospel, we will learn to appreciate the Gospel genre and the message of Jesus as told through the eyes of these early evangelists.

REFLECTION

1. What implications might come from understanding the Gospels are not biographies?
2. Consider how we might tailor the message of Jesus to certain groups today.
3. In what ways is composition of the Old Testament different from the New Testament? Consider length of time in the writing for each.

It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgement.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 119



Session Overview

Each session will follow the same template, which is outlined here. The general flow will be listed for each session, but you can refer to these pages for descriptions on what each stage means as needed throughout the course of the year.



1. Gather

People's lives are busy and often chaotic. Gathering together is meant to be a peaceful moment to slow down, connect with others and check in to see how each person is doing.

2. Opening Prayer

Each session will begin with prayer. You can use the prayer provided or let the Holy Spirit lead your group. Remember to take time to pray for any intentions individuals may have on their heart.

3. God Sightings

Taking time to share life and faith is an important part of building community and being the body of Christ with and for one another. In our culture, sharing vulnerably or interpreting life through the eyes of faith, can be seen as something personal that should not be shared. But Christian community is different, and we need to create safe places to share our lives and faith with one another. It is also important to learn to say not just that "I will pray for you," but "can we pray right now for you?" After prayer think about how God has been at work in your life over the past month. Have you had any new beginnings, breakthroughs, or struggles in your life where you can see God's hand, or where you hope to see God's involvement? If you have been faced with difficulties and challenges, ask if the group can pray right then for it.

4. Reading & Discussion

The readings we will be using are those for the fourth Sunday of each month. There will be a short introduction for the group on scripture scholarship or the Liturgical year, followed by a few questions for discussion. Then read the scriptures and discuss them with the questions provided or other ideas that surface in the conversation.

5. Video

Bishop Medley will offer a reflection on the readings to take us deeper into our discipleship and transformation into a holy people of God. Discussion questions will be provided.

6. Closing Prayer

There is a prayer provided in the booklet, or you can lead a spontaneous prayer lead by the host leader or another group member.

7. Announcements

There will be time to share events happening in your parish and inviting the group to join. The Host Team can also share updates for any diocesan events happening in your area and inform the group of the next meeting date and time.

8. Social Time

Make time at the end to visit and enjoy each other's company. Some may need to leave soon after the announcements but others may enjoy sharing a dessert or snack together while visiting. As a courtesy remember to watch the room and ensure you are respecting any needs your host might have for clean up and departure.



GOD ALONE

Who sits on the throne of your heart?

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for the grace and freedom we have as your followers and as citizens of our great country. As we begin our Acts 2:42 small group this fall, help us to be open to the love and power of your Holy Spirit. May we grow in our relationship with you and one another as we learn about and share our faith. Give us eyes to see our lives from your perspective and a heart to choose well what we put in the center of our lives. Anoint our gathering and help us to experience your love. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) We make our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings (pg. 10) from this past month with each other.

In every Mass, according to the documents of Vatican II, we receive the Real Presence of Jesus in four distinct ways: through the gathered community, the priest, the Word, and the Eucharist. As we gather today to prepare for the Fourth Sunday of September, we reflect on the readings for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The message of Jesus in these readings is quite stunning today. In essence he is asking us, "Am I on the throne of your heart or is it something else?" If we are truly united to Christ, our lives will reflect God's love and perspective to all. And if we say "no" to God through our inaction but still seek to put him on the throne of our hearts each day, thankfully we will be transformed over the course of our lives to be like Jesus. What are the other things that we can place on the throne of our hearts? Our spouse, career, money, ourselves: of course, there are so many things, but God calls us to abundance in Christ, and this is only realized by having Jesus on the throne of our hearts.

We are in Year A, which focuses on Matthew's Gospel. As noted earlier in this booklet, Gospel is a specific genre of writing that highlights the "Theological Portraits" of Jesus from various perspectives. Today's Gospel, Matthew 21:28-32, is a prime example of how Matthew tailored his Gospel to resonate with—and challenge—a Jewish audience. His primary goal was to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures, often highlighting the friction between Jesus and the religious establishment.



Here is how several specific verses in this reading reflects a Jewish context. Matthew explicitly identifies the audience as the chief priests and elders of the people. These were the elite custodians of Jewish law and temple life. In a Jewish context, these figures represented the "Second Son"—those who claimed to say "Yes" to God's Covenant but failed to act on it. By addressing them directly, Matthew frames the parable as a critique of the current Jewish leadership's stewardship of the faith.

The "vineyard" is a deeply rooted Old Testament metaphor for the nation of Israel. By using this setting, Jesus (and Matthew) isn't just talking about agriculture; he is using a "shorthand" that any first-century Jew would recognize as a symbol for their spiritual responsibility to God. Jesus mentions that John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness, which was the central pursuit of Jewish religious life—the adherence to God's will and the Law. Matthew highlights that even though John lived a life of asceticism and Torah-adherence, which the Pharisees should have respected, they still rejected him. This points to a failure of the very Jewish standards they claimed to uphold.

The parable hinges on a father's command to his sons. In Jewish culture, parental obedience was not just a family matter; it was a divine commandment. By showing the religious son disobeying his father, Jesus is highlighting a breach of the Ten Commandments, making the sting of the parable even sharper for a Jewish listener.

Lastly, Matthew often deals with the "rejection/acceptance" theme: the idea that those expected to inherit the Kingdom (the religious leaders) are being bypassed by the

outcasts" (tax collectors and prostitutes) who actually repented. To a Jewish audience, tax collectors were seen as traitors to the Roman occupation. By stating these "sinners" enter the Kingdom first, Jesus is redefining what it means to be a "true Israelite"—it is based on repentance and action, not just lineage or office.

Are you and I like the first son, that feels justified, then repents and puts Christ back in the center of his life and receives grace or like the second that says yes, but through inaction and disobedience simply keeps the status quo in his spiritual life?

REFLECTION

1. What are things that have been on the throne of your life in the past?
2. How do you strive to keep God on the throne of your heart?
3. What difference does this make in your life?

IN ESSENCE HE
IS ASKING US,
AM I ON THE
THRONE OF
YOUR HEART OR
IS IT SOMETHING
ELSE?



1ST READING | EZEKIEL 18:25-28

Thus says the LORD: You say, "The LORD's way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair? When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

2ND READING | PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5

Brothers and sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others. Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL | MATTHEW 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

REFLECTION

- Name one thing that strikes you in these readings.
- How might we become less selfish?
- What is a message you see in this Gospel?



BISHOP’S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley’s reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of your Living Word and the many and varied ways your love and life have been communicated to human beings throughout our history. As your missionary disciples, may we always have the grace to be humble and to trust you as the ultimate source of our life and happiness. We pray for all the other Acts 2:42 groups across our diocese this month and as we celebrate Mass on the fourth Sunday of this month, may we be more prepared to respond to your leading and call in our lives. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



NOTES

DISCIPLESHIP

A Call to Witness

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we gather today seeking more of you in our daily lives. We are forever grateful for your many blessings and for drawing us together in this small faith group. We lift up the needs of each person in our group, including those not present. As we turn over the difficulties in our lives and trust in your provision, guidance and mercy, help us to see the ways you are working around us and to witness to others about your goodness and love for all. Bless our world with a greater knowledge of you that all may come to know your loving presence. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In Jesus' name, Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

We again see Matthew speaking to the Jewish community. Instead of expressing the 631 Jewish laws that the religious leaders held up as the model of living the law of God, he highlights the simplicity of Jesus' message and challenges the followers of Jesus to see their faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of their Jewish faith. He is the Messiah that has come for Israel.

In the Gospel genre, Matthew is not as focused on the Gentile community as Luke's Gospel is but rather is more concerned about helping the Jewish community understand and accept Jesus as the Messiah. While we do not fully understand the life and worldview of our early Jewish brothers and sisters, we can nonetheless understand the message of Jesus as proclaimed

by Matthew's Gospel, as an outreach to the Jewish community to invite them to a deeper understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

The readings for the thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time call us to live lives that embody God's love to the world. In Catholic culture in the mid-20th century, it was common for Catholics to not read the Bible. In fact, one day after high school, I stopped by my grandparents' home and Grandma asked why I was carrying a Bible. I told I was reading it for our Bible study before school. She said, "Does your father know you are reading it?" I responded, "Yeah, why?" Too which she went on to tell me that she was always taught not to read the Bible, that was for the priest to read and tell us what it meant. I told her that my dad read and highlighted in his Bible and she couldn't believe it. As Catholics today, we are challenged to realize that each of us by virtue of our baptism is called to be a missionary disciple. Jesus is the teacher and we are the students.

EACH OF US
BY VIRTUE OF
OUR BAPTISM
IS CALLED TO
BE A
MISSIONARY
DISCIPLE.

Like the beautiful lesson we hear on Holy Thursday, when Jesus commands us to wash the feet of others, discipleship is about doing what the Master does.

Therefore, when we read the Bible in our home or hear it proclaimed at Mass, we are encouraged to be open to the Holy Spirit and allow this Spirit to propel us to do just as Jesus did. We are to be witnesses to the plan, purpose and power of God in our daily lives. As we leave Mass, we are entering the mission field. All the places we go, from our homes, workplaces, family, and friends, to wider community involvement, are places we are meant to witness to the love and teachings of Christ. Through prayer, the sacraments, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, doing what he teaches us to do.

REFLECTION

1. Name a way that God has called you to serve others?
2. Consider other groups of people in society today and how we might tailor message of Jesus to their perceived needs and ideas.
3. What feeds you in your desire to live as a disciple of Jesus?





1ST READING | EXODUS 22:20-26

Thus says the LORD: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans. "If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate."

2ND READING |

1 THESSALONIANS 1:5c-10

Brothers and sisters: You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

GOSPEL | MATTHEW 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

REFLECTION

- What characteristic of God are mentioned in the first reading?
- What is one example of ways the Thessalonians became imitators of Paul, and how can this encourage us today?
- Name a key message of this Gospel.



BISHOP’S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley’s reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, as we close our gathering today, we are grateful for the gift of your presence and each person gathered here. As we continue to reflect on your word, stir us to greater openness to how you want to work in and through our lives. May all that we say and do reflect your love to the world. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In Jesus’ name, Amen.



NOTES

CATHOLIC ACTION

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Creator, you created the world out of love and brought into being humanity. We are creatures of mind, body, and spirit and you have revealed yourself to us most fully in Jesus. Teach us to give over our mind, body and soul to you, that we might live in right relationship with ourselves and all creation. Help us to come to know your love in our mind and heart. Teach us to be fully human by being fully connected to your divinity and to lead lives that reflect your love to the world. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) We make our prayer in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

The amazing news of the Gospel is that we are loved, and this cannot just be an intellectual understanding, but needs to be experiential. Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, tells a story about a retreat he went on with a French priest named Fr. Henri Caffarel. Fr. Caffarel was a renowned teacher of prayer and told the priests gathered that the entire retreat would be dedicated to one task: "sitting in silence until they could hear God say to them, "I love you." Henri Nouwan is another spiritual giant of the 20th century and explains that our primary spiritual task is to let the truth of our "belovedness" settle into our bones.

We humans are restless creatures and as Americans are prone to a "get it done" mentality. We find it hard to sit in silence with ourselves and take time for Sabbath in our lives; rather, we like to keep busy, productive and in control. The spiritual life depends on quite the

opposite. It is a letting go and a letting God control, lead and instill in us the kingdom of God vision of life.

Silence is an important spiritual discipline in the Christian life and there are many ways to practice this. One very powerful way is through praying before the Blessed Sacrament, which has been renewed in our time in the practice of Adoration. Individuals encounter God in a personal and powerful manner in Adoration. We bring our praise, gratitude and chaotic lives into Jesus' presence and ask him to help us sort it all out. We are often touched powerfully and can see God's love and spirit leading in our healing and guiding us to abundant life. However, Eucharistic Adoration must lead to Eucharistic action!

In our readings today, we hear about a loving God in the image of a shepherd and are told that in Christ all are brought to life, where God will be all in all. It is a wonderful vision of order, meaning and purpose.

Our Gospel today is addressed to Christian disciples. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary says that "Discipleship is understood in a bold way as identical with care of the needy" (pg. 669). So, as in last month's Gospel from Matthew, we are again reminded that the Jewish community had often over-emphasized the law but missed the true meaning of loving God first and allowing God's love to overflow through us into the world. The commentary goes on to say that Matthew, "Identifies service to the needy with the love of Christ" (ibid).

We are not meant to simply receive extensive

spiritual calories only for ourselves through prayer, Mass, scripture reading, etc. Instead, these calories are meant to be expended through corporal and spiritual works of mercy. The Catholic Church serves the world in incredible ways. How do you and your parish community contribute to these efforts?

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION MUST LEAD TO EUCCHARISTIC ACTION!

REFLECTION

1. In what ways has silence been a pathway to God for you?
2. Does this message of Jesus resonate with his other teachings?
3. Name a way that knowing God's love has led you to serve others.





1ST READING |

EZEKIEL 34:11-12, 15-17

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly. As for you, my sheep, says the Lord GOD, I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.

2ND READING |

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-26, 28

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

GOSPEL | **MATTHEW 25:31-46**

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

REFLECTION

- Name one takeaway from these readings.
- How have you experienced God as a shepherd?
- What actions share Christ's love and lead to abundant/eternal life?



BISHOP'S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley's reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you for visiting your people in our gathering today, Lord. You lavish your loving presence upon us and tenderly care for every need. As we are filled with your love and cared for so generously, let us in return generously share our blessings with others. May our love for you be lived out in our love for humanity and all creation. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE FAVOR OF GOD

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord, we pause at the beginning of our session to be reminded that you are with us and that your favor is upon those who love and follow you. As we continue to prepare during the season of Advent, make us especially grateful for your countless blessings and aware of how we can share those blessings with others. Come Holy Spirit and help us to experience your presence as we gather in God's name. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

The Church has begun a new liturgical year as we celebrate the Advent Season and move from Year A, focused on Matthew's Gospel, to Year B, where the focus is on Mark's Gospel. However, during the major seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, the lectionary often departs from the Gospel of the year to use passages that are more thematically appropriate for the specific mystery being celebrated. Mark's Gospel was the first to be written in about 70 AD and contains no infancy narrative, no mention of the birth in Bethlehem, the shepherds, or the childhood of Jesus; it provides no material that illustrates the domestic life of the Holy Family.

Therefore, the Feast of the Holy Family this month uses the Gospel of Luke, written 10-15 years after Mark's Gospel, which tells a fuller story of the Holy Family. The Gospel of Luke holds a distinct place in Catholic theology, often referred to as the Gospel of mercy. Written by a Gentile physician and companion of St. Paul, it emphasizes the universality of salvation and the compassion of Christ. Unlike Matthew's audience of the Jewish people, Luke wrote to emphasize that Jesus came for everyone, not just those of the Jewish faith. For instance, Luke's genealogy traces Jesus' back to Adam (the father of all humanity) rather than just Abraham, as in Matthew's Gospel. Both Luke and Matthew's Gospels were written between 80-85 AD utilizing Mark's Gospel and a source called "Q" often referred to as the sayings of Jesus. Again, in the genre of Gospel, each evangelist "told the truth about Jesus" in a way that would lead their specific audiences to faith (Dei Verbum 19). And this meant including



further details to tell a clearer story, in this case of Jesus birth and his family life, remembering that these are theological portraits rather than chronological biographies.

In St. Mother Teresa's 1979 Nobel Prize acceptance speech she was asked what people could do to promote world peace, she responded: "If we really believe, we will begin to love. And if we love, naturally, we will try to do something. First in our own home, our next-door neighbor, in the country we live, in the whole world." In the wisdom literature of our first reading from the book of Sirach, the author, "Ben Sira was a theological pioneer in integrating biblical and secular traditions" (International Biblical Commentary, pg. 925). Written approximately in 180 BC, we find many beautiful reflections on life, friendship, love and happiness. Familiar with Jewish law, he presents a very earthy and practical portrayal of a life well lived.

For our purposes today, he presents the importance of parents. Lest we wander too far into a conversation about why the mother is not more prominent, it is helpful to understand a term by scripture scholars called parallelism. While the passage begins by addressing "father and mother" equally, scripture often pivots to focus on the "father" as the representative head of the household in the ancient Near Eastern context. However, in Hebrew parallelism, the "father" in one line often serves as a poetic stand-in for both parents mentioned in the opening.

Today's Gospel highlights the ritual duties of Jewish parents and expresses that "the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." The favor of God is upon all who live the teachings of

THE FAVOR OF GOD IS UPON ALL WHO LIVE THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS...

Jesus, especially those mentioned in our second reading from the book of Colossians. When we "put on" these kingdom values of compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness and love, by spending time with the Trinity in prayer every day, our lives begin to look like our teacher, Jesus, and the Spirit equips us to live a life of discipleship.

REFLECTION

1. How is it helpful to see the different ways the Gospel writers are speaking to their audience?
2. Why is the family such an important focus for peace in the world?
3. How can the Spirit transform our values and equip us to be faithful disciples?



1ST READING | SIRACH 3:2-6, 12-14

God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and, when he prays, is heard. Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother. My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life; kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt of your sins —a house raised in justice to you.

2ND READING | COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

GOSPEL | LUKE 2:22, 39-40

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.



REFLECTION

- How have you experienced the wisdom of the first reading in your life?
- How does the teaching in this Letter to the Colossians ring true in your life?
- What do you think the early life of Jesus was like in his home?



BISHOP'S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley's reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we ask for the grace to love our families with your very love. Send forth your Holy Spirit upon our parents, siblings, children, grandchildren and extended family members that they might come to know you a little more through our witness and love. Anoint our Christmas gatherings with your peace and help us to point others to the real purpose of this holy season. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



NOTES

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NOW IS THE TIME

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we long to be in union with you and your will for our lives. Through our study and conversation in our gathering, please stir in our hearts and expand our faith in your love and your teachings. Equip us to be more knowledgeable about how you lived and to imitate your actions in our daily lives. Through the Gospels writers, strengthen us to understand you and your will for the world. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

The Christmas Season has come to an end with the Feast of the Baptism of Lord, and we have a short period of Ordinary Time before the Lenten Season. In general, Ordinary Time focuses on Jesus' public ministry and teachings. The readings for our reflection today are for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time and begin with the Book of Jonah.

The Bible is a complex book made up of 73 books written over approximately 1000 years. Rather than a single book, it is a library of books, which scripture scholarship helps us to understand the complexity of the writing and discern various genres and messages within. One example is the genre of Gospel, which we have been learning about in this study. Today, we have another example in our first reading from the Book of Jonah.

"Critical scripture scholarship," which is normative in the Catholic Church, "has rightly abandon the attempt to treat the book of Jonah



as history" (The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1990, pg. 580). Instead, it is a didactic story, which is intended to teach a lesson. In this case, according to the New American Bible's introduction to this book, "Jonah stands for a narrow and vindictive mentality, all too common among the Jews of that period. Because they were the chosen people, a good many of them cultivated an intolerant nationalism which limited the mercy of God to their nation... It is a parable of mercy, showing that God's threatened punishments are but the expression of a merciful will which moves all people to repent and seek forgiveness" (pg. 1007). It is a universal message of God's mercy to all, and Jonah's message is clear: repent for God's judgement is coming.

One of the main teachings of Jesus throughout the scriptures is metanoia, which is a change of heart and a reorientation. It is a decision to stop

viewing the world through the lens of self and start viewing it through the lens of the divine. His message was offered to all and he invited people by saying, “the kingdom of God is at hand.”

In our first reading, we hear a didactic story of an entire city that responded to God message to repent and change. The second reading makes it clear that time is limited, and it calls for radical discipleship, which calls us to daily intimacy with God. And like the disciples in the Gospel, Jesus invites us to repent and believe in the Gospel, and to become active in his ministry to the world.

As surprising as this is, today is the only month in our study that we will hear from Mark’s Gospel even though we are in Year B. Once we get through Lent and Easter, Mark’s Gospel will be proclaimed more regularly. As a reminder, Mark’s Gospel was the first to be written and it the shortest of all the Gospels. He begins with the baptism of Jesus and gets right into his public ministry.

REFLECTION

1. Does scripture scholarship challenge your faith in anyway?
2. How and when have you experienced metanoia in your life?
3. Name one thing you can be intentional about in this new year to grow in intimacy with God.

IT CALLS FOR
RADICAL
DISCIPLESHIP,
WHICH CALLS
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1ST READING | JONAH 3: 1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD'S bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed," when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

2ND READING | 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

GOSPEL | MARK 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

REFLECTION

- What strikes you about today's readings?
- The Early Christians thought the world was ending soon. How did this affect their faith?
- In what ways is "the Kingdom of God at hand" today? Share some examples.



BISHOP'S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley's reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, you call us to follow you and to be witnesses of your love in this world. Sometimes we feel so unworthy, unqualified, and even ineffective at making your kingdom present in our midst. Help us to experience your kingdom by being intentional about growing in our relationship with you and our knowledge of your values and grace. Thank you for this gathering of such wonderful people and bless our efforts at following you. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In Jesus' name. Amen.



NOTES

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INTELLECTUAL AND EXPERIENTIAL FORMATION

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we long to be in union with you and your will for our lives. Through our study and conversation in our gathering, please stir in our hearts and expand our faith in your love and your teachings. Equip us to be more knowledgeable about how you lived and to imitate your actions in our daily lives. Through the Gospels writers, strengthen us to understand you and your will for the world. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

Fr. Raymond E. Brown S.S., one of the preeminent Johannine scholars of the 20th century, famously described the Gospel of John as having a high Christology compared to the low Christology of the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Fr. Brown argued that while the Synoptic Gospels moved from the humanity of Jesus toward his divinity, John begins with his eternal divinity and views his entire earthly ministry through that lens. Written approximately between 90-100 AD, it was most likely the latest book written in the New Testament.

Although the book is written in the genre form of gospel, the audience and context are very different than the Synoptics. While John is believed to have heavily influenced the writing, Fr. Brown, and other scholars, argue that it was a brilliant student and/or follower of the beloved disciple and then a later redactor adding the prologue and the final chapter. The audience was Jewish-Christians who lived near Ephesus and their specific needs were around their excommunication from local synagogues and the need for definitive teaching about

...WE TOO NEED
BOTH
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EXPERIENTIAL
FORMATION IN
OUR FAITH.



Jesus. The high Christology presented a deeply theological picture of Jesus, which provided them with a new identity centered on being children of God and provided meaning for being separated from the Jewish community. Today and for the next two months, we hear from the Gospel of John because of the Lenten and Easter Seasons.

To flesh out how John's Gospel is speaking to this specific community, let us take the story of the woman at the well. For the reader in late 90's AD, this story served as a survival manual. It gave them: 1) Identity- You are not defined by the synagogue leaders, but by the living water Jesus gives. 2) Access- You don't need a specific building to reach God; you have the Spirit. 3) Mission- Like the Samaritan women in Samaria, it was about the validity of the Johannine community's existence outside the walls of traditional Judaism. A couple other important take aways from this story are that the community saw that Jesus prioritized personal faith and revelation over institutional belonging. If Jesus could embrace a Samaritan woman, he could certainly embrace the Jewish-Christians who had been cast out for his sake. Another deeper reality for the audience of this Gospel is that the synagogue authorities relied on the tradition, lineage, and institutional authority. John's audience was being taught that a direct, personal encounter with the Word was superior to any institutional stamp of approval. Their excommunication was actually an invitation to move from a religion of "what they were told" to a religion of "what they experienced."

The Word of God speaks in many varied and powerful ways to all people. The four Gospels are each an example of how the writers worked to deliver a message from God that the audience needed to hear. And just like the

experience of this late First Century community, we too need both intellectual and experiential formation in our faith. It must be both and, not one or the other.

As we prepare for the First Sunday of Lent this month, we begin by reflecting on the question, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" The Lenten season provides us with multiple ways to reflect on this question and make amends in our relationship with God and others. God provides for our every need, and we can trust in God's love and care, but we need to take time to reflect on our lives and examine where we are off track in our discipleship. We are reminded in our second reading, that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us and that Christ died for us.

REFLECTION

1. In your life experience, have you experienced a shift in Catholic culture from a purely intellectual faith in God to include an experiential faith? How is this helpful?
2. How does understanding the audience help understand the message and how does our message change for the different audiences we come in contact with today?
3. What are the opportunities this Lent to reflect on our relationship with Christ?



1ST READING | EXODUS 17:3-7

In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? a little more and they will stone me!" The LORD answered Moses, "Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink." This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

2ND READING | ROMANS 5:1-2, 5-8

Brothers and sisters: Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

GOSPEL | JOHN 4:5-15, 19B-26, 39A, 40-42

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" —For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.— Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father

seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.” Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him. When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

REFLECTION

- Name a time in your life when you questioned if God was with you.
- In the previous examples, when you look back, can you see God’s hand guiding you?
- Share an example of “living water” in your life?



BISHOP’S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley’s reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, help us to always find streams of living water in our small group and wider parish community. May our faith attract others to greater awareness of your love and mercy. And may you help us to receive the Holy Spirit and be changed more and more by your loving presence this Lent. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.



NOTES

A WAY OF LIFE THAT WORKS!



OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, we gather and are so aware of all the worries, chaos, and frustrations of our personal lives and throughout our world. We long for your peace and renewal in our lives and ask that as we celebrate the Triduum, we would experience a time of mental, physical and emotional healing for us and our families. Like Mary Magdalen, help us to hear you and recognize you in our daily lives. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

The three-day Great Feast of the Church is upon us this month! The celebration of the Pascal Mystery: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in which we are invited into the communion of the Trinity, is celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. There is nothing more central to our faith than the message of Easter!

In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.” And further, that “Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach and testify.” We are called as members of the Catholic Church and disciples of Jesus to realize our baptismal identity as missionary disciples. We are to testify with our lives that God is love and Jesus is the fullest revelation of God. And that we have a way of life that works!

In the second reading for Easter Sunday from the Letter to the Colossians, Paul affirms that the “spiritual renewal of the human person

occurs through contact in baptism with the person of Christ... True Christian asceticism (which is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence, self-discipline and the renunciation of worldly pleasures to pursue spiritual, religious, or intellectual goals) consists in the conquering of personal sins and the practice of love of neighbor in accordance with the standard set by Christ" (New American Bible, pg. 1267). Sounds good, right?

The Gospel then opens us up to the message of Easter Sunday. We read how Mary Magdalen, Simon Peter and John go to the tomb. Peter sees and believes, but they did not fully understand, and the men return to the others. Mary stayed at the tomb and in the following verses after today's reading, verses 16-18, we hear how she came to know Christ in the resurrection. She sees a man she thinks is a gardener and says, "where have they taken the body." Jesus says to her, "Mary." And immediately, Mary says, "Rabbouni," which is often translated, my great teacher or my master. Jesus tells her to return to her brothers and announce the good news. She does so and says, "I have seen the Lord!"

The question for us is, have we seen the Lord? Like Mary, have we sought the Lord with our whole hearts and longed to know the peace and presence of God? In her sorrow, confusion and unbelief, Jesus met her and wants to meet you and I each day on our life's journey. The Catholic/Christian life is a call for us to be hidden in Christ. To live lives not on our own knowledge or strength, but to be intimately connected to the divinity of God and live lives rooted in God's will and anointing. Are we fully there yet? Of course not, as we never will be fully there in this life, but are we striving for ongoing transformation and renewal rooted in

the heart of our amazing God? When a human being experiences a living relationship with God, they are witnesses that we Christians have a way of life that works.

REFLECTION

1. What is your favorite part of the three-day Great Feast of the Church?
2. Share at time in your life that you knew God was real and leading you in life.
3. Is there some way to make a renewed effort in your spiritual life during the Easter Season to be open to God's leading and anointing of your life?

ARE WE STRIVING
FOR ONGOING
TRANSFORMATION
AND RENEWAL
ROOTED IN THE
HEART OF OUR
AMAZING GOD?



Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

REFLECTION

- Name one thing that strikes you in these Easter readings.
- Like the early disciples, what are some things God expects of us today?
- How did Easter change the disciples?



BISHOP'S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley's reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear resurrected Lord, we thank you for your witness, love and personal sacrifice for humanity. Treated and crucified like a criminal, you lived a blameless, self-less life of service and showed us how to live in your kingdom. As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we ask for the power of the Resurrection to be made manifest in our lives, that your Church might lift you up and you might draw the world to yourself. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.



NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WORTHY IN CHRIST

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, teach us to see ourselves as you see us. You delight in your creation and in each human person and long to be in union with us. So often our own feelings of unworthiness keep us from coming to you in our need. As we hear the witnesses of the Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, stir in us a boldness and zeal to receive your love and share it with others. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) We make our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

When we say Catholic guilt, what comes to mind? It is a term used to describe a persistent sense of remorse or inadequacy that some Catholics have grown up with and may have some positive aspects as well. In healthy devotion to God, we are motivated by love or values. It brings a sense of peace or purpose, allows one to tolerate ambiguity, and focuses on the big picture of faith. Whereas excessive guilt or scrupulosity is often motivated by fear, brings a sense of exhaustion and terror, demands 100% certainty, and focuses on microscopic details of faith.

In some ways, these negative tendencies have been a part of our Catholic culture, and we must relearn a fuller truth about God. Why is it that Ash Wednesday is one of the most attended non-obligation liturgies of the entire

year? In part, because Catholics know that we are in need of God's mercy, but the attitude that we are not worthy can lead to a somewhat twisted sense of our true nature.

The spirituality of imperfection is a framework that emphasizes finding meaning and connection within our flaws and limitations, rather than the pursuit of an unattainable ideal. We acknowledge that to be human is to be "not God" and this is a path to authentic living and deeper intimacy with our loving Creator. A core of this spirituality and true discipleship is rooted in the power of vulnerability. Rather than seeing weakness as something to be hidden, vulnerability is realized as a bridge to connection. When we admit our struggles, we allow others to do the same, creating a shared space of empathy and mutual support.

While the 40-day Lenten Season is an important time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, Catholics can benefit greatly from leaning into the 50-day Easter season, where we realize that the main message is not about our unworthiness, but instead, about the fact that we are made worthy through Christ.



In our first reading from the Book of Acts, we hear that Barnabas stands up for Saul and says, "He has seen the Lord." As if to say, Saul is a changed person. God has touched him and transformed his life and perspective; we can trust that he knows that it is only through God that he is worthy.

The second reading from the First Letter of John, stresses the call to love and the source of this love, which is our belief in the name of Jesus the Christ. And finally, in John's Gospel, we are invited to understand the intimacy we are invited into through Jesus.

In the Christian life, we are not the focus. God's love for us and invitation to communion with the Trinity is the greatest gift this side of eternity. Of course, you and I are not worthy. We are creatures. It is only in acknowledging the Creator and living in relationship with God, such as a vine and branch are connected, that we have life in abundance. The good news is that we are not worthy, but through Christ we are made worthy. All praise, honor and glory goes to God and our lives will bear abundant fruit if/when we put Christ in the center of everything.

REFLECTION

1. What has been your experience with Catholic guilt? In what ways is it helpful and other ways not?
2. What is the Spirituality of Imperfection getting at?
3. How does Christ make us worthy? What is our response?

THE GOOD NEWS
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This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

42

GOSPEL | JOHN 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

REFLECTION

- What do you appreciate about the readings from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season?
- How might we increase our confidence in God?
- What are some spiritual practices that help you remain connected to the vine of Jesus?



| BISHOP'S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley's reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, you are the vine grower: Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Grant us the gift of your Holy Spirit that we might know how to stay connected to Jesus and experience the fruit of living in union with you. Anoint our lives with the fruits and power of your Holy Spirit and help us to make present your kingdom on earth. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) In Jesus name. Amen.

OUR MISSION & THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit. As we prepare today, to reflect on the readings for Pentecost, please make your presence known among us and anoint our time with your peace. We long for your peace in our hearts and surrender to you all that is holding us back from living as missionary disciples in our lives. Meet us where we are and equip us with your power to change for the better. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.

Take some time to share God sightings from this past month with each other.

Have you ever been asked if you were saved? The Catholic answer is, "I was saved at my Baptism, I am being saved each day, and I hoped to be saved in the end." We have received the Holy Spirit at our Baptism, and it was stirred up through our Confirmation. However, it is said that the Holy Spirit is the least understood person of the Trinity and we each need to learn how to connect with and be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Remember John's Gospel is the latest to be written of the four Gospels and was specifically written to the Johannian community that was experiencing isolation, rejection and wondering how they would move into the future without the Jewish community. Therefore, the writing offers a deeper theological message regarding the Holy Spirit and shows how this early

Christian community can carry on the work of Jesus.

Jesus told the disciples that "it is much better for you that I go. If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you... When he comes, however, being the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth" (John 16:7,13). John is the only Gospel writer to use the term "Paraclete" to describe the Spirit as a helping presence, counselor, or legal advocate, who comes alongside believers. Being equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit is an essential aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. We might know what Jesus would do, but it is the Spirit that gives us the power and grace to do it. We must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit in our daily lives and pray to be fully immersed in the communion of the Trinity.

"IT IS MUCH BETTER FOR YOU THAT I GO. IF I FAIL TO GO, THE PARACLETE WILL NEVER COME TO YOU, WHEREAS IF I GO, I WILL SEND HIM TO YOU."

Our Old Testament reading teaches the Hebrews to “Fix in your heart that the Lord is God.” There is no other. In the Book of Romans we are told, “the Spirit bears witness... that we are children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” And in Matthew’s Gospel, we are told to “go, teach and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and know that I am with you always.” We see the ongoing revelation of God through the scriptures, and can be so grateful that in Jesus, we have the fullest revelation of God.

The mission of our Church is to proclaim the saving love of God to the world. As baptized members of this Church, God is depending on each of us to seek the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and to learn to be empowered disciples of Jesus making present the kingdom of God in all we do and say: Come Holy Spirit!

REFLECTION

1. How have you responded to the question “Are you saved?”
2. How have you grown in your awareness of the Holy Spirit?
3. Is there anything that you and/or your parish can do to be more fully empowered by the Spirit to live the mission of Jesus?





DEUTERONOMY 4:32-34, 39-40

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Brothers and sisters: For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

GOSPEL | MATTHEW 28: 16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they all saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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."

REFLECTION

- Name a way that following God’s commands can lead to abundant life.
- What does a “spirit of adoption” mean to you?
- What does the Great Commission in today’s Gospel mean for us today?

 | BISHOP’S REFLECTION

Bishop Medley will offer a video reflection on the readings. Additional questions may be provided in the monthly agenda, but in general you might focus on the following:

- What did you learn from Bishop Medley’s reflection?
- What questions do you have or are you wondering about?
- What is something that God is teaching you through these scriptures?

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, we gather in your name and ask for the anointing of your Holy Spirit that we might be changed and truly live the mission of our diocese to: “Go, make, teach.” Please bless all the priests, deacons, religious and laity of our diocese and set us on fire with your love to live your mission. For what else shall we pray? (Pause for intentions.) Amen.

 | NOTES

ALWAYS BE READY TO SHARE

1 Peter 3:15 exhorts us to “Venerate the Lord, that is, Christ, in your hearts. Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully.”

Wow! Like the evangelists that wrote the Gospels, you and I are commissioned by God to always be ready to share our “Why” for being followers of Jesus. And instead of having one way that we do this, we need to develop a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to speak through us. God gives us wisdom, as well, through our life experience and will often set up encounters for us to meet others who have gone through similar life experiences. Therefore, when we share our story with others, it might resonate with them and like the Gospel writers, we can target our message to each person/audience we meet. This happens best when we pray for others and look for an opportunity to share what God is putting on our hearts about what the other person might need.

This is exactly what our “Walk with One” training does, that we developed following the National Eucharistic Congress, where the United States Catholic Bishops asked us to share this concept in every parish of our diocese. Has your parish hosted this two-hour training yet? Let’s connect and diocesan personnel can come and share it with your parish at no cost.

Remember to always share your story with gentleness and respect! Here’s another diocesan workshop for your parish, titled “Tell a Better Story.” Share your faith it in a manner

that brings hope, joy and helps people to just take one small step toward Jesus and let God lead the person on a lifelong journey of renewal!

The Office of Evangelization & Discipleship can tailor these and other workshops to the needs of your parish. Contact Jeff Andrini for more information (details below)

Always be ready to share the hope you have in Christ and never be ashamed of what God has done in your life. In fact, your story might speak to someone in a manner that scripture never has in their life. Be ready! Look for ways to share the good news of God’s love and blessings in your life with others. And believe me, you will be amazed as where God takes you and the adventure that life can be when we more fully open to the Holy Spirit in our lives and recognize that we were baptized into a mission... You and I are missionaries to a hurting world and it starts in our own families! God bless you and yours!



Jeff Andrini

Dr. Jeff Andrini
Director Office of Evangelization
270-683-1545, Ext. 360 or
jeff.andrini@pastoral.org

OTHER RESOURCES

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Prentice Hall, 1990

The International Biblical Commentary, Liturgical Press, 1998

The Catholic Study Bible Third Edition, Oxford Press, 2016 (This is an excellent Bible, which has a 500 page commentary included for in-depth study)

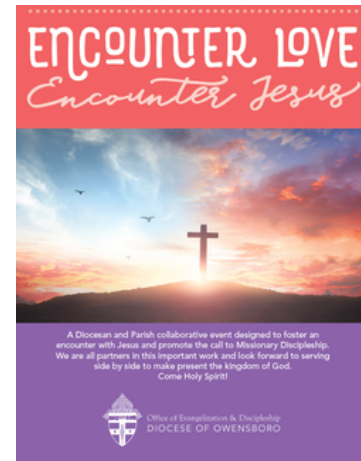
An Introduction to New Testament Christology, By Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Paulist Press, 1994

Understanding the Bible- A Catholic Guide to Applying God's Word to Your Life Today, by Fr. Jeffrey Kirby, STD, Our Sunday Visitor, 2022

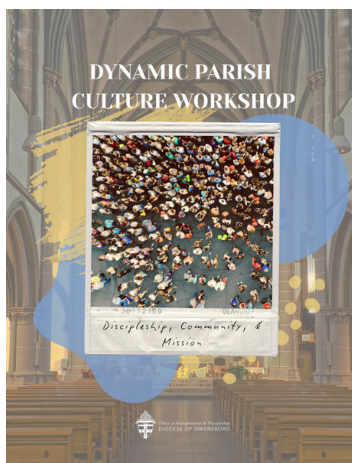
The Office of Evangelization & Discipleship can bring these trainings to your parish at no cost!



The “Walk with One” is a very simple tool to help Catholics live and share their faith with others, one person at a time. This was the mission of Jesus, and it is the mission of his Church, to live joy-filled lives in union with God and to invite others to experience this joy as well.



Highlighting the Great Commission and Pope Francis’ call to live as a missionary disciple, this four-hour event uses a reflective Kerygmatic experience to bring participants into an encounter of God’s love and catch a vision for lifelong discipleship.



A dynamic parish is welcoming, attractive, and deeply mission-focused, where parishioners are fed and sent forth to proclaim the Gospel in their daily lives. This workshop helps parishes discover what makes their parish dynamic, celebrate their strengths, and prayerfully consider areas where they can continue to grow as a community of missionary disciples making present the kingdom of God!



The Encounter Love Retreat led many to ask the question, “How do I share my faith with others?” We need an engaging story that we know well and that reveals how much God loves us. Host this four hour workshop in your parish to foster Adult Faith Formation and equip folks to tell their story! In this workshop we will explore the Bible as Story and learn what it means to evangelize and how to do it.

2027 EVENTS

Women's Joy Laughter Holiness Retreat

February 6, 2027

St. Ann Church, Morganfield KY

Featuring keynote Laura Phelps and local speakers

<https://owensborodiocese.org/womensretreat/>



Catholic Men's Conference of Western KY

February 6, 2027

Riverpark Center, Owensboro KY

Featuring: Michael Gormley (That Man is You), Zip Rzeppa (Sportscaster & founder of Mater Media), and local guest Wade Gaynor

<https://kycatholic.com/>



ALPHA is an exciting parish program that offers an exciting way to welcome new people, form community, and grow by experiencing God's grace and love. It is eleven weeks, which includes a meal, video and small group discussion, and one Saturday retreat. The Diocese of Owensboro will host the retreat for any parishes that want to participate on March 20, 2027 at St. William Parish in Knottsville. All are welcome!

Check it out at Alpha.org and join us by hosting Alpha in your parish in January 2027. Contact Jeff for details: jeff.andrini@pastoral.org

Koinonia - St. Pius X, Owensboro | February 12-14, 2027

If you have never been to a Koinonia retreat before, consider joining St. Pius X's Koinonia retreat. Connect with Jeff Andrini for details (contact on back cover)



The Diocese of Owensboro invites all adults to prayerfully consider making a Cursillo retreat in 2027! Check the website for dates and more information: <http://www.cursillo-owensboro.org/>

Young Adult Ministries

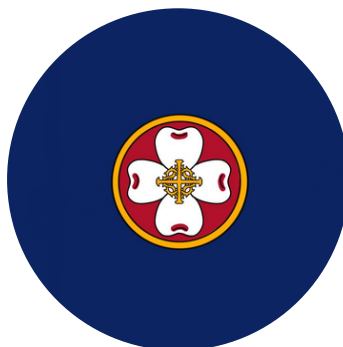
Visit owensborodiocese.org/young-adult-ministry to learn more about young adult diocesan events. To learn about young adult movement in your area visit these Facebook pages:



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Keep up-to-date with all things
Young Adult in Bowling Green!



Keep up-to-date with all things
Young Adult in the Paducah-Lakes Area!



Keep up-to-date with all things
Young Adult in Owensboro!



Gasper River is a summer camp and retreat center, operating within the Diocese of Owensboro, that seeks to engage young people in their faith by providing challenging activities, building faith communities, and teaching the tools of evangelization, so they can share their faith when they return home.



Grace Marriage is an intentional, ongoing, parish-based, small group approach to marriage ministry where couples spend intentional time every 90 days in conversation focusing on their marriage. Each series includes four sessions, held once a quarter. This ministry has expanded over the years to serving over 150 couples throughout the diocese. To learn more and find a Grace Marriage group near your scan the QR code below!



Or visit owensborodiocese.org/grace-marriage/



Office of Marriage & Family Life
DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

support ministries

**"He heals the brokenhearted and
binds up their wounds." ~ Psalm**

147:3



Scan the QR Code to
find resources for
counseling, marriage
support, pregnancy
loss support and more

CAP Counseling Assistance Program

Learn more
[owensborodiocese.org/
counseling/](https://owensborodiocese.org/counseling/)



OUR MISSION:

To be missionary disciples of Jesus,
making present the kingdom of God!

Contact the Director of the Office of Evangelization &
Discipleship with any questions:

Jeff Andrini, D.Min., 270-683-1545, Ext. 360 or
jeff.andrini@pastoral.org

Join our Diocese of Owensboro Missionary Disciples Facebook group



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