

DIOCESE OF DALLAS YOUNG ADULTS

CALLED TO HOLINESS

PREPARING FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

SMALL GROUP CONTENT | **SEASON TWO**



Why Small Groups?

Welcome to Season Two of Young Adult Small Groups for the Diocese of Dallas! Thank you for making the commitment. Truly. Thank you. There is a plethora of other things you could be doing, but you are here. We hope that your act of “just joining a small group” has a lasting impact on your relationship with God and on the fervor of our Church.

These small group gatherings have been written and designed to accomplish two things: 1.) form a community- building authentic friendships among young adults who long to live their faith with others and 2.) provide a chance for each person to reflect and consider how they are living their faith in the everyday: at home, work, with family, friends, and among perfect strangers.

About Our Content

We are blessed to have the involvement of nationally beloved ministry couple, Tommy & Katie Prejean McGrady of Louisiana, as the authors of the small group content. Tommy & Katie worked in consultation with a Dallas Advisory Group, composed of 8 Dallas young adults, who provided insights to the realities of Dallas and offered feedback as to the small group structure, flow, and material.

We are grateful for the contributions of our authors, the Dallas Advisory Group, and the Young Adult Ministry Leaders throughout the diocese who have contributed to this effort and continue to love and serve our Dallas young adults with fervor.

The small group content you will find in this season is scriptural, **liturgical**, and relevant to the realities of a “Dallas young adult”. The content follows the **liturgical calendar**, meaning that the Scripture passages are taken from the **lectionary** of Sunday readings and that the reflections encourage us to delve into the **liturgical seasons** of the Church. Season Two begins in **Ordinary Time** and will conclude in **Advent**.



**YOUNG ADULT
SMALL GROUPS**
— DIOCESE OF DALLAS —

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Each week of content contains the following:

- Opening Dedication Prayer
- Introductory Thoughts
- Weekly Scripture Readings
- Spiritual Reading taken from prominent and important Catholic figures
- Group Discussion Questions
- Individual Prayer/Journal Prompt
- Closing Prayer Suggestion

There is likely more content available than you are able to process with your group and that's okay! The design of these small groups allows for the facilitator to determine which pieces of the content should receive more or less attention. You do not need to complete the content every time your group gathers. Below is an explanation of the content and some best practices.

Opening Dedication Prayer

The beginning of each small group starts with entrusting to God the upcoming time spent together. It is intended to be brief, sincere, and a model of simplicity. A few scripted options for opening prayer are found in the appendix at the end of the content.

Introductory Thoughts

The main theme of the Season Two small group content is “Called to Holiness”. You will see this theme unpacked through a variety of lenses in each week’s Introductory Thoughts. Introductory Thoughts include questions that can act as an “entry” to the time together or could just be a chance to spark thought and conversation on your own. Do not feel obligated to use these questions in discussion, but instead use them as a springboard to get things moving and have people begin to think and process.

Scripture References

We suggest the facilitators make the Scripture references & the spiritual reading passages available before the small group gathering to allow participants time to read and reflect, make notes in their own Bible, or even print their own copies to bring. This could free up more time for dialogue, discussion, and fellowship while the group is together. During your gatherings, at minimum, we think the facilitator or designated reader should read the full Gospel aloud so that there is a time of centering and focusing on the Word.

We have also made note of the key passage or line from the weekly Scripture that we think is most relevant to the theme. If the group is unable or chooses not to read all the passages together, the key line will give you something to reference in discussion. Encourage individuals to bring a Bible. The following link also provides the Scripture readings online: <https://bible.usccb.org/readings/calendar>.

Spiritual Readings

The spiritual readings we have selected are a chance to go a bit deeper into the weekly theme. The references provided for each selection allow inspired individuals to seek further study. We have referenced the source of the passages. A further description of each source is available in the appendix.

The following sources are used for the spiritual readings:

- Lumen Gentium
- Pope St. John Paul II
- Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen
- St. Teresa of Calcutta
- Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan
- Sr. Thea Bowman

Group Discussion Questions

Discussion questions do not need to be answered in order. We hope that there will be free-wheeling conversations that allow people to begin ping-ponging off of one another with ideas, insights, and reflections. Ensuring that everyone has a copy of the questions will best allow the conversation to be organic and free flowing.

Individual Prayer and Journal Prompt

The prayer and journal prompt are a much more personal and introspective series of questions- a time to process, reflect, and write- for while the group is still gathered. This could be a good chance to close things out and allow everyone a moment to breathe and process before heading home and shifting back into “normal life.” It’s designed to be done independently- each person taking a few moments to write and think silently on their own.

Closing Prayer Suggestion

Lastly, the time of prayer is merely a suggestion of a way to end the gathering. Every group is different, both in how well they know each other, comfort level, and even spirituality. As with the entire small group guide, the group always has the option to “do their own thing” that fits the needs of the group members, especially in regard to concluding the time together in prayer. Again, as prayer is such an important element of small group gatherings, extensive instructions for both facilitators and participants are found in the appendix. Be sure to decide upon and plan for prayer ahead of time. It’s important not to rush prayer or to pray after the time your group was expecting to conclude.

Recommendation: Holding a “Session Zero”

Every group, and every group dynamic, is different. Some people will know each other and be quite close long before this group gathers for the first time. Some people will be total strangers. Most will probably be somewhere in the middle. We’d suggest having a “session zero” (especially your small group is conducted via an online format) for everyone to meet and introduce themselves.

There’s no formal “outline” for this session zero, or expectation of it, but here are a few questions that could spark discussion and conversation:

- Who are you? Where do you work? Who’s your family? General intro information.
- Why did you want to participate in a small group formation experience?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience and small group time?
- Do you have a favorite way to pray?

Know that both diocesan and parish leadership have been interceding for your small group gatherings. We hope that you find your small group community to be an expression of the Church’s desire to let you know that you matter and have a home here.

ALL YOU HOLY MEN AND WOMEN

Opening Thoughts

As this small group officially begins, we set the stage for the coming weeks of gathering, sharing, and praying together by talking about holiness. What is it? What does it mean to be called to holiness? And perhaps most importantly, what does it look like for each of us as individuals?

Holiness does look differently for every person, while also being something universal. Holiness for a parish priest will be lived and strived for differently than holiness for a mom of three young kids. It is also different for the single young adult or the married dad. In the diversity of holiness, there is beauty and continuity: a seeking after the Lord, a desire to serve others, and a consistent, daily attempt to live as God's own child. It is through our Baptism that we are made children of God; and therefore, through our Baptism, that we are called to holiness. To be holy, is to be sacred, or set apart. "For you are a people holy to the Lord, your God; the Lord, your God, has chosen you from all the peoples on the face of the earth to be a people specially his own" (Deuteronomy 14:2w). Set-apartness is a helpful concept when considering holiness.

Over the coming weeks, the focus of these small group gatherings is to deeply and intentionally unpack the **universal call to holiness**, especially in light of the different ways holiness manifests and is witnessed in the world.

This Sunday, the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of All Saints**, in which we remember that every person is called to holiness and invited into intimacy with the Lord. We also recall the great multitude of holy men and women who have gone before us in life and death, who surrendered their lives and hearts to Jesus while on earth, and who now "see his face" in their heavenly state. This surrender is not something unattainable to us, nor is it to be considered a goal set aside for a select few. We have to ask ourselves: What does holiness look like for me, in my current state of life? And how can good, fruitful, life-giving community help me to strive for holiness and to seek the Lord daily?

Opening Dedication Prayer

Reminder: See appendix for examples.

Sunday Readings

Reminder: Prioritize reading the Full Gospel.

First Reading: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

"After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue..."

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 24:1-6

"Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face."

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God...”

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God...”

Spiritual Reading

Reminder: More info on the Spiritual Reading sources are found in the appendix.

Thus, it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.

-Lumen Gentium, 40

Discussion Questions

Reminder: You don't have to answer every question.

- First things first! Introduce yourselves and share why you wanted to participate in a small group this season. (If you are continuing after Season One, share why you wanted to stay involved.) Also, answer this question, “Of what would you be the patron Saint?” For example, Saint Sebastian is the patron Saint of the army and athletes; Saint Catherine is the patron Saint of nurses; Saint Anthony is the patron Saint of the lost, etc.
- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- If you had to define holiness, succinctly, to someone who is curious or seeking more about the faith (a new believer, perhaps) what would you say? How would you define it?
- What does it mean to you to “long to see God’s face”? Do you consider yourself a person who longs to see God’s face? (Psalm 24:6)
- Ultimately, holiness is not in our control. We cannot “become holy” by our own volition. In what ways do you find yourself actively surrendering and answering the call to holiness? What do you do daily to grow closer to the Lord?
- In what ways do you find yourself actively and intentionally avoiding holiness? How do you find ways to distance yourself from the Lord?
- The Beatitudes are a series of blessings found in this weekend’s Gospel. Referencing Matthew 5, which beatitudes resonated with you most strongly?
- In the spirit of All Saints Day (The Solemnity of All Saints), are you particularly drawn to any Saints? Why? What about their life is inspiring to you? How are they an example of holiness for you?

NOVEMBER 8TH | 32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WISDOM OF HOLINESS

Opening Thoughts

What comes to mind when you hear the word “wisdom”? Is it the image of an elderly man or woman, sitting high atop a hill, dishing out sage advice and pithy phrases? That’s the stereotypical idea – that wisdom comes with experience, age, and facing numerous circumstances throughout life.

In Christianity, wisdom is a spiritual gift from God, more so than a byproduct of experience. Wisdom, therefore, manifests differently for each of us, depending on our need for grace in our particular states in life. Our pursuit of holiness, our personal relationship with Christ, our vocation, our career, and even our personal prayer style affect how we experience the gift of wisdom. We must pray for the gift of wisdom as we grow in relationship with Christ, Wisdom Himself; the wisdom of God will grow and thereby be fulfilled in us.

Wisdom is also personified in the Old Testament as a woman who is sought after. Consider this imagery and the intimacy which it implies. To seek is an act of patience, of waiting, and of active pursuit. To embrace wisdom is to embrace the mind of God, rather than to rely upon our own intuitions, ideas, and even plans. The pursuit of wisdom and of holiness requires a particular readiness and a consistent effort from our hearts, which are constantly tempted toward complacency.

If holiness is our “set-apartness”, complacency would be giving into being “just like the rest of the world.” In Confirmation, the faithful are particularly strengthened with the spiritual gifts- including wisdom- to urgently pursue intimacy with Jesus and to invite others to do the same.

Opening Dedication Prayer

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16

“Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her...”

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 63:2-8

“Thus, have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory...”

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus, we shall always be with the Lord...”

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

“Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Spiritual Reading

It is easy to intuit that this “wisdom” is not mere intelligence or practical ability, but rather a participation in the very mind of God who “with his wisdom [has] established man” (cf. v. 2). Thus, it is the ability to penetrate the deep meaning of being, of life and of history, going beyond the surface of things and events to discover their ultimate meaning, willed by the Lord.

Wisdom is a lamp that enlightens the moral choices of daily life and leads us on the straight path “to understand what is pleasing in [the] eyes [of the Lord] and what is conformable with your commands” (cf. v. 9).

-St. John Paul II, General Audience, January 29, 2003

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- How have you sought wisdom in your life? What steps have you taken to grow in this gift?
- Who has been a witness to wisdom in your life? How? When?
- Do you ever consider heaven? Why or why not? What do you think the experience of eternal union with God will be like? How do you feel when you think about heaven?
- The Gospel speaks about being wisely prepared, both to persevere through life and someday meet the Lord. What do you do in your daily life to be as wise as the five virgins who brought oil?
- Pope John Paul II calls wisdom a “lamp,” which ties into the idea of lighting the lamps in the Sunday Gospel. What or who has been a lamp for you? How have you been a lamp for others?
- Referencing back to last week’s discussion about the Beatitudes – how do you think the gift of wisdom could help you answer the call to holiness and more fully live the spirit of the Beatitudes in your daily life?

NOVEMBER 15TH | 33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

HOLINESS FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Opening Thoughts

What do you have to offer? What do you bring to the table? How does your daily life position you to serve and give to others?

When we contemplate the idea of “talents”, we may be tempted to instantly think of an elementary school talent show, where we perform and demonstrate a skill to receive applause from an audience. Or we think of the “thing” we can do, after years of practice and perfection, that others recognize as our unique ability. And that’s certainly part of it, as to be talented is to be able to do something well.

But let’s flip the script and consider a different definition of talent. Let’s think of our talents as a gift from the Lord that we can then offer back to him and to others. Through this perspective, we can begin to see our talents (and the talents of others) not as a possession, but as an opportunity to serve and give.

Serving and giving – is that not what holiness is all about? Both are an important exercise of the soul which help us grow in holiness (our set-apartness). As we each have unique paths and situations in life, the ways in which we serve and give will be unique, according to our purpose. With wisdom from the Holy Spirit, we are able to examine ourselves and our lives to better understand where our talents are best employed for God and others.

Opening Dedication Prayer

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

“When one finds a worthy wife, her value is beyond pearls.”

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 128:1-5

“Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways!”

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

“For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness.”

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

“For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away...”

Spiritual Reading

Even in this life there is a terrible penalty for neglect. That penalty is the warping and the atrophying and the dulling of those faculties which were meant to feed on the things of God. God gave us a mind to know Him, a will to love Him, and a body to serve Him. If these energies of body and soul are neglected, by not lifting them up in adoration of the Father from Whom all gifts come, nature takes a terrible revenge. Something happens

to us that happens to the lower animals, namely, we lose the use of those faculties and also the high objects toward which they should have been directed. There is some scientific warrant for the belief that the mole was not always blind. It chose, however, to spend its life underground and not to use its faculty of vision. Nature, as if sitting in judgment, practically said to the mole: "If you will not use the eyes which I have given you, then I shall strike you blind.

And so, the penalty of neglect is the surrender of even the gifts which we have. It is this lesson which Our Blessed Lord revealed in the Parable of the Talents. "And to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one. . ." He that received the five talents gained another five. In like manner, he that received the two gained another two. "But he that had received the one, going his way digged into the earth, and hid his lord's money." But when the reckoning day came, he who had received the five talents and he who had received the two talents, through their work having earned another five and another two, were admitted into the joy of the Lord. But he who had done nothing with the gift which had been given him, but merely hid it in the earth, had to suffer the penalty of the forfeiture of the talent, for the Lord said: "Take ye away therefore the talent from him..." The deprivation was the natural consequence of his sloth. As the arm of a man, which is never called into exercise, loses its strength by degrees, and its muscles and its sinews disappear, even so the powers which God gave us, when unexercised, fail and fade from us. "For to everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall abound: but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away.

Venerable Fulton Sheen, "The Penalty of Neglect," Jan. 22, 1933

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- The first reading speaks of the value of a "worthy wife". Let's see her as representing an individual who desires to fulfill his or her responsibilities to God and neighbor on a daily basis, regardless of marital or vocational status. Consider your daily life. What responsibilities (and opportunities) do you have to love God and neighbor, based on your current state in life? Be specific! (Proverbs 31:10)
- How have you seen "light" in your life? How have you seen darkness? What have you done to try and walk and live in the light more than the darkness? (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)
- Consider the Gospel. With which servant do you most strongly identify? Why?
- What talents do you believe the Lord has gifted to you? How have you tried to use them for the Kingdom?
- Archbishop Sheen talks about how our souls atrophy when we neglect the spiritual life and the gifts God has given us. Where are some areas where you have experienced neglect in your spiritual life? What can you do to reverse the course of neglect in your life?
- Do you believe we have worth to God and others beyond our talents and giftings? Would we still have worth if we were to never serve or give?

NOVEMBER 22ND

THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

THE SOURCE OF OUR HOLINESS

Opening Thoughts

What brings us to life? Besides just the physicality of breathing, with our heart beating and blood pumping- what animates us? Moves us? Guides us? What brings life to your soul?

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Whew! That's a mouthful!) is like a liturgical party. Advent is NEXT WEEK, marking the beginning of a new liturgical year and making THIS week the conclusion of the current liturgical year. In the upcoming weeks, we will further look into the idea of each person's call to holiness by reflecting on the source of holiness in our lives, even thinking about the Source of Life himself. We have to acknowledge that we can only be holy, wise, talented, and generous because of Jesus. It is Jesus who first loves us, came to be with us, died so we could be with him, and calls us to sacrifice in service of others.

Jesus could have revealed himself to man in any manner, but he chose to reveal himself through particular images: a helpless infant, a pastoring shepherd, a reigning king.

The upcoming liturgical season of Advent is the perfect time to pause and reflect on how that Kingdom was first ushered into this world – by way of a helpless infant, who made himself small like us. This is Christ's Kingship. He didn't rule in the way anyone expected but invited everyone into generous service to one another and humble

holiness born of a desire to follow God's will over one's own. To celebrate Christ's Kingship is to acknowledge that we are being welcomed into His Kingdom and are being asked to build that Kingdom on earth, by doing what he did: clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, teaching the ignorant, and listening to and following His voice. How well do we know THIS JESUS as the source of our holiness?

Opening Dedication Prayer

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

"The Lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 23:1-6

"He guides me in right paths for his name's sake..."

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

"For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life..."

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me." of God before you."

Spiritual Reading

If we are not willing to give whatever it takes to do good to one another, sin is still in us. That is why we too must give to each other until it hurts. It is not enough to say -- for us to say: "I love God." But I also have to love my neighbor. St. John says that you are a liar if you say you love God and you don't love your neighbor. How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live? And so, it is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to hurt. I must be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people and, in fact, to do good to them. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me; and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.

It hurt Jesus to love us. We have been created in His image for greater things, to love and to be loved. We must "put on Christ," as Scripture tells us. And so, we have been created to love as He loves us. Jesus makes Himself the hungry one, the naked one, the homeless one, the unwanted one, and He says, "You did it to Me." On the last day He will say to those on His right, "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to Me." And He will also say to those on His left, "Whatever you neglected to do for the least of these, you neglected to do it for Me."

-St Teresa of Calcutta, National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C., February 3, 1994

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- Have you ever felt "lost" in the spiritual life? As if you've strayed? What was that like? What brought you back?
- The idea of "Jesus as King" conjures up a lot of imagery and visuals. We can also think of Jesus as an infant and shepherd, along with a servant or a fisherman. Do you have a favorite image/visual of Jesus? Why? How does that image help you in prayer? Does it aid you in your relationship with Jesus?
- What enemies do you battle in the spiritual life? (1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28) How have you "taken them on"?
- Think back to the Beatitudes we discussed in Week 1 (Matthew 5:1-12). Compare the Beatitudes to the commands Jesus gives in the Gospel today (Matthew 25:31-46). Which ones pair up or match together? With which ones do you struggle the most?
- Who has given to you, to the point of hurt? Who have you given to, to the point of hurt?
- Mother Teresa is famously known for saying "find your Calcutta" to challenge people to live Matthew 25 in a radical way. What is your Calcutta? Where can you give, serve, clothe, feed, and love others, especially in relation to your current state of life?

NOVEMBER 29TH | 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

HOLY ANTICIPATION

Opening Thoughts

Do you consider yourself a patient person? Or is it hard for you to wait, especially when you know that something “big” is coming?

As a people set apart, we are set apart in our anticipation of the coming of our King. The liturgical season of Advent is the Church’s “season of waiting.” We wait for the coming of our King as an infant in Bethlehem and for the return of our King on the throne at the end of time. Advent is distinctly marked by this joyful hope – He is coming, and He’s coming soon!

But how do we persevere in the waiting? How do we avoid becoming restless, anxious, or try to “speed things along?” Because there’s value in the waiting. It’s about the destination, sure, but also, the journey.

Oftentimes, the angst we experience during periods of waiting stems from a true desire for something better that we wish to come. As young adults, we experience a density of life transitions and there can be a misconception that one day, we will “get there”. We can fall into the false belief that once we arrive at a particular stage in our career, find the one we are meant to be with, are finally able to have children, we will stop longing for something better to come. Yet, being a Christian means we are always longing and waiting for the better to come: Jesus. In the meantime, we are called to fulfill the call of our Baptism and to be holy.

As we’ve journeyed together in conversation and

fellowship, we’ve looked at how we are each called to holiness – which means we are each called to wait hopefully for the one who makes us holy. We’ve unpacked how our gifts and talents can be used for God’s kingdom – which means we are called to wait in joyful hope for that Kingdom to be made even more visible on earth. We’ve discussed how the wisdom of God is the lamp unto our feet – which means we cannot ignore the time it takes to grow in that wisdom and the necessity of being patient with ourselves as we do.

Opening Dedication Prayer

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

“Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.”

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

“...give us new life, and we will call upon your name.”

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

“He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

“Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming...”

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

“The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.”

Spiritual Reading

On 15 August 1975, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, I was invited to the Palace of Independence, the President's Palace in Saigon, only to be arrested. The motive was that Pope Paul VI had transferred me from my diocese in Nha Trang where I had been bishop for eight years, between 1967 and 1975, to Saigon, to become Archbishop Coadjutor...

...From the very first moment of my arrest, the words of Bishop John Walsh, who had been imprisoned for 12 years in Communist China, came to my mind. On the day of his liberation Bishop Walsh said, "I have spent half my life waiting."

It is true. All prisoners, myself included, constantly wait to be let go. I decided then and there that my captivity would not be merely a time of resignation but a turning point in my life. I decided I would not wait. I would live the present moment and fill it with love. For if I wait, the things I wait for will never happen. The only thing that I can be sure of is that I am going to die.

No, I will not spend time waiting. I will live the present moment and fill it with love.

-Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- When have you had to wait in life? Are you currently waiting on something? What's that been like for you? How does waiting (especially on big/important things) make you feel?
- Do you feel like the Lord is molding you, like a potter molds clay? Or do you find that sometimes you try to make the mold and form the clay? Is it hard for you to let go of control and allow the Lord to form you? Are you patient with him and yourself? (Isaiah 63)
- What are some things you typically do during the Advent season, to mark the liturgical season as set apart and special? How do you pray differently during these four weeks?
- How do you feel uniquely called to "fellowship with the Son?" What does your friendship with Jesus look like, five weeks into this small group gathering? Has it changed? Has it grown?
- What are you most looking forward to in life right now? What's something you are excited about? How have you invited Jesus into that excitement?

DECEMBER 6TH | 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE PREPARATIONS OF HOLINESS

Opening Thoughts

Who are the people of God, those that are set apart? Do you count yourself among them? What does it mean to be in solidarity with one another, a people in waiting?

The Advent season is a time where we actively wait – not passively wait. Historically, the Jewish people are a people in waiting. The Old Testament tells the story of a people waiting for freedom, waiting to enter the promised land, waiting for the cease of oppression, waiting for a Savior. They have waited to the point of suffering, clinging to the promise of God that, indeed, he is coming.

As Christians, called to holiness, we are set apart as a collective body- the Church. In a very real sense, we are still a people in waiting.

Over the past few weeks, we hope that you have experienced the true Church in your small group. This is the call to holiness – that each of us is uniquely suited to walk in the ways of the Lord. This is what it means to grow in wisdom – that each of us can hear God's voice in our lives and follow His will. This is what it means to use our gifts that God has given to us, and this is what it means to wait in joyful hope. None of us are excluded from the call of our Baptisms. As children of God, we are challenged to help one another as we each pursue answering that call.

Please note: this week, December 12, is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Some parishes have a huge celebration for this important feast day, and we'd encourage the group to participate and celebrate together with the parish, if able.

Opening Dedication Prayer

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

"Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 85:9-14

"...for he proclaims peace to his people."

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14

"...but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

"...Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

Spiritual Reading

I am a pilgrim in the journey looking for home. And Jesus told me that the Church is my home. And Jesus told me that heaven is my home and I have here no lasting city. Cardinals, bishops – my brothers or Church – help me to get home....

Today we're called to walk together in a new way toward that Land of Promise and to celebrate who we are and whose we aren't. If we, as a Church, walk together – don't let nobody separate you – that's one thing black folk can teach you – don't let folks divide you up – you know, put the lay folk over here and the clergy over here – put the bishops in one room and the clergy in the other room – put the women over here and the men over here – The Church teaches us that the Church is a family of families and the family got to stay together and we know, that if we do stay together, come here brother – we know that if we do stay together – if we walk and talk and work and play and stand together in Jesus' name – we'll be who we say we are – truly Catholic and we shall overcome – overcome the poverty – overcome the loneliness – overcome the alienation and build together a Holy city, a new Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know that we are here because we love one another.

-Sister Thea Bowman, Address to the U.S. Bishop's Conference, June 1989

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from the Scripture and the spiritual reading?
- Over the past few weeks, how have you grown in your intentional pursuit of personal holiness? Have you noticed a change within yourself? In your friendships? Among your family relationships?
- How would you define “the glory of God”? Name a moment in your life when you've seen the glory of God revealed? What was that like? How did it change you and the circumstances of your life, especially in regard to your state of life?
- How has the “waiting” of the Advent season been for you so far? Are you finding yourself patient or restless? What are you most looking forward to as Christmas draws near?
- If you were to encounter John the Baptist in the desert and hear what he has to say about the Messiah coming, how do you think you'd react?
- Sister Thea Bowman talks about how the Church is a family that stays together. Have you found that to be true in your life? Why or why not?

DECEMBER 13TH

WRAP UP / FELLOWSHIP GATHERING

This week, instead of going through the standard “read, discuss, journal, pray” we want to summarize/reflect on all the various themes and passages that have been discussed.

To recap our focus over the last few weeks:

Growing in holiness – and the call to be holy – is a project for every single one of us, in every state of life. Wisdom is not just a “trait” of the aged or experienced, but a gift of the Holy Spirit, and we are called to follow and rest in the wisdom of God himself. The world needs what we have to offer – the gifts the Lord has given us. To hide them, bury them, ignore them, or even misuse them, hurts the Church and ourselves. Waiting in joyful hope for the Lord, and growing in patient anticipation of His incarnation, will only aid our growth in holiness. Our hearts long for Him – and we live in such a way that we can be with Him.

We want this gathering to be a chance to share together what you have thought on over these past few weeks, what you’ve taken home and continued to ponder, and what you would like to continue discussing in the future. And, we hope tonight is a chance to celebrate one another’s company with good food, drinks, fun, and some festive cheer.

Here are some questions to prompt conversation:

- What have you learned about the personal and universal call to holiness over the past few weeks? Have you felt yourself focusing more on/growing in holiness?

- What has surprised you (in a good way) about these gatherings?

Depending on the size of the group, here are some ideas of things to do during this “fellowship night”

- Silly Christmas Sweater Contest (Advent or Christmas themed; have prizes for most creative, tackiest, most liturgically appropriate, etc.)
- Board Games (Mexican Train, Ticket to Ride, Bananagrams, SkipBo - all excellent group games)
- Have a potluck dinner (with everyone bringing a dish, and then bake and decorate cookies together for dessert)
- Watch a movie and discuss it after (Does not need to be a “Christian” movie)
- Family Gathering/Party - bring together kids, significant others, spouses (if they aren’t part of the group already) to share a meal and hang out all together

Please note: this is also the day after the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We repeat our encouragement to join your parish celebrations!

Whatever you do, we also hope this time of fellowship is centered and grounded in prayer, so we’d also encourage (if possible) to go to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament or attend Mass, together, as a group, at some point this week.

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Advent

A liturgical season that begins four Sundays before Christmas and concludes on Christmas Eve. The word Advent means “arrival” or “coming”. The season is spent in spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ.

Beatitudes

(See Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1716-1729)- The word beatitude corresponds with “blessing”. The Beatitudes are a series of blessings found in Matthew 5. Our eternal Beatitude is the gift of heavenly life with Christ.

Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan

(1928-2002) Vietnamese priest and Bishop of Nha Trang notorious for being imprisoned without cause for thirteen years under communist regime in Vietnam where he brought the Gospel to thousands from behind bars

Lectionary

A book that contains the Bible passages that are read at each Mass throughout the year, arranged by day, surrounding the liturgical calendar. There are 3 cycles of readings that are repeated every 3 years.

Litany

A prayer that is arranged as a series, in which a main leader typically offers the requests for general or specific blessings and the congregation responds to complete the request (For example: “Pray for us” or “Grant us the grace to desire it”)

Liturgical

Referring to the Liturgy (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1066-1075)- Liturgy is the participation of the People of God in the work of God.

Liturgical Calendar

The organization of the liturgical year into six liturgical seasons, with an upholding of “the Lord’s Day” as a pillar Feast Day and the incorporation of the celebrations of solemnities, feasts, and memorials that commemorate Saints and events in Church history. Learn more here: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar>.

Liturgical Seasons

Distinct periods of practice within the Liturgical Calendar that encourage the Church to enter into the Mystery of Christ in a particular way. The seasons include Advent, Christmas, Lent, The Holy Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

Lumen Gentium

This is a “dogmatic constitution on the Church”, a document inspired by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which was an effort of the Church to answer the question of how the Church was to engage with the modern world. In Latin, its title means “Light of the Nations” and the document was promulgated during the papacy of Pope Paul VI in 1964.

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Ordinary Time

A liturgical season- taking place between Christmas and Lent, Easter and Advent- which focuses on the events of Jesus' life

Pope St. John Paul II

(1920-2005) A polish priest and Pope from 1978-2005, notorious for his advocacy of basic human rights, women's rights, and worker's rights and his elevation of the importance of young people in the Church through the founding of World Youth Day

Servant of God, Sr. Thea Bowman

(1937-1990)- A Mississippi native religious sister of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration notorious for her transcendence of racism against African Americans, the founding of the National Black Sisters Conference, and her mark on the Catholic Church through presentations, songs, and storytelling. The title "Servant of God" means that her life is under investigation and consideration to be brought before the Pope to be recognized for heroic virtue.

St. Teresa of Calcutta

(1910-1997) Albanian religious sister of the Missionaries of Charity notorious for her work with the severely ill, disabled, aged, and impoverished in India

Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen

(1895- 1979) Illinois native priest notorious for his work of evangelization through television and radio (He won 2 Emmys and was on the cover of Time Magazine!). The title "Venerable" means that he has been recognized by the Pope for heroic virtue and if miracles are granted through the intercession of the individual, the individual may be formally recognized as a canonized Saint.

PRAYER INDEX

Opening Dedication Prayers

You do not have to recite any of these prayers word for word. They are provided to give you an example of how you could start your small group time together in prayer.

Example 1:

Lord Jesus,

Thank you for being always good and always loving. Thank you for your presence in our lives and for bringing us here together to be a part of the same small group. Please bless our time and our conversation. Make it draw us closer to you. Amen.

Example 2:

Come, Holy Spirit. We take a moment to recall that whenever 2 or 3 are gathered in your name, that you are present in our midst. Thank you for being with us. May your Spirit help us learn from the Scripture and reading today, have honest conversation, and come to better know your love. Amen.

Example 3:

Lord God, thank you for this week and this time we have together right now. We ask for your blessing over our time together as we pray:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Hail Mary, Full of Grace, The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death. Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Prayer of Beatitude: November 1

Find Matthew 5:3-11 in your Bibles. The blessings listed here are referred to as the Beatitudes. Choose one person to read the Beatitudes, pausing after each one. After each beatitude is read aloud, have the group respond with the prayer below. For example:

Reader: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Group: "Lord Jesus, help me live this blessing."

At the conclusion of praying through the Beatitudes, sit in silence for a few moments before concluding with a short Litany of Saints, with each group member naming a saint they're close with and asking for their prayers. For example:

Participant #1: "St. Francis..."

Group: "Pray for us."

Participant #2: "St. Clare..."

Group: "Pray for us."

Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary: November 8

Mary is often referred to as "Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom." This makes sense. She's someone who leaned into the presence of God in her life, followed His will, and rested in His plans. She listened to Wisdom, and in a very real sense, is wise herself.

Pray through the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary together, as a group for the intention of growing in wisdom.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of 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.

Holy Mary, pray for us.

Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us.

Mother of Christ, pray for us.

Mother of divine grace, pray for us.

Mother most pure, pray for us.

Mother most chaste, pray for us.

Mother inviolate, pray for us.

Mother undefiled, pray for us.

Mother most amiable, pray for us.

Mother most admirable, pray for us.

Mother of good counsel, pray for us.

Mother of our Creator, pray for us.

Mother of our Savior, pray for us.

Mother of the Church, pray for us.

Virgin most prudent, pray for us.

Virgin most venerable, pray for us.

Virgin most renowned, pray for us.

Virgin most powerful, pray for us.

Virgin most merciful, pray for us.

Virgin most faithful, pray for us.

Mirror of justice, pray for us.

Seat of wisdom, pray for us.

Cause of our joy, pray for us.

Spiritual vessel, pray for us.
Vessel of honor, pray for us.
Singular vessel of devotion, pray for us.
Mystical rose, pray for us.
Tower of David, pray for us.
Tower of ivory, pray for us.
House of gold, pray for us.
Ark of the covenant, pray for us.
Gate of Heaven, pray for us.
Morning star, pray for us.
Health of the sick, pray for us.
Refuge of sinners, pray for us.
Comforter of the afflicted, pray for us.
Help of Christians, pray for us.
Queen of angels, pray for us.
Queen of patriarchs, pray for us.
Queen of prophets, pray for us.
Queen of apostles, pray for us.
Queen of martyrs, pray for us.
Queen of confessors, pray for us.
Queen of virgins, pray for us.
Queen of all saints, pray for us.
Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us.

Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us.
Queen of the most holy rosary, pray for us.
Queen of families, pray for us.
Queen of peace, pray for us.
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord God, that we thy servants may enjoy perpetual health of mind and body, and by the glorious intercession of blessed Mary, ever Virgin, may we be freed from present sorrow, and rejoice in eternal happiness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Blessing: November 15

This prayer gives the opportunity for the small group to ask God to individually bless each member and to help each member use his or her gifts in service of God and others.

Choose one person to be the prayer leader (most likely the facilitator). This person will do the majority of the praying aloud. Ask each member of the group to think of a gift or talent they have that they would like to put towards service. After the prayer leader begins the prayer, he or she will go person by person, asking them which gift they'd like to offer to God. Then, the group will join together to pray for that individual. The group members are welcome to extend their hands in a blessing toward the group member. We recommend, in this circumstance, there be no physical touching. Praying aloud, the prayer leader will thank God for that gift and ask God to strengthen it, while the rest of the group prays along quietly. The prayer leader can allow other group members to add to the prayer aloud as well.

Example:

Prayer Leader: Okay, Group Member, what is the gift or talent you would like to offer?

Group Member: I think that I am a good listener.

Prayer Leader: Great. Let us pray. Jesus, we are so grateful for Group Member and we thank you for giving him/ her the gift of being a good listener. Help him/ her use this gift to comfort and support those who need a friend during hard times. Help him/ her to use this gift to better understand people and to be compassionate. In your name, we pray, Amen.

Radiating Christ: November 22

Mother Teresa was famously known for praying the Radiating Christ prayer written by St. John Henry Newman. Pray it together as a small group.

Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with Your Spirit and Life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our souls.
Let them look up, and see no longer us, but only Jesus!

Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.

The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be ours.

It will be You, shining on others through us.

Let us thus praise You in the way You love best, by shining on those around us.

Let us preach You without preaching, not by words but by example,
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do,
the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear for You.

Amen.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel: November 29

There are certain traditional ways to mark the beginning of Advent, including singing certain hymns, hanging ornaments on Jesse tree, and lighting the candles of an Advent wreath.

Sing (or say aloud together) “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” together as a group, and then have each person in the group offer up a petition for something they are currently waiting for in life.

1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. Refrain

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe. Refrain

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. Refrain

5 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode. Refrain

6 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light. Refrain

7 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. Refrain

Intentions & Decade of the Rosary: December 6

Have each member of the group offer two intentions:

- An intention of gratitude
- An intention of petition

After each person has offered an intention, pray a decade of the rosary (or the whole rosary, if you have time) as a group. For instructions on how to pray the rosary, visit this link:

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/rosaries/how-to-pray-the-rosary>.



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