

Introduction to Discipleship Small Groups

Why: The goal of this initiative is to form small groups within our parishes that can help foster growth in faith. This model is intended to be flexible to adapt to many different schedules and circumstances of life. However, by providing a common set of reflections, it can help to foster fellowship and a common mission between the many different groups that will take part.

Who/What: A Discipleship Small Group refers to roughly four people who will meet to pray and study together over the course of a study. The number of people within the group could be increased or decreased depending on circumstances, although it should not exceed eight people (e.g. four couples). The small group will meet for four sessions, each with a designated set of reflections. In the future, additional sets of studies will be prepared. The members of the small group may either stay the same or choose to change between studies.

When/Where: The time and location can be determined according to the availability of the group members. The four sessions can be spread out in whatever way works best. Each session is intended to last for approximately an hour, although this too can also be adjusted. The location/scheduling is intended to be flexible enough to adapt to whatever is needed.

How: Each session should begin with a prayer. Next, someone should read the study (or at least part, especially if all have not read it before) and direct the conversation. Each person should have a copy of the handout (either physical or electronic). If desired, a link is provided to Formed.org for a supplemental video presentation. Time should be left at the end of each session for sufficient prayer. It is encouraged to spend a few minutes in meditation before the final prayer. If desired, music could accompany/precede this meditation. Two options are provided for each session - one more contemporary and one more traditional. At the end of this meditation, the group should pray the closing prayer together.

Introduction to this Study:

The Mission of the Church

Renewal in the Church always takes place through reconnecting with the grace given by Jesus at our first founding: **“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it”** (Matthew 16:18, RSV translation).

The apostles shared this gift with the early saints and first disciples. We see a description of how they lived in Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, Verse 42: **“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”**

The grace present in the early Church is still offered to us today. Likewise, these four activities still provide a framework to understand the mission of a Catholic parish: **Our mission is to make the saving and transformative grace of Jesus Christ present in our parish boundaries by dedicating ourselves to celebrating the sacraments, devotion to prayer, fostering the faith handed on by the apostles, and building authentic community through fellowship and the works of mercy.**

This study is based on the four elements of Acts 2:42 - Faith, Fellowship, the Breaking of the Bread (in the sense of the Eucharist/Sacraments), and Prayer. Each of these aspects will be looked at in relation to a different saint. The variety of saints highlights how the same mission was lived within different time periods, regions, and circumstances. The question for us is, how will we live this mission today?

Opening prayer for each session:

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 shall renew the face of the earth.*

Let us pray.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session #1: Apostolic Faith

Opening Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit...

Saint: Lawrence the Deacon (d. 258 AD. Feast day August 10th)

Scripture (Acts 6:1-6):

At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve [Apostles] called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.

Question: What strikes you about this Scripture passage?

St. Lawrence was one of the seven deacons that served Pope Sixtus II. He had a particular responsibility for administering the works of charity. In 258 AD the Roman Emperor Valerian began an intense persecution of the Church. Valerian was at war against the Persians, and so in an attempt to solidify his power he began to insist upon divine veneration. When the Church refused to offer worship to him as divine, he had Pope Sixtus and a number of the leaders executed. They demanded that Lawrence hand over the material goods of the Church to the Imperial treasury, but he instead distributed them to the poor. He was then executed as well. Tradition records that he was burned on a gridiron. When asked if he would denounce his faith, it is said he instead responded, "Turn me over, I am done on this side."

Saintly Writing (from a sermon by St. Augustine, d. 430 AD):

The Roman Church commends to us today the anniversary of the triumph of Saint Lawrence. For on this day he trod the furious pagan world underfoot and flung aside its allurements, and so gained victory over Satan's attack on his faith.

As you have often heard, Lawrence was a deacon of the Church at Rome. There he ministered the sacred blood of Christ; there for the sake of Christ's name he poured out his own blood. Saint John the apostle was evidently teaching us about the mystery of the Lord's supper when he wrote: "Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." My brethren, Lawrence understood this and, understanding, he acted on it. Just as he had partaken of a gift of self at the table of the Lord, so he prepared to offer such a gift. In his life he loved Christ; in his death he followed in his footsteps.

Brethren, we too must imitate Christ if we truly love him. We shall not be able to render better return on that love than by modeling our lives on his. Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps. In saying this, the apostle Peter seems to have understood that Christ suffered only for those who follow in his steps, in the sense that Christ's passion is of no avail to those who do not. The holy martyrs followed Christ even to shedding their life's blood, even to reproducing the very likeness of his passion. They followed him, but not they alone. It is not true that the bridge was broken after the martyrs crossed; nor is it true that after they had drunk from it, the fountain of eternal life dried up.

I tell you again and again, my brethren, that in the Lord's garden are to be found not only the roses of his martyrs. In it there are also lilies of the virgins, the ivy of wedded couples, and the violets of widows. On no account may any class of people despair, thinking that God has not called them. Christ suffered for all. What the Scriptures say of him is true: "He desires all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth."

Let us understand, then, how a Christian must follow Christ even though he does not shed his blood for him, and his faith is not called upon to undergo the great test of the martyr's sufferings. The apostle Paul says of Christ our Lord: "Though he was in the form of God he did not consider equality with God a prize to be clung to." How unrivaled his majesty! "But he emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men, and presenting himself in human form." How deep his humility! Christ humbled himself. Christian, that is what you must make your own. Christ became obedient. How is it that you are proud? When this humbling experience was completed and death itself lay conquered, Christ ascended into heaven. Let us follow him there, for we hear Paul saying: "If you have been raised with Christ, you must lift your thoughts on high, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God."

Question: What most strikes you about the life of St Lawrence?

Formed Video suggestion: Peter and John coming to faith on Easter Sunday
<https://watch.formed.org/why-believe-volume-1/season:9/videos/formed-whybelieve-s1-ch09-pt1-mezzanine> (3 minutes, 8 seconds).

Reflection:

The early Church did not exist in a situation of cultural strength. People were not drawn to join the Church simply because it was the popular thing to do or because it gave prominence in society. In fact, often it was quite the opposite. What attracted people was the lived witness of Christians and the encounter with the power of the Resurrected Christ. The faith handed on by the apostles was found to prove true. Faith in the resurrection gave the strength to face even times of persecution and martyrdom. St Lawrence witnesses to the way that these situations can even be faced with joy. Renewal in the Church requires reconnecting with this faith.

Questions: In your personal life/vocation how can you follow in the example of the apostles? How can we better live this in our parishes?

Closing Prayer:

Theme for meditation: How can I better live in the light of the Resurrection?

Contemporary Music: 10,000 Reasons by Matt Redman and Steve Angrisano

Traditional Hymn/Chant: Christians, to the Paschal Victim/Victimae Paschali Laudes

Instructions: The faith that comes down to us from the Apostles is rooted in Jesus Christ. His resurrection confirms our faith and hope, and his heart manifests all of the love of God. You may optionally each share a prayer intention. Then, pray together the Litany of the Sacred Heart. One person should lead the prayer and the others give the italicized responses.

Lord, have mercy. *Lord, have mercy*
Christ, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy*
Lord, have mercy. *Lord, have mercy*

God our Father in heaven, *have mercy on us*
God the Son, Redeemer of the world, *have mercy on us*
God the Holy Spirit, *have mercy on us*
Holy Trinity, one God, *have mercy on us*

Heart of Jesus, Son of the eternal Father, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mother, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, one with the eternal Word, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, infinite in majesty, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, holy temple of God, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, tabernacle of the Most High, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, house of God and gate of heaven, *have mercy on us*

Heart of Jesus, aflame with love for us, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, source of justice and love, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, well-spring of all virtue, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, worthy of all praise, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, king and center of all hearts, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, treasure-house of wisdom and knowledge, *have mercy on us*

Heart of Jesus, in whom there dwells the fullness of God, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, in whom the Father is well pleased, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, from whose fullness we have all received, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, desire of the eternal hills, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, patient and full of mercy, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, generous to all who turn to you, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness, *have mercy on us*

Heart of Jesus, atonement for our sins, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, overwhelmed with insults, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, broken for our sins, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, obedient even to death, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, pierced by a lance, *have mercy on us*

Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, our peace and reconciliation, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, victim of our sins, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, salvation of all who trust in you, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, hope of all who die in you, *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, delight of all the saints, *have mercy on us*

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, *spare us, O Lord*

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, *graciously hear us, O Lord*

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, *have mercy on us*

Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, *make our hearts like unto Thine*

Let us pray.

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that we, who glory in the Heart of your beloved Son
and recall the wonders of his love for us,
may be made worthy to receive
an overflowing measure of grace
from that fount of heavenly gifts.
Through Christ our Lord.
R/ *Amen.*

Interested in learning more?

On the origin/reason for the Catholic Church:

<https://watch.formed.org/symbolon-the-catholic-faith-explained/season:1/videos/why-do-i-need-the-church-the-mystery-of-the-catholic-church> (45 minutes)

Session #2: Authentic Community

Opening Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit...

Saint: Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231 AD. Feast day November 17th)

Scripture (Matthew 25:37-40):

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 these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Question: What most strikes you about this Scripture passage?

Elizabeth was the daughter of the King of Hungary. She exhibited a desire for holiness from a young age and at times got in trouble for giving food or other things to the poor from her parents' home without permission. A famous story is that she once was caught trying to sneak out a basket of bread, but the one who caught her saw only roses in the basket and so let her go. For this reason, she is often depicted carrying a basket of flowers. Elizabeth married a German nobleman at a young age. In 1223 she encountered members of the newly formed order of St Francis of Assisi (called the Friars Minor), whose spirituality had a big impact on her. Four years later, while she was pregnant with her third child, her husband passed away. From that point she became a lay member ("Third Order") of the Franciscans and expanded her charity even more. She herself would pass away four years from sickness. Although her life was short, Elizabeth lived her time as a child, wife, mother, and widow with great intensity. Each situation gave her unique opportunities to show the love of God to others.

Saintly Writing (From a letter of Conrad of Marburg, St Elizabeth's spiritual director):

From this time onward Elizabeth's goodness greatly increased. She was a lifelong friend of the poor and gave herself entirely to relieving the hungry. She ordered that one of her castles should be converted into a hospital in which she gathered many of the weak and feeble. She generously gave alms to all who were in need, not only in that place but in all the territories of her husband's empire. She spent all her own revenue from her husband's four principalities, and finally she sold her luxurious possessions and rich clothes for the sake of the poor.

Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, Elizabeth went to visit the sick. She personally cared for those who were particularly repulsive; to some she gave food, to others clothing; some she carried on her own shoulders, and performed many other kindly services. Her husband, of happy memory, gladly approved of these charitable works. Finally, when her husband died, she sought the highest perfection; filled with tears, she implored me to let her beg for alms from door to door.

On Good Friday of that year, when the altars had been stripped, she laid her hands on the altar in a chapel in her own town, where she had established the Friars Minor [the Franciscans], and before witnesses she voluntarily renounced all worldly display and everything that our Savior in the gospel advises us to abandon. Even then she saw that she could still be distracted by the cares and worldly glory which had surrounded her while her husband was alive. Against my will she followed me to Marburg. Here in the town she built a hospice where she gathered together the weak and the feeble. There she attended the most wretched and contemptible at her own table.

Apart from those active good works, I declare before God that I have seldom seen a more contemplative woman. When she was coming from private prayer, some religious men and women often saw her face shining marvelously and light coming from her eyes like the rays of the sun.

Before her death I heard her confession. When I asked what should be done about her goods and possessions, she replied that anything which seemed to be hers belonged to the poor. She asked me to distribute everything except one worn out dress in which she wished to be buried. When all this had been decided, she received the Body of our Lord. Afterward, until vespers, she spoke often of the holiest things she had heard in sermons. Then, she devoutly commended to God all who were sitting near her, and as if falling into a gentle sleep, she died.

Question: What most strikes you about the life of St Elizabeth?

Formed Video suggestion: Words of Mother Teresa and images of the Works of Mercy in action. <https://watch.formed.org/videos/formed-whybelieve-s2-ch10-pt2-mezzanine> (3 minutes, 29 seconds)

Reflection:

St. Elizabeth saw that there was a close connection between the love of God and love of neighbor - as Jesus himself taught in the Great Commandment. This love of neighbor had both an “inward” and “outward” direction. First, St. Elizabeth had the calling to love her family (first her parents, then later her husband and children). This calling then extended to the world around her, particularly through the works of mercy to the sick and those in need. Part of what made the early Church so strong was the authentic commitment of the disciples to this twofold nature of authentic community. They fostered the fellowship of prayer and meals in their families and the Church, as well as living generously with those in need. Renewal in the Church requires this.

Questions: How can you better live charity within your own family? How can we better practice the works of mercy in our parishes?

Closing Prayer:

Theme for Meditation: How can I better build authentic community in my family, school, work, parish, and community?

Contemporary Music: Prayer of Saint Francis

Traditional Hymn/Chant: Where Charity is True/Ubi Caritas

Instructions: This litany is based on the classic list of corporal and spiritual works of mercy. One person will lead the prayer and the others will join in the italicized response.

When I can give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can give clothing or housing to those who go without, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can visit or care for the sick, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can visit the imprisoned or ransom the captive, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can help bury the dead or support those in grief, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can provide teaching, counsel, or correction, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can forgive those who offend me and bear wrongs patiently, *Lord, grant me charity.*

When I can in any other way provide comfort to the afflicted, *Lord, grant me charity.*

In my daily resolve to pray for the living and the dead, *Lord, grant me charity.*

[Each may add a prayer intention, then pray together:] Our Father...

Interested in learning more?

Additional scriptural connections and suggestions for the works of mercy are given here-

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy>

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy>

Or watch: Building a Civilization of Love

<https://watch.formed.org/videos/catholic-social-teaching-building-a-civilization-of-love> (19 minutes)

Session #3: Powerful Sacraments

Opening Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit...

Saint: Malachy (1094-1148 AD. Feast day November 3rd)

Scripture (Luke 24:13-35):

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Question: What most strikes you about this Scripture passage?

St Malachy lived at a challenging time for the Irish Church. St Patrick had established the Church and passed away c. 500 AD. Three hundred years later, Viking invasions began to seriously disrupt life in Ireland. Invading rulers conquered regions of the island, and often installed their own family/friends in place of the Bishops (whether or not the appointments were clergy or even believers). Although Brian Boru had largely broken the Viking strength in the

Battle of Clontarf in 1014, the Church had not yet recovered. Much of the institutional Church was still in possession of leaders that saw it as a means of political or financial gain, and cared little for the Faith. Isolated holy bishops or abbots sought to foster the teaching of the faith, prayer, and the sacraments, but they had to contend with the other powers and personalities that worked against their efforts. In light of this, Malachy had at first desired to live the life of a hermit - seeking holiness, but avoiding the public conflict. Those who desired the renewal of the Church saw something in him, however, and eventually he agreed to take up the work of becoming a bishop. It took him many years to overcome the resistance of the false claimants to the position of serving as the primary archbishop of Ireland, but eventually his patience, prayer, and humility won out. Malachy studied with holy bishops/abbots (including St. Bernard of Clairvaux) and made pilgrimages to Rome to learn what he would need to establish. He reinvigorated the celebration of the sacraments and a healthy rule of life for bishops, priests, and monks. The flame of faith lit by St Patrick had not gone out, but had only become dim. Malachy was able to rekindle this light and let it shine brightly.

Saintly Writing (from the biography of St Malachy written by St Bernard):

Since he had a desire and a very great zeal for the honoring of the divine offices and the veneration of the sacraments, lest by chance he might ordain or teach anything concerning these matters otherwise than that which was in accordance with the rite of the universal Church, it came into his mind to visit Bishop Malchus, that he might give him fuller information on all points. He was an old man, full of days and virtues, and the wisdom of God was in him...

At that time an episcopal see was vacant, and had long been vacant, because Malachy would not assent: for they had elected him to it. But they persisted, and at length he yielded when their entreaties were enforced by the command of his teacher, together with that of the metropolitan. It was when he was just entering the thirtieth year of his age, that he was consecrated bishop and brought to Connor... But when he began to administer his office, the man of God understood that he had been sent not to men but to beasts.... They were Christians in name, in fact pagans. There was no giving of tithes or first-fruits; no entry into lawful marriages, no making of confessions: nowhere could be found any who would either seek penance or impose it. Ministers of the altar were exceeding few. But indeed what need was there of more when even the few were almost in idleness and ease among the laity? There was no fruit which they could bring forth from their offices...

What was the “athlete of the Lord” to do? He must either yield with shame or with danger fight. But he who recognized that he was a shepherd and not a hireling, elected to stand rather than to flee, prepared to give his life for the sheep if need be. And although all were wolves and there were no sheep, the intrepid shepherd stood in the midst of the wolves, rich in all means by which he might make sheep out of wolves—admonishing in public, arguing in secret, weeping with one and another; accosting men now roughly, now gently, according as he saw it to be expedient for each. And in cases where these expedients failed he offered for them a broken and a contrite heart. How often did he spend entire nights in vigil, holding out his hands in prayer! And when they would not come to the church he went to meet the unwilling ones in the streets and in the broad ways, and going round about the city, he eagerly sought whom he might gain for Christ...

He continued knocking, and according to the promise, at length, sometimes, to him that knocked it was opened. How could that not follow which the Truth had declared beforehand should follow?

The right hand of the Lord brought mighty things to pass, because the mouth of the Lord spoke the truth. Hardness vanished, barbarity ceased; the rebellious house began gradually to be appeased, gradually to admit reproof, to receive discipline. Barbarous laws disappear, Roman [Church] laws are introduced; everywhere the ecclesiastical customs are received, their opposites are rejected; churches are rebuilt, a clergy is appointed in them; the solemnities of the sacraments are duly celebrated; confessions are made; congregations come to the church; the celebration of marriage graces those who live together. In fine, all things are so changed for the better that today the word which the Lord speaks by the prophet is applicable to that nation: “those who before were not my people are now my people.”

Question: What most strikes you about the life of St Malachy?

Formed Video suggestions: The power of the sacraments

<https://watch.formed.org/why-believe-volume-2/season:12/videos/formed-whybelieve-s2-ch12-pt1-mezzanine> (3 minutes, 19 seconds)

The Road to Emmaus as an outline of the Mass:

<https://watch.formed.org/why-believe-volume-1/season:14/videos/formed-whybelieve-s1-ch14-pt1-mezzanine-1> (2 minutes, 33 seconds)

Reflection:

As human beings, what we do regularly becomes routine. It requires less attention and we can operate on “auto-pilot.” This is helpful for a task like tying our shoes, but not for the celebration of the sacraments! The Lord is always ready to do something new, but are we ready to see it? The seven sacraments are “efficacious signs” - they contain the power to do what they signify. Each of them place our lives in contact with the grace of Christ in a particular way. In many ways the celebration of the Mass is the beating heart of the sacraments. As in the Gospel reading about the road to Emmaus, the references in the early Church to celebrating the “breaking of the bread” often refer to more than a simple meal. The phrase developed a special meaning of the sacrament of the Last Supper - also called the Eucharist. This served as the “source and summit” of their Christian lives. From it they drew strength, and to it they returned in thanksgiving. Renewal in the Church is always connected with rediscovering the blessing of the sacraments.

Questions: What are powerful moments you have experienced with the sacraments? What challenges do you encounter in celebrating the sacraments?

Closing Prayer:

Theme for Meditation: How can I better encounter the power of the sacraments?

Contemporary Music: I am the Bread of Life by Suzanne Toolan

Traditional Hymn/Chant: Godhead Here in Hiding/Adoro te Devote

Instructions: St Malachy reignited the fire of faith first kindled by St Patrick. This famous prayer of St Patrick calls to mind the way that the sacraments insert us into the life of the Most Holy Trinity, and the protection that this gives. As you pray this “Breastplate” prayer, alternate between a leader and another group with the italicized responses:

I arise today, *Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,*
Through belief in the Threeness, *Through confession of the Oneness*
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.
I arise today, *Through the strength of the love of cherubim,*
In the obedience of angels, *In the service of archangels,*
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward, *In the prayers of patriarchs,*
In the predictions of prophets, *In the preaching of apostles,*
In the faith of confessors, *In the innocence of holy virgins,*
In the deeds of the righteous.

I arise today,

Through the strength of heaven, *The light of the sun,*
The radiance of the moon, *The splendor of fire,*
The speed of lightning, *The swiftness of wind,*
The depth of the sea, *The stability of the earth,*
The firmness of rock.

I arise today,

Through God's strength to pilot me, *God's might to uphold me,*
God's wisdom to guide me, *God's eye to look before me,*
God's ear to hear me, *God's word to speak for me,*
God's hand to guard me, *God's shield to protect me,*
God's host to save me, *From snares of devils,*
From temptation of vices, *From everyone who shall wish me ill,*
afar and near.

I summon today

All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.

Christ with me, *Christ before me,*
Christ behind me, *Christ in me,*
Christ beneath me, *Christ above me,*
Christ on my right, *Christ on my left,*
Christ when I lie down, *Christ when I sit down,*
Christ when I arise, *Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,*
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, *Christ in every eye that sees me,*
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation. Amen.

Interested in learning more?

The Eucharist as Source and Summit:

<https://watch.formed.org/symbolon-the-catholic-faith-explained/season:2/videos/the-eucharist-source-summit-of-christian-life> (38 minutes)

What do Catholics believe about the Eucharist:

<https://watch.formed.org/why-believe-volume-2/season:12/videos/formed-whybelieve-s2-ch12-pt4-mezzanine> (2 minutes, 39 seconds)

Session #4: Profound Prayer

Opening Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit...

Saints: Dominic (1170-1221 AD. Feast day August 8th) & Catherine of Siena (1347-1380 AD. Feast day April 29th)

Scripture (Luke 10:38-42):

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

Question: What most strikes you about this Scripture passage?

St. Dominic entered religious life, but then realized that his order was in need of renewal. It had become lukewarm and struggled to draw others to Christ. Similar to St Francis of Assisi (his contemporary), he felt inspired to found a new community that was more closely connected to the counsels of the Gospels. This became the Order of Preachers, better known as the Dominicans. They lived an organized life of prayer, study, and service. A key aspect of their preaching and teaching was their manner of sharing the fruits of their prayerful contemplation with others. The Dominicans spread the devotion of the rosary as an aid to spiritual growth regardless of one’s education or state of life. A great example of this balance of intense prayer with active service was St Catherine of Siena. She began her membership in the Dominicans at home as a Third Order sister (a tradition continued with the Dominican Associates today). Her prayer life allowed her to live in the midst of the world without becoming corrupted by it. Eight-hundred years later, the Dominicans continue to persevere in the grace of their founding.

Saintly Writing (from writings on the history of the Order of Preachers):

Dominic possessed such great integrity and was so strongly motivated by divine love, that without a doubt he proved to be a bearer of honor and grace. He was a man of great equanimity, except when moved to compassion and mercy. And since a joyful heart animates the face, he displayed the peaceful composure of a spiritual man in the kindness he manifested outwardly and by the cheerfulness of his countenance.

Wherever he went he showed himself in word and deed to be a man of the Gospel. During the day no one was more community-minded or pleasant toward his brothers and associates. During the night hours no one was more persistent in every kind of vigil and supplication. He seldom spoke unless it was with God, that is, in prayer, or about God, and in this matter he instructed his brothers. Frequently he made a special personal petition that God would deign to

grant him a genuine charity, effective in caring for and obtaining the salvation of men. For he believed that only then would he be truly a member of Christ, when he had given himself totally for the salvation of men, just as the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all, had offered himself completely for our salvation. So, for this work, after a lengthy period of careful and provident planning, he founded the Order of Friars Preachers.

In his conversations and letters he often urged the brothers of the Order to study constantly the Old and New Testaments. He always carried with him the gospel according to Matthew and the epistles of Paul, and so well did he study them that he almost knew them from memory. Two or three times he was chosen bishop, but he always refused, preferring to live with his brothers in poverty.

Formed Video suggestion: Practical advice on prayer:
<https://watch.formed.org/videos/prayer-continued> (8 minutes)

Reflection:

A brilliant part of the Dominican charism is the ability to balance a contemplative prayer life with active teaching/service. Despite all of our “time-saving devices,” it seems harder than ever to make time for prayer. However, without prayer our action lacks strength and direction. We lose a sense of who we are and what we are doing. We easily are led to the path of least resistance. Likewise, growth in relationship requires spending quality time with another. Making prayer a priority requires discipline, but it begins by focusing on quality over just quantity. Renewal in the Church requires renewal in profound prayer.

Questions: What are the major obstacles you encounter in growing in your prayer life?
What methods of prayer have you found most helpful, or are most interested in learning?
How can the parish help foster personal prayer growth?

Closing Prayer:

Theme for meditation: What is the next step God is asking me to take in my prayer life?

Contemporary Music: Nearer than Before by Jim Cowan

Traditional Hymn/Chant: Come, O Holy Spirit (Sequence)/Veni Sancte Spiritus

Instructions: As mentioned, the Dominicans promoted the rosary as a method for all ages and levels to grow in prayer. It still bears great fruit 800 years later. Pray together one decade of the rosary. **The Transfiguration, the Fourth Luminous Mystery.** Read the following Gospel passage as a preparation for praying the decade:

A reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 9, Verses 28-36:

About eight days after he said this, he took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my chosen Son; listen to him.” After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

[Pray the decade - Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory Be, and Fatima prayer (if known). The leader prays the first half of each prayer, then the rest join in the second half.]

Interested in learning more?

Watch Prayer as a Surge of the Heart:

<https://watch.formed.org/videos/prayer-a-surge-of-the-heart> (38 minutes)