



REJOICE AND BE GLAD

"THE LORD ASKS EVERYTHING OF US, AND IN RETURN HE OFFERS US TRUE LIFE, THE HAPPINESS FOR WHICH WE WERE CREATED."
(GAUDETE ET EXULTATE 1)

**LENTEN REFLECTIONS
FOR SMALL GROUPS 2019**

Proclaim Westminster
building missionary parishes



forming missionary disciples

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rejoice and be Glad, LENTEN REFLECTIONS for Small Groups 2019

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Imprimatur: Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

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FOREWORD

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I wonder whether you have a favourite Saint, and if so, why? Never ask me to choose just one. Among my personal top ten is St Theresa of Lisieux, The Little Flower. Theresa was a bit of a daydreamer. She often wondered what her vocation should be, the 'Theresa-shaped' gift that God meant her to become. Finally, she discovered it. Her vocation was simply to love, to be love at the heart of the Church. In discovering that, she says, she discovered the secret of happiness, the reason for her joy.

It is beautiful that St Theresa is the Patron Saint of the Church's mission, the mission of love. She shows us that the joy of the Gospel and the love of our God are at the heart of what we proclaim, of who we proclaim, when we proclaim it from our heart.

Pope St Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation to the Church, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), contains this challenging but inspiring teaching: "The work of evangelization presupposes in the evangelizers an ever increasing love for those whom they are evangelizing." (para.79). It all begins and ends with love.

My hope for this new faith-sharing resource for small communities is that all who participate in it will discover a profound and personal sense of being loved and of being called to love, and that this discovery will inspire in them a deep desire to make Christ known, to be His joyful missionary disciples in a Church which looks only outwards and upwards.

I am deeply grateful to Monsignor Keith Barltrop for preparing the material in this book. His rich experience of Ministry as a Priest, Rector of Allen Hall Seminary, Episcopal Vicar in Westminster Diocese, Director of the Catholic Missionary Society and the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation, have given him a unique story to tell. He writes with a preacher's passion and a from a pastor's heart.

May St Theresa, Pope St Paul, and the patron of the New Evangelization, Pope St John Paul, spur us on!

Fr Chris Vipers
Director of the Agency for Evangelisation



For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages - they will be of great benefit.

GATHERING as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another. Always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

HOSPITALITY and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes (see page 7 for the structure of the meeting). Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

PRAYER will take different forms; we will make a suggestion for a Psalm or another opening prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Ordinarily, it is good to have about 15 minutes of prayer. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. During the session, we need to reflect on our real experience. Then we listen to Scripture. Use a Bible or a Sunday Missal to read the gospel story of the week. Remember that there are variations in the different translations of the Bible. This is ok. Sometimes exploring the differences in the versions that your group use can enrich your reflections. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation.

RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.



? WHAT IS THE LEADER OF YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader. A leader is not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with the particular responsibility of facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of the session and creating a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process each week
- Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group
- Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep sharing moving
- Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak
- Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as an opportunity for sharing in which they might grow in faith



THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

(Timings are just rough indications. Please feel very free to adapt as necessary).

5. ACT

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice. With a reflection from Pope Francis, you will be invited to respond to what you have heard in the session.

🕒 15 mins

1. GATHER

At the first meeting, introduce yourselves to each other. Thereafter, following your opening prayer, you will have an opportunity to catch up with one another, and share how last week's session influenced you.

🕒 30 mins

4. REFLECT

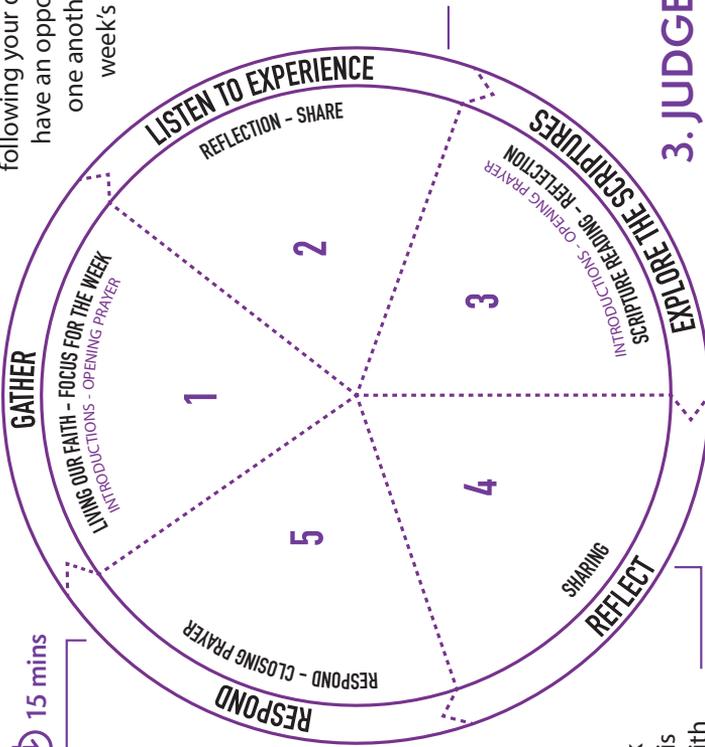
This is an opportunity to reflect on 'our story' - God's story and your own story - and how to link the two together. What is the meaning for you? With the help of a reflection and questions, you will have the opportunity to share.

2. SEE

This part of the session is about 'your own story' and how it relates to the theme of the session. Having listened to a short reflection, you will be given the opportunity, with the help of questions, to share your own experience.

3. JUDGE 🕒 45 mins

This part is about exploring 'God's story' in scripture. Having listened to the Gospel for the week, you will be invited to reflect on what you have heard.





WEEK 1

A NEW EVANGELISATION



To prepare for this first session, take time to read 'Faith sharing in a small community' and 'Structure of the meeting' on pages 5-7.

GATHER



At this first session, begin by introducing yourselves to each other. Share your names and a little about yourself.

The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, when your Son saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. As we begin these Lenten reflections, we pray that all we do and say in this holy season will create the same compassionate heart in us, and drive us out of our comfort zone to share with others the good things you give us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Joan is a middle-aged woman in North Wales who sometimes shows visitors around her beautiful parish church, which has several interesting features. At first, this consisted of her describing the stained-glass panels, explaining the history of the church and mentioning some of the leading figures connected with it.

Some years ago, Joan took part in a course designed to help Catholics welcome people who may be seeking faith but are not ready to join the Church yet. Taking part in this new evangelisation programme led her to add some significant features to her presentations to tourists. For example, quite often when she arrives at the tabernacle and explains what the Blessed Sacrament is, she pauses and says: "I can't tell you how important it is to me to spend a few minutes each day here talking to Jesus and waiting for him to speak to me."



She was surprised to find herself saying such a thing, as she never thought of herself as an evangelist, certainly not one who would stand on street corners and preach! And what is even more surprising, she says, is that this simple witness of her own faith has evidently had quite an effect on several of the people she shows round the church.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- Could you do what Joan does, or the equivalent, in your situation? If not, why not?
- When you hear the word 'evangelisation' what associations or images come to your mind?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

REFLECT



Peter said to the crowd: "The whole House of Israel can be certain that God had made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?" "You must repent," Peter answered, "and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." They accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

If we are going to explore the ‘new evangelisation’, we had better begin by asking what is new about it, or if you like, what was the ‘old evangelisation’? The passage we have just read is a classic description of evangelisation: the proclamation of the very essence of the Gospel, that is, the death and resurrection of Jesus as an event which saves us and challenges us to be converted. So why do we need a new evangelisation today?

In a talk to catechists in the Jubilee Year 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger explained: “The Church has never interrupted the path of evangelisation. She celebrates the eucharistic mystery every day, administers the sacraments, proclaims the word of God, and commits herself to the causes of justice and charity. And this evangelisation bears fruit: It gives light and joy, it gives the path of life to many people.

“However, we can see a progressive process of de-Christianisation. A large part of today’s humanity does not find the Gospel in the permanent evangelisation of the Church. This is why we are searching for a new evangelisation, which means never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow.”

Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* 11: “With this newness, Christ is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelisation is always new.”

Pope John Paul II was fond of saying that the new evangelisation is new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its means of expression. New means of expression are easy to understand: the Internet, Twitter, Facebook, etc. New methods could be as simple as Joan using a talk to tourists in the example given earlier. But perhaps the



hardest is to have the new ardour he spoke of. In our scripture reading, Peter showed that ardour, and it came from the experience he and the other apostles had just had of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That gives us a clue as to where we should look as we search for a similar enthusiasm for evangelisation in our parishes today.

SHARE

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- What are the main features of the world we live in that make it open to receiving the Gospel?
- What are the main features of the world we live in that make it resistant to receiving the Gospel?
- How ready do you feel to share the Gospel with others in your daily life?

RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions.

- Download a copy of Pope Francis' inspiring exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" and read a short paragraph every day. See <http://w2.vatican.va>
- Pray to the Holy Spirit each day to stir up in you this new ardour. Use your own prayer or the prayer with which this session finishes.
- Think of simple things to say and do that witness to your faith, such as telling someone you will pray for them.



CLOSING PRAYER



Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you will renew the face of the earth.

Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

*Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to “go out to the whole world and proclaim”
our faith with confidence.*

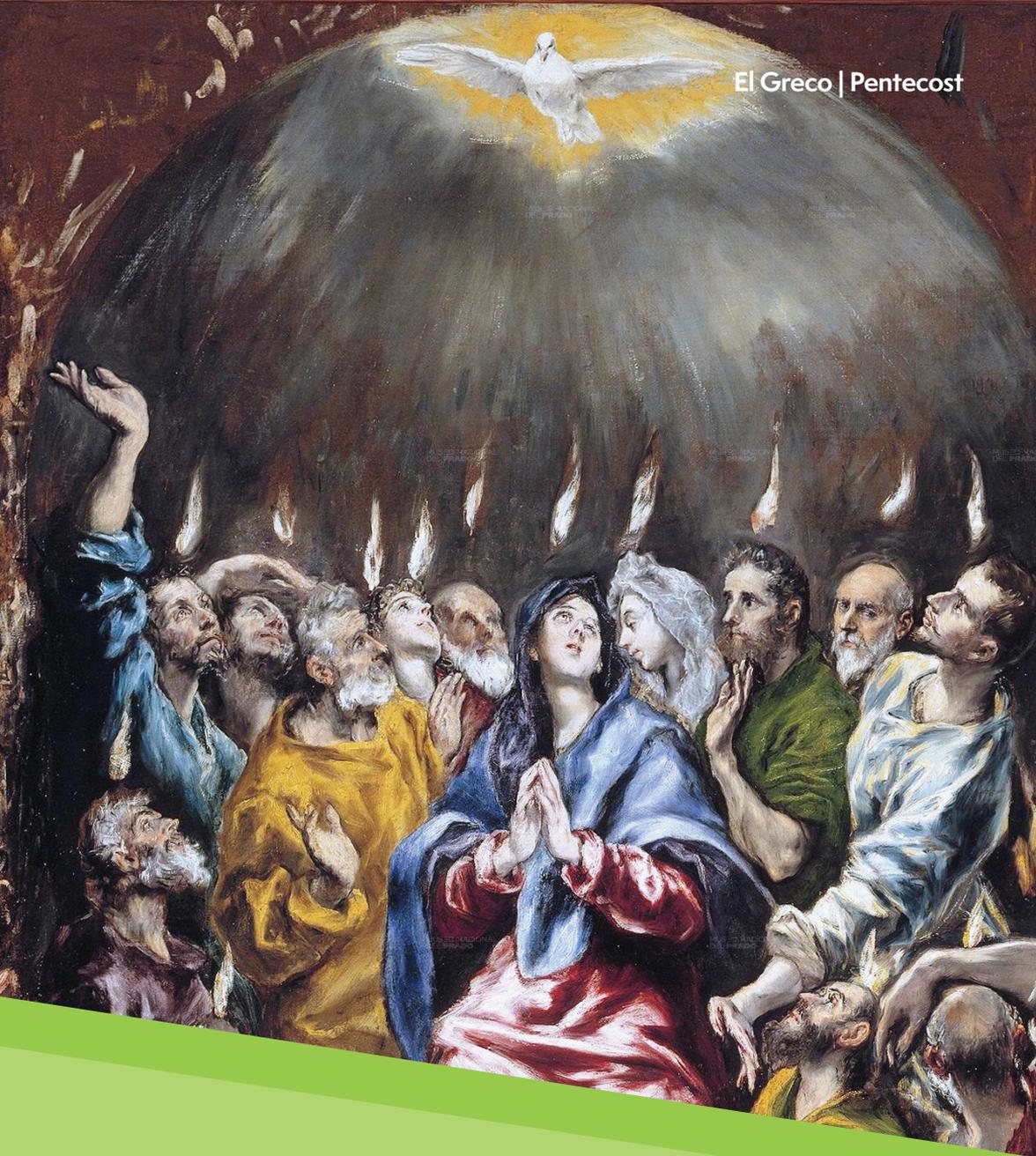
*Give us the courage to witness to the Joy of the Gospel
by our words and actions.*

*Help our parish to become more welcoming and missionary,
so that you may be known and loved by all people.*

*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen





WEEK 2

MISSIONARY DISCIPLES



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, through our baptism you have made us missionary disciples of your Son. Through your Word you teach us how to follow him; through the Eucharist you fill us with his life and send us out on mission. May we never harden our hearts to your call, but eagerly seek your guidance for our own lives so that we may be a light for others and salt for the earth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Marthe Robin was born in 1902 to a family of non-practising Catholics in rural France. From her late teens she began to experience severe illness which eventually left her completely bedridden. After many struggles, she came to see God's mysterious purpose in this.

She tells how Jesus spoke directly to her on several occasions, inviting her to work with a priest with whom she would found what became known as the Foyers de Charité. These are communities of lay people living with a priest who put on silent retreats to form lay people in the work of evangelisation.

When she met this priest in 1936, he reports: "She announced especially a new Pentecost of love that would be preceded by a profound renewal of the Church marked by a missionary zeal where numerous lay people would participate in the apostolate."

This was surely a prophecy of the new Pentecost with which St. John XXIII would announce the calling of the Second Vatican Council 25 years later, and of the call of Pope Francis for all to be missionary disciples.

Marthe Robin remained bedridden till her death in 1981. Over 100,000 people came to her bedside to seek advice, and there are now nearly 80 Foyers de Charité throughout the world.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- Do you know anyone who is an inspiration to others like Marthe despite great personal weakness? What do they say to you?
- What does being a missionary disciple mean to you?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

When he had washed their feet and taken his garments and resumed his place, Jesus said to them: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." [John 13: 12-17]

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

"The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created." (Pope Francis, Gaudete et Exsultate 1). One of the great messages of Pope Francis, especially in Evangelii Gaudium and Gaudete et Exsultate, is joy. He reminds us of Pope Paul VI's phrase, "the delightful and comforting joy of evangelising," and warns us that "an evangeliser must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral".

Perhaps one of the main obstacles to the new evangelisation is that we see it as another task, a burden on top of all the other things we are meant to do as Catholics, rather than as a joy and a means of liberation. That is why, when calling us to be missionary disciples, Pope Francis stresses that Jesus himself has taken the initiative, and all we



have to do is to respond:

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelising community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: ‘You will be blessed if you do this.’ (Jn 13:17) An evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” [Evangelii Gaudium 24]

Indeed, the very phrase missionary disciples implies a natural rhythm of receiving and giving. From our eagerness to learn every day from Jesus (a disciple means literally a ‘learner’), and from his great desire to teach us and empower us, being a missionary (literally ‘someone sent’) flows naturally, it is not an effort or a strain. To put it another way, if we are not in some way missionary, we have not started being a disciple.

The Gospel of the washing of the feet, which we enact in our churches on Holy Thursday, illustrates this perfectly and also shows that there are many different ways of being a missionary. You do not have to preach or even say anything. Just serving others with something of Christ’s humble love can speak volumes.

REFLECT



In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below then share your reflections.

- What are the main features of the world we live in that make it open to receiving the Gospel?
- What are the main features of the world we live in that make it resistant to receiving the Gospel?
- How ready do you feel to share the Gospel with others in your daily life?



RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions

- Spend a few minutes each day reading a short passage from the Gospels and ask the Lord what he is saying to you through it.
- Review the activities of your day and ask the Lord to show you where there are opportunities to serve others as he serves us.
- From time to time, ask yourself who Jesus has sent into your life this week and why.



CLOSING PRAYER



Mary Star of the new evangelisation, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world.

**Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God's little ones, pray for us.
Amen.**

Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

*Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to "go out to the whole world and proclaim"
our faith with confidence.*

*Give us the courage to witness to the Joy of the Gospel
by our words and actions.*

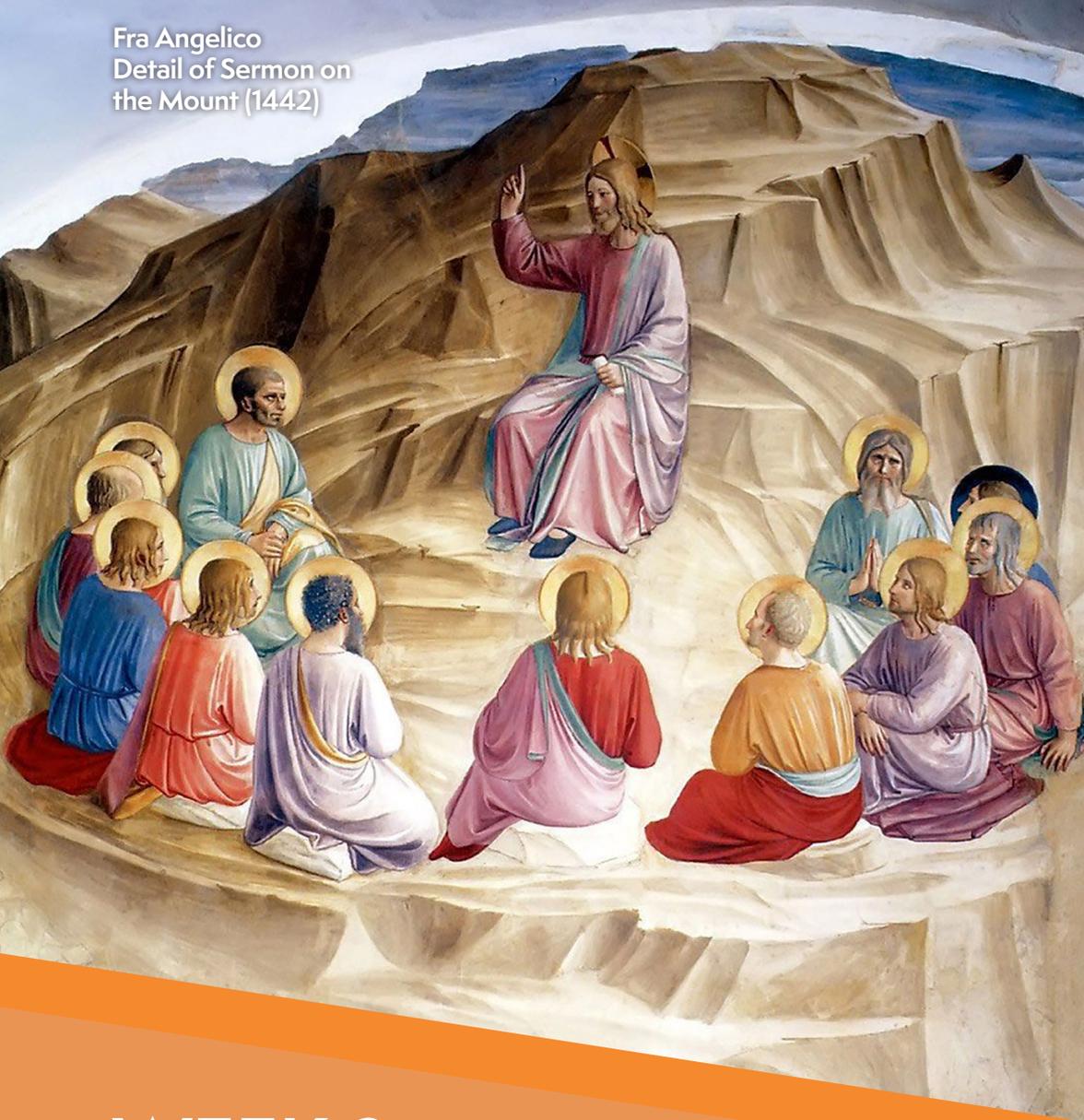
*Help our parish to become more welcoming and missionary,
so that you may be known and loved by all people.*

*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen



Fra Angelico
Detail of Sermon on the Mount (1442)



WEEK 3

DON'T BE AFRAID
TO SEEK HOLINESS



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, as we go deeper into this Lenten season, help us to go deeper into our own hearts also, and to discover there the desire to be totally united to you. Grant us the holiness we need to see your face and enjoy your presence here on earth and for ever in heaven, through Christ our Lord, Amen.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Ann Voskamp's book, *One Thousand Gifts*, was on the New York Times' bestseller list for over a year. Married to a farmer in rural America, and mother of seven children, she fell into self-pity and depression until she was challenged by a friend to write down in a journal one thousand things to thank God for – not all at once! This simple spiritual practice helped her to centre her life on God rather than herself – the very essence of holiness.

On her website (<https://annvoskamp.com>) she writes: "I keep writing it out here every day, the words I am seeking to live — about this wondrously messy, everyday-holy life, about finding the beauty and quiet, about slowing to see the sacred in the chaos, the cross in the clothespin, the flame in the bush. Just listening – laundry, liturgy, life, — all of life, holy ground. A holy experience — because God has flaming bushes everywhere."



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- What does the word holiness mean to you? Do you see it as something you can aspire to, or is it only for special people?
- What spiritual practice has most helped you to be more centred on God and less on yourself?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1: 13-16)

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

What have you given up for Lent, or what discipline have you undertaken? Are you clear in your mind why you have done this?

Giving things up is a means to an end, and sometimes we can lose sight of the end. The whole purpose of our Lenten discipline is surely to be able to draw closer to God, and to be realistic about the obstacles in our lives to that happening. In other words, the purpose of Lent is to become holy so that we are ready to approach God who is holy.



It's now over 50 years since the Second Vatican Council sent out a strong message that all Christians are called to be holy, but still we have not fully taken this message on board. We think of holiness as the preserve of consecrated people – monks, nuns, priests; or we think of it as withdrawing from the world to engage in lots of pious exercises.

Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exsultate* sees holiness as a joyful challenge, founded on the Beatitudes, (Mt. 5: 1-12; Lk. 6: 20-26) each of which begins with the word Blessed or Happy, just as the very first psalm begins: 'Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked...'

Just as Ann Voskamp adopted a particular spiritual practice, in her case that of thanksgiving, to help her move from selfishness to holiness, so it is good for us to look at concrete areas of our life and decide to change our attitudes and behaviour. Pope Francis points to several such "signs of holiness in today's world". They are too many to list here, so let us take one particularly relevant and important one: our behaviour online. In no. 115 he writes:

"Christians too can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication. The result is that things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, and people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others. It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others. Here we see how the unguarded tongue, set on fire by hell, sets all things ablaze." (cf. Jas 3:6)

And in no. 117 he quotes St. John of the Cross as an antidote: "Always prefer to be taught by all, rather than to desire teaching even the least of all. Rejoice in the good of others as if it were your own, and desire that they be given precedence over you in all things; this you should do wholeheartedly. You will thereby overcome evil with good, banish the Devil, and possess a happy heart. Try to practise this all the more with those who least attract you."



REFLECT



In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- Have you ever felt the temptation to behave online in a way you would not in real life? How did you deal with this temptation?
- Does St. John of the Cross's advice resonate with you and how would you put it into practice?

RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions.

Here are some suggestions for practical ways to respond to today's session:

- Go onto Facebook or another social media platform and send a message to others that communicates mercy and forgiveness.
- Call to mind someone who has hurt you or who least attracts you and ask God to show you all their gifts and strong points. Thank God for them.

CLOSING PRAYER

(Adapted from the Rite of Baptism – one person to lead and ask the questions)

Leader: Do you reject Satan, and all his works and all his empty promises?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you place your entire trust in the mercy and forgiveness of God and desire to live in the power of that mercy?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you desire to become holy by God's grace, and especially to rejoice in the gifts of others, especially those who least attract you, and thereby to overcome evil with good?

All: I do.

All: And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of his Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**



CLOSING PRAYER



Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

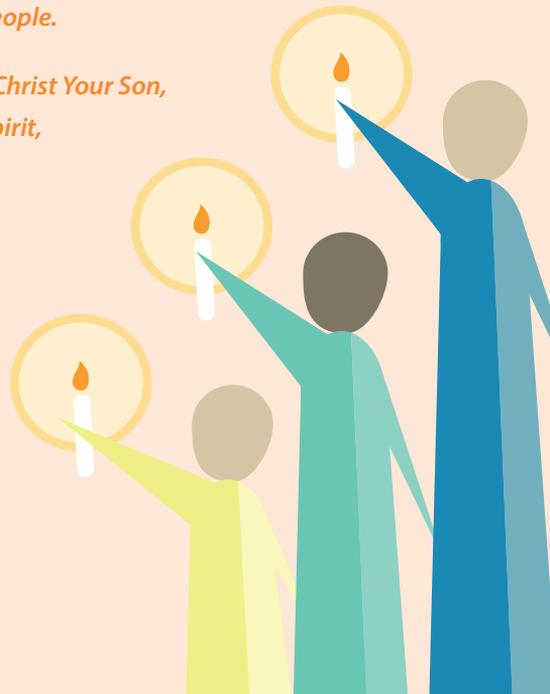
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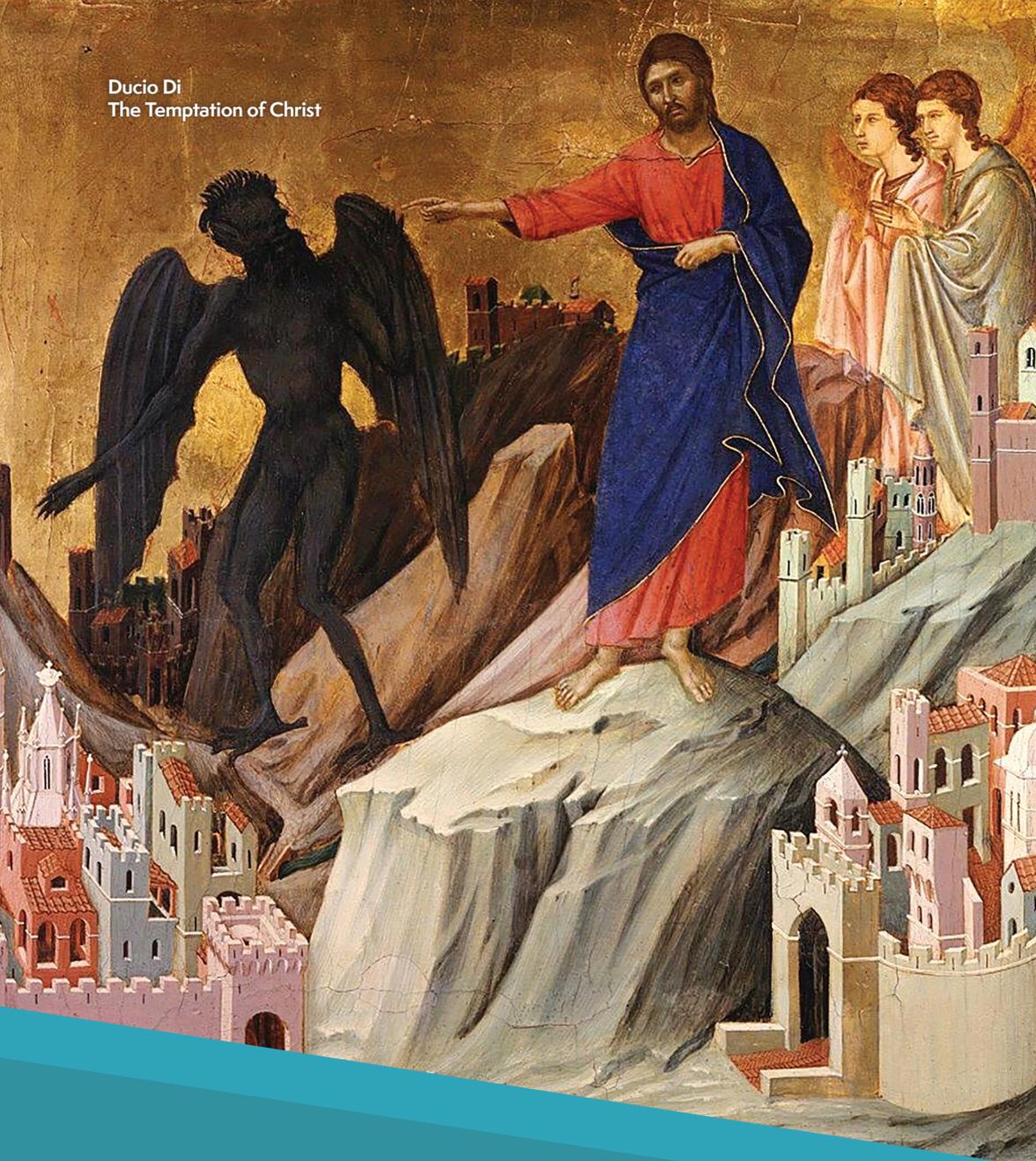
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*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen



Duccio Di
The Temptation of Christ



WEEK 4

GET BEHIND ME, SATAN



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, you allowed your Son to be tempted by Satan in the desert and in many other ways. Give us courage when we face our own weakness and failure, and help us to put our trust in you rather than in ourselves. We ask this through Christ our Lord.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

In his autobiography, the great American evangelist, Billy Graham, who died a year ago, tells how during his years of training in a Southern Baptist seminary, one of the professors was discovered to be in an adulterous relationship.

All the students were shocked by this, as the man appeared to be a model of virtue, someone who was looked up to by everyone. Some of them were so scandalised they decided to leave the seminary, thinking that if such an apparently holy man was a fraud, this called into question the whole nature of ministry and leadership in the Church.

Billy Graham was highly respected by the other students, so they awaited anxiously his response. Eventually one of them went to him and asked what he was going to do. His response was short but spoke volumes of his character and indeed of the Christian response to scandal and temptation in general: "I'm going on." He did indeed go on, to become one of the twentieth century's most influential preachers who brought many people to know Christ, and incidentally, was very welcoming to Catholics.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- What effect do scandals in the Church have on you and those you know? How do you deal with the temptation to give up?
- Do you see the Devil at work in scandals and temptations, or is that an outmoded way of thinking?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

“Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.” Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mt. 16: 21-24)

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

On the first Sunday of Lent, we heard the well-known story of the three temptations of Jesus by Satan in the desert. At the end of Lent, we shall hear the story of the Agony in the Garden and the Passion of Jesus, which he refers to as ‘Satan’s hour’. Perhaps we imagine that in between these two moments he did not experience temptation, that the Devil left him alone.

But a moment’s reflection tells us that this cannot have been the case. He must often have been wearied by people’s lack of faith, by their superficial attitude, and indeed



by the immaturity of his own apostles, as when two of them asked for seats at his right and left hands. Having just received Peter's marvellous profession of faith that he was indeed the Christ, it must have been especially hard for him when a moment later that same disciple tried to turn him away from the very act for which he had come to the world, the sacrifice of his life on the cross.

Having explored in previous weeks the call to become missionary disciples, and the consequent need for us to become holy so that others will be drawn to Christ through us, we must now face the darker side of the picture: the temptations and scandals the Devil puts in our way to halt our progress.

Bishop Robert Barron, who spoke at the National Eucharistic Congress in Liverpool in September 2018, has called the sexual abuse scandals in the Church 'the Devil's masterpiece', in as much as they tend to undermine everything we have been reflecting on in this Lenten series, especially our desire to evangelise.

The very word 'scandal' means literally a stumbling block, and it is actually the word Jesus uses in the passage we just read which is translated as a 'hindrance'. Perhaps we think that speaking about the Devil is rather old-fashioned these days, but the Church has consistently upheld her teaching that evil has a personal focus which we call Satan or the Devil, and in fact recognising this can help us to overcome our temptations, since it makes us aware that another power is at work in the world and in our own lives which has very different objectives than God has.

Of course, we have plenty of weaknesses and sins of our own without bringing in the Devil to explain them, but whereas God always has compassion for our weakness and uses it to display his grace and power, the Devil uses it to bring us down. God allows him to tempt us so that we can make a conscious decision which way we want to go, who we want to follow, what price we are prepared to pay to remain in the love that created us and redeems us by the cross.

REFLECT



In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- 1 What tempts you to give up the idea of sharing your faith with others? How do you deal with that temptation?
- 2 How would you respond to someone who used scandals in the Church as an argument against the Christian faith?



RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions.

Here are some suggestions for practical ways to respond to today's session:

- Take a few minutes at some point in each day over the coming week to examine your conscience: what are the main temptations in your life at present and how do you deal with them?
- Decide on something you will do that you know is difficult and you have been putting off because it makes you face your own weakness.



CLOSING PRAYER



Holy Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle, be our safeguard 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 thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls.

Amen.

Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

*Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to "go out to the whole world and proclaim"
our faith with confidence.*

*Give us the courage to witness to the Joy of the Gospel
by our words and actions.*

*Help our parish to become more welcoming and missionary,
so that you may be known and loved by all people.*

*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio
The Supper at Emmaus



WEEK 5

**GO AND ANNOUNCE
THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD**



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, as we gather together today, fill our hearts with the joy of the Gospel, the joy that the disciples experienced when they realised you had risen from the dead. May our joy be so great that we cannot keep it to ourselves but must share it with others, through Christ our Lord.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Agnes is a young Chinese woman who grew up, like most people in her native land, with no religious belief. On a stay in London as a student, she was invited by some young people she met on the street to drop in one evening to St. Patrick's Church in Soho, where the beauty of the church, the warmth of the welcome, and the love she encountered in other young people drew her to investigate their faith.

Eventually, she was baptised and began joining the young people in an outreach called Nightfever. This programme sees young people going out into the streets of Soho at weekends to share the Good News with others. They invite people like Agnes, to the church where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and priests and others are available to talk to anyone who seeks guidance or confession.

Not far away on Oxford Street, a stern looking man can sometimes be seen with a banner announcing 'The End is Nigh.' Every time she passes him, Agnes cannot help contrasting this forbidding way of 'evangelising' with the gentle outreach of the St. Patrick's community enabling her to find a faith which has completely changed her life.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- Have you had experiences like Agnes' in which others reached out to you and helped you connect with the Church when you felt alienated from it?
- How is your parish or community reaching out to others and how could it extend that outreach?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

“When he was at table with them, Jesus took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” (Luke 24: 30-35)

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

As we saw in session two, joy is a recurring theme in the teaching of Pope Francis, and is reflected in the titles of two of his Apostolic Letters, ‘The Joy of the Gospel’ (Evangelii Gaudium) and ‘Rejoice and Exult’ (Gaudete et Exsultate). As we come towards the end of our Lenten series, and approach the great festival of Easter, it is good to bear in mind his often-quoted warning in Evangelii Gaudium no. 6: “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter.”



He is not referring to a false smile we might put on to cover our real feelings, or denying that there are times when we feel sadness or anger. Rather he means the kind of joy we have hopefully been experiencing in this small group as we have shared together what our faith means to us, an echo of what the two disciples felt on the road to Emmaus, which they later described as their hearts burning within them.

Each of us has his or her own personal relationship with the Lord, and each of us belongs to a parish community which celebrates the liturgy week after week. But in many cases our parishes are too big for us to be able to share with each other in the personal way we have been able to in this group, and our personal prayer is often interrupted by the pressures of family and work. That is why a small group sharing like this is so valuable. We are going to explore this more in our last session.

In such a group sharing, we are in a sense returning to the very beginnings of our faith, when the disciples, a small group like us, huddled together for fear of persecution after Jesus' crucifixion, came to know that he had indeed risen. Their joy was so great it could not be kept to themselves.

Pope John Paul sums it up in his Letter for the New Millennium (no. 40): "We must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of specialists, but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him to themselves, they must proclaim him."

This is what happens at the end of every Mass. We hear God speak to us, we are fed with his own life, and then we are told: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." That means, you have heard God speak: share his word with others. You have been given strength to live like Christ and so be a light to draw others, as Agnes was drawn to the light of Christ by the young people at St. Patrick's.



REFLECT



In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- How has this group sharing helped your own personal relationship with God?
- How has this group helped you to feel more part of your parish community and more ready to share your faith with others?

RESPOND



The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

Here are some suggestions for practical ways to respond to today's session:

- Tell one person this week what this group has meant to you.
- Arrive a few minutes early for Sunday Mass next week and ask God to speak to you through his Word during the Mass.



CLOSING PRAYER



Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

*Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to “go out to the whole world and proclaim”
our faith with confidence.*

*Give us the courage to witness to the Joy of the Gospel
by our words and actions.*

*Help our parish to become more welcoming and missionary,
so that you may be known and loved by all people.*

*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen





WEEK 6

AN UNFINISHED STORY



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, on the day of Pentecost, you fulfilled your promise to pour out your Spirit on all mankind. You began by giving that Spirit to the apostles, and now we too are part of that great story. Help us to recognise what you are calling us to do and to play our part, relying always on the power and the wisdom that your Spirit gives, through Christ our Lord.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following three short reflections silently or aloud:

Arthur belongs to a large parish in the United States, but he came close to leaving the Church when his marriage broke down, and the divorce proceedings left him demoralised and lonely. With nearly 3,000 people attending Mass weekly, he had only a passing acquaintance with a few parishioners, and did not know where to turn for support.

He was wondering whether to start attending a local Pentecostal church, where he had heard there was a real sense of community and mutual help, when he happened to see a notice in his parish advertising the start of some Small Christian Community gatherings. Not sure what that meant, he decided to give it a go and attended an initial meeting where the purpose of these groups was to be explained.

“Who are these groups for?” someone asked at this meeting, and the response has always stayed with Arthur: “Well, put it this way: they’re not just for people whose lives are in apple-pie order.”

“That’s me,” he thought, and over the next few weeks, Arthur finally found a place where he could share his story with others and begin to make sense of it.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- To what extent do you feel you really belong to your parish?
- Where have you been able to share your story with others in times of distress?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2; 44-47)

Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

Coming from a continent where Basic Christian Communities have given life to many Catholics who, like Arthur, find their parishes too big to offer real support, it is not surprising that Pope Francis has a keen awareness of the value of groups such as the one we have been part of over the last few weeks.

He warns: "When we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the Devil and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb. Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others." (Gaudete et Exsultate 140-141)



And in words that seem to sum up what we have been about here, he adds: “Each community is called to create a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord. Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community.” (no. 142.)

If we find talk of holiness off-putting because we are all too aware of our weaknesses, we can recall the words which made such a difference to Arthur: small groups are not just for those whose lives are in ‘apple-pie order’. In fact, the secret of groups like the one we have been sharing in is that they bring two things together: the Word of God and our own lived experience, which is often messy – recall the words of Ann Voskamp in session three.

Without the sharing of personal experience, God’s Word can seem abstract, an ideal which may inspire us but which is really for someone else, and remote from our daily life. Without the light of God’s Word, personal experience can seem chaotic and hard to make sense of, a series of unrelated, cool moments: in the famous words of T.S. Eliot: “We had the experience but missed the meaning.”

When we bring experience and God’s Word together, something amazing happens: our hearts burn within us as the Risen Jesus takes the familiar words of scripture and shows us how they apply to what is happening to us here and now.

We can experience this on our own, in our personal life of prayer, but it is much more powerful when we come together and create what Pope Francis, quoting St. John Paul II, calls “a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord”. And the test of such a group is that we do not want to make it an inward-looking ‘holy huddle’, but to invite others to it, especially those whose lives appear to be just as messy as some of ours.

REFLECT



In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- What ‘unfinished business’ in your own life would you like to bring to a group like this in the future?
- What passages of scripture have shed light on your own experience over the past few years?



RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

Here are some suggestions for practical ways to respond to today's session:

- Discuss with other members of the group whether you would like to continue to meet and how often.
- Think of someone you would like to invite to future meetings of this group or one like it.
- Contact the Agency for Evangelisation of Westminster diocese to find out which of their resources would be most helpful if you decide to continue the group: 020 7931 6078 / smallgroups@rcdow.org.uk



families
RESOURCES



vision and strategy
RESOURCES



unchurched
RESOURCES



prayer
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youth
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poor church
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parish teams
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testimonies
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gospel
RESOURCES



prayer experiences
RESOURCES



non-churchgoing
RESOURCES



CLOSING PRAYER



Father, we thank you for the light you have shed on our lives through these weeks of sharing together. Help us to continue the journey in hope, and to welcome those you want to bring to us, through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Loving Father,

*You so loved the world that you sent us your only Son,
that we might believe in him and have eternal life.
May we encounter Jesus Christ anew this day
and live the Good News with joy.*

*Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
help us to "go out to the whole world and proclaim"
our faith with confidence.*

*Give us the courage to witness to the Joy of the Gospel
by our words and actions.*

*Help our parish to become more welcoming and missionary,
so that you may be known and loved by all people.*

*We make this prayer through Our Lord Jesus Christ Your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever,*

Amen



To respond in practical ways visit Caritas Westminster website and see what opportunities might be.

Visit <https://www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/>



HOME



ABOUT



NEWS & EVENTS



PROJECTS



VOLUNTEER



SERVICES

SOCIAL ACTION

We promote parish-based social action in the following ways:

- Our hubs give local support to new and existing parish-based social initiatives
- Our Social Action Map shows you the social action projects running at each parish in the Diocese of Westminster
- We establish partnerships with local and national organisation
- We develop resources for parish priests and volunteers.

OUR SERVICES

Caritas Westminster is the umbrella organisation for:

- Caritas St Joseph's, a lifelong learning school for people with intellectual disabilities
- Caritas Deaf Service, which helps the Deaf Community and people who are hard of hearing to take part in Church life
- Caritas Bakhita House, a refuge for women escaping human trafficking
- St John Southworth Caritas Fund - grants for parish-based social action initiatives and for individuals in need.
- Caritas Volunteer Service, a volunteer matching service for organisations, parishes and schools.



JOIN US!

This is an exciting time for Caritas Westminster and we welcome new ideas. Have a look at our Get Involved page or contact us for more information.





Mgr Keith Barltrop

I was born in Bromley in 1947 and educated at Eltham College and Magdalen College, Oxford, where I read Classics and Chinese. Received into the Church by Fr. Michael Hollings in 1969, I trained for the Catholic priesthood at the English College, in Rome, where I was ordained in 1976. Following further studies in moral theology, I was appointed director of theological studies at the English College in 1977.

From 1982-1990 I was an assistant priest and a parish priest in two parishes in Harrow. From 1991-1998 I was rector of Allen Hall, the seminary of Westminster Diocese in Chelsea, and from 1998-2001 I was Episcopal Vicar in East London, looking after the needs of 40 parishes as well as schools and communities. In 2001 I was appointed Director of the Catholic Missionary Society, with the brief of helping to set up a national agency for evangelisation for the Catholic bishops of England and Wales. This came into being in September 2003 as CASE - the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation. During this time I was also the Chair of the China Forum of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

In 2009 I oversaw the visit of the Relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux to England and Wales, and since 2010 have been parish priest of St. Mary of the Angels, Bayswater. In February 2015 the Cardinal also asked me to be chaplain to two groups supporting LGBT / Same-Sex attracted Catholics in London.

My interests are in films, music (including playing the piano), country walking, cooking, and travelling.



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AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION