

DIOCESE OF DALLAS YOUNG ADULTS
SMALL GROUP CONTENT

COUNTED AMONG THEM



WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Welcome to Counted Among Them, Season Ten of Young Adult Small Groups for the Diocese of Dallas! We are excited that you have opted to join us, during this Season, as we dive into the lives of the 12 Apostles and their journey with Jesus. We hope that the time you spend with your small group is both fulfilling and life giving. These young adult small groups have been developed to: help remind us of our call to discipleship, support your communal foundation by helping you build authentic friendships with young adults who are striving to live out their Catholic faith, connect your realities to those of the Apostles who have sought to live out their baptismal call.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Aguilar is not an Apostle, but sure hopes to be counted among them one day! She lives with her husband, Carlos, in Plano, TX. They support one another in the challenging, yet joy-filled, walk of discipleship. Katie has Bachelor's degrees in Theology and Catechetics from Franciscan University, a Masters in Church Ministries from the Ecumenical Institute of Baltimore, and a Masters in Business Administration from LSU Shreveport. She hopes that her love of Jesus helps more people come to know him. She works for Christ the King Catholic Church in Dallas as a Pastoral Associate.

Katie would like to dedicate this small group series to Pope Benedict XVI, who died on December 31, 2022. When Katie learned that he had died, she was holding his book, *The Apostles*, composed of his 2006 General Audience addresses, which provided major inspiration for this series.

HOW TO USE THE SMALL GROUP CONTENT:

1. LISTEN TO THE PODCAST INDEPENDENTLY BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP GATHERING. The primary content for small group formation is presented via podcast. The script for the podcast is provided for those who would like to reference it alongside the podcast.

2. UTILIZE “INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER” AT HOME, DURING YOUR PERSONAL PRAYER TIME, ANYTIME THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. You do not need to share the fruits of your prayer with your small group unless you want to.

3. BEGIN WITH THE OPENING PRAYER WHEN YOU GATHERING WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP. Always bring your Bible! Get familiar with carrying it around and navigating the text comfortably.

4. LISTEN TO THE PODCAST WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP. It will be helpful for your discussion to have the content fresh on your mind. Plus, you will find new meaning in the teachings by listening to them a second time. It may be helpful to have the script with you during this so that you can make notes.

5. SHARE INITIAL FEEDBACK WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP.

6. DISCUSS THE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP.

7. END WITH THE CLOSING PRAYER AS YOU CONCLUDE YOUR TIME WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP.

WEEK ONE



Episode one can be referenced on pg. 29

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

AN EXERCISE IN IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

“Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories. In the Ignatian tradition, praying with the imagination is called contemplation.... contemplation is a very active way of praying that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions. (Note that in other spiritual traditions, contemplation has quite a different meaning: it refers to a way of praying that frees the mind of all thoughts and images.)

Ignatian contemplation is suited especially for the Gospels.... we accompany Jesus through his life by imagining scenes from the Gospel stories. Let the events of Jesus’ life be present to you right now. Visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story; don’t worry if your imagination is running too wild. At some point, place yourself in the scene.

Contemplating a Gospel scene is not simply remembering it or going back in time. Through the act of contemplation, the Holy Spirit makes present a mystery of Jesus’ life in a way that is meaningful for you now. Use your imagination to dig deeper into the story so that God may communicate with you in a personal, evocative way.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going “too far,” then do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagining lead you: Closer to God or farther away? Is your imagining bringing you consolation or desolation?

PERSONAL PRAYER CONTINUED...

EXCERPT FROM THE IGNATIAN ADVENTURE BY KEVIN O'BRIEN, SJ.

Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they may have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize it. In a spirit of generosity, pray as you are able; don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions, or imagination."

Pray with the text from the Call of the First Disciples (Apostles) found in **MATTHEW 4:18-22**. Find a space that is quiet and relaxing, where you can be comfortable.

Read the passage slowly, paying attention to the details and how they inform your senses. How does this scene feel? Look? Smell? Sound? Taste?

Read the passage a second time. Imagine yourself as present in the passage. Perhaps you are one of the Apostles. Perhaps you are the father of James and John. Perhaps you are an onlooker.

Allow Jesus to speak to you. Do not put any pressure on yourself. Just receive.

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. What exactly do you think it is that draws so many Catholics to observe the practice of Lent? What is the appeal of Lent to you, personally?
3. If you have been baptized, how would you describe the effect your Baptism has on your life today?
4. What role has Reconciliation played in your relationship with Jesus?
5. Read together the Call of the First Disciples (Apostles) in Matthew 4:18-22. What does the analogy of fishing teach the apostles about evangelizing or sharing the Gospel with others?

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

WEEK TWO



Episode two can be referenced on pg. 33

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

PRAY WITH THE READING OF THE CALL OF THE APOSTLES FROM LUKE 5:1-11.

Whether or not you are a skilled artist, choose a moment within the passage and draw it. Don't be concerned with making it a "good" drawing and feel free to laugh at yourself. The purpose of this exercise is to draw yourself deeper into the details of the passage in order to imagine the interaction with Christ.

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. Consider how Andrew went to tell his brother about Jesus. Do you have a story of a time when you have shared Jesus with another person? If so, share. Consider your relationships now. Is there perhaps a person who the Spirit might be calling you to tell about Jesus?
3. Why do you think Jesus may have had an “inner three” (Peter, James, and John)? Choose a special moment that Jesus shared with one of the three. What did that moment teach you about Jesus?
4. Read together the Call of the First Disciples as found in Luke 5:1-11. Have you ever witnessed a sort of miraculous event (such as the overflowing catch) that led you to have a deeper faith? If so, please share.
5. Consider the sentence: “We make a grave error if we believe that anyone can be fully Christian with only Christian acquaintances or occasional Christian company and conversation.” Are you in agreement or disagreement with this statement and why?

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

A series of 20 horizontal black lines providing a template for writing.

WEEK THREE



Episode three can be referenced on pg. 37

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

POPE FRANCIS HAS ENCOURAGED MEDITATION ON THE FIVE WOUNDS OF CHRIST.

Read this article before spending time in prayer. Sit still, in a quiet and comfortable place. Close your eyes. Steady your breath. One by one, contemplate individually each wound of Christ: his left hand, his right hand, his left foot, his right foot, his side.

Article: <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/francis-comic-strip/francis-chronicles/five-wounds-christ-pope-urges-recovery-traditional>



OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. The Samaritans were considered impure within Jewish law; therefore, it was a significant act of acceptance when Jesus openly interacted with, not only a Samarita but, a Samaritan woman. In our Church today, are there any groups of people that we, at least in practice, seem to treat as “impure”? If so, who? And how do you believe Jesus wants us to treat them?
3. This episode points out that there are many Christian churches with slightly varied interpretations of the Gospel faith and ways of practicing that faith. What are some of the factors that have led to you being Catholic and remaining Catholic when there are so many other options out there?
4. Read together John 20:19-29. Why do you believe that Jesus’ wounds were preserved in his resurrected body? Share other thoughts on the passage.

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

Lined writing area consisting of 25 horizontal lines.

WEEK FOUR



Episode four can be referenced on pg. 41

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

EVERY DAY THIS WEEK, SIT IN SILENCE FOR 5 MINUTES.

You can time yourself on your phone. During that time of silence, close your eyes and ask the Spirit to put a person on your heart, or inspire the name of a person in your mind. Pray for that person, and if you feel like God is calling you to reach out to them in a particular way, do so!

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. Jesus sends the Apostles out two by two. Do you believe that you have been sent anywhere by Jesus? Do you have a “mission territory” or area in your life where you believe you are meant to bring the Gospel of Jesus? If you don’t have a mission territory, how might you discern if God is indeed wanting to send you somewhere. Share.
3. Share the name of a person in your life that supports you in living your faith and spreading the Gospel within your mission territory. How do they support you?
4. Reflect on ways that you have witnessed God working in your life and others over the past several months. “Report” to the group.
5. Check in: How is Lent going for everyone? Have any specific practices helped you grow closer to Jesus?

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

WEEK FIVE



Episode five can be referenced on pg. 45

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

WORK ON MEMORIZING THE “ANIMA CHRISTI” SOUL OF CHRIST PRAYER.

Consider incorporating it to a routine moment in your day, so that it can become a daily prayer.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O Good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds hide me.

Permit me not to be separated from you.

From the wicked foe, defend me.

At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you

That with your saints I may praise you

For ever and ever. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. Philip was unafraid to talk directly to Jesus and to ask questions. What do you think prevents most people from talking directly to Jesus and being honest with him in prayer?
3. In what ways do you believe Jesus shows us the Father?
4. Share about the role of the Eucharist in your life: What has been your experience with attending Sunday Mass? Have you ever/ do you attend daily Mass? Do you ever participate in Eucharistic Adoration?
5. What difference do you think it would make in our Church if everyone believed in the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

WEEK SIX



Episode six can be referenced on pg. 48

INSPIRATION FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

SPEND TIME IN PRAYER MAKING A “HOLY WEEK” PLAN WITH JESUS.

Aim to attend Holy Thursday Mass, Stations of the Cross or Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion on Friday (Liturgy of the Word, Veneration of the Cross, and Communion Service with previously consecrated hosts), and make meaningful plans for Easter Mass with family or friends. If you are able, take off work on Friday and uphold fasting from meat (two small meals throughout the day and a regular meal for dinner). If not able, remember to do so next year, and excuse yourself at the three o’clock hour to commemorate Jesus’ death.

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. Amen.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Share initial feedback with the group. Do not feel as if you need to use the small group questions if your organic conversation fills the time.
2. Consider the betrayal of Judas. Do you think Jesus' death had to come about through Judas or could the plan have been accomplished another way?
3. Consider the denial of Peter. Why do you think Peter denied Jesus even after being warned that he would and being determined that he wouldn't?
4. Reflect upon your journey through Lent thus far. What has been your greatest take-a-way? How has the Lord spoken to you during this season? How have you grown closer to him?

CLOSING PRAYER

1. Share any Prayer Intentions
2. Our Father
3. Hail Mary
4. Glory Be

APPENDIX

EPISODE ONE

Hello and welcome to “Counted Among Them,” the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! My name is Edith Torres and today, We are at the beginning of a six episode journey in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles. Lent- so much more than the color purple, ashes, and giving up chocolate- is a full, forty day-long, powerful liturgical season of the Church. During Lent, we prepare ourselves to draw closer to Jesus in his Passion, Death, and, ultimately, his Resurrection, which we celebrate at Easter (and every Sunday!).

Lent is trending, y'all. And I'm not just referring to McDonalds heavily promoting its fish sandwich. Lent is trending among CATHOLICS! There is a striking phenomenon among Young Adults surrounding the observance of Lent. In 2016, a study was conducted on self-identifying Catholic millennials— who would now be considered our older young adults. You might not be so surprised to learn that only 14% of these millennials reported regularly attending Sunday Mass. But listen to this! 41% of the same population reported attending Ash Wednesday services! This makes Ash Wednesday the third most attended religious service all year for Catholic millennials, following, predictably, Christmas and Easter. This is an interesting trend considering the fun fact that Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation and it's not particularly... well... happy! While Christmas celebrates the birth of our Lord and Easter his Resurrection, Ash Wednesday calls to mind our sins, our mortality, and repentance. But there is something about this season of Lent and its magnetic draw, as approximately 58% of Catholic young adults will abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent and 38% will give something up as a practice of fasting.

So, why are we choosing to walk with the Apostles during this season of Lent? Lent is ultimately for the purpose of better being able to do what the Apostles did so well: be loved by Jesus and love him back. The Apostles are twelve individuals, who, once upon a time, were going about a normal life. Then, they were called. Called mid-shift. Called unexpectedly. Called to come and see. Called to follow Jesus. They had the unique privilege of being physically with Jesus, witnessing his miracles first hand and receiving his teachings directly from his mouth. The Apostles learned from Jesus, himself, the love of the Father, and gave the rest of their lives, and literally, their lives, to share that love to the ends of the

earth. Now, they enjoy eternal life with the Lord and it is our desire that we, one day, may be counted among them. Well... not all of them. But we will get into that later!

Before we meet the original Big Twelve, let's learn a little bit about the season of Lent and its characteristics.

Lent is not practiced by all Christians, as it is neither found in the Bible nor prescribed in the Bible. However, Lent is practiced by Catholics and denominations of Christianity that uphold Tradition, informed by Biblical principles. The practice of Lent dates back to the first centuries, as proven in a letter written by St. Irenaeus to Pope Victor debating Lenten practices. There are "two elements which are especially characteristic to Lent—the recalling of Baptism or the preparation for it, and penance". Penance is an outward act expressing the inward disposition of repentance. And before you scrunch your nose at words like "baptism" and "repentance", hold on a second. Well, hold on for forty days! It is my sincere belief that with an open heart, these words will become bursting with meaning for you.

We will be exploring these two characteristic elements— Baptism and repentance— for the duration of our Lenten journey together and looking at how they were foundational in the calls of the Apostles.

But first, let's start with John the Baptist. While John the Baptist was not an Apostle, he was the last of the prophets to point to the coming of the Messiah. He is an integral part of understanding Lent as his ministry prepared for the way for Jesus' mission through 1) Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and 2) preaching repentance.

1ST ELEMENT OF LENT

Let's look at Baptism and its connection to Lent. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Each year, our parishes offer formation for those inquiring about the Catholic faith and preparation for those wishing to join the Catholic Church. This process is called OCIA, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (formerly called RCIA, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). Lent most likely developed as an intensified period of repentance for those intending to be baptized and join the Church at the Easter Vigil. To help you embrace your own Baptism, you are invited to pay particular attention to the OCIA at your parish during this season. There are several special rites, "r-i-t-e-s", that take place during Lent for those journeying in OCIA. Your parish may have determined that these rites take place at a certain Mass time on the weekend, so consider attending Mass at that time over Lent. The Rite of Sending and the Rite of Election take place the Saturday after Ash Wednesday. Catechumens— big word!— those who are not yet baptized, are sent to the Bishop in the Rite of Sending and, in the Rite of Election, he will receive them and accept them to continue formation with intention to be baptized into the Church at the Vigil. Do not forget about the members of OCIA! Not only do they deserve our prayers and support, but they often possess a curiosity, initiative, and zeal for the faith that can inspire us to

re-appreciate the treasures of our Church which we can take for granted. Baptism is also relevant to Easter for those of us who have already been baptized because we will be asked to renew our baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil, and then will be sprinkled with holy water to remind us of our Baptism.

2ND ELEMENT OF LENT: REPENTANCE

Now, let's consider repentance and its connection to Lent. If you are reading the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, you can't miss it: repentance is everywhere. We recall the words of the prophet, John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" And notably, a few chapters later, the first recorded statement of Jesus' preaching in the Gospel of Matthew is a repetition of the message preached by John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repentance, from the Greek word, *metanoia*, means a change of mind or heart. With this definition, repentance doesn't have to be so scary! Accompanying John's cry for repentance was his baptism for the forgiveness of sins, "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance...". We now see how Baptism and repentance are integrally connected: repentance being the state that leads one to seek Baptism, and Baptism as the act which constitutes the forgiveness of their sins. It was the same Baptism for repentance that Jesus requested of John. Now, in becoming man, Jesus was like us in all ways but sin, so Jesus did not need Baptism to cleanse him from his sins. He participated in Baptism as an act of solidarity with man. To help you embrace repentance, you are encouraged to consider areas of your life in which your relationship with Jesus would benefit from a change of mind or heart. Repentance is expressed especially during Lent through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Additionally, repentance is expressed in seeking the forgiveness of sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Most parishes make a concerted effort to make Reconciliation abundantly available during the season of Lent, offering evenings of penance services in addition to regularly scheduled opportunities. Make it a priority to attend the sacrament at least once during Lent.

40 DAYS

Alright, so we have that down: Baptism and repentance! Let's continue in the Gospel of Matthew. We are introduced to John the Baptist, John baptizes Jesus, and immediately following, we read: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights..." It is according to this detail that Lent is observed over 40 days. It begins with Ash Wednesday and continues into Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of fasting because Sundays are considered "mini-Easters", in light of the Resurrection, and it would not be appropriate to fast on a feast day! The forty days and forty nights in the desert mark the final preparation before Jesus embarks on his public ministry. The number 40 also links Jesus to Moses, who when receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, "was there with the

Lord for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water..." and to Elijah, who "walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of Horeb." This is important as Moses represents the Law and Elijah the Prophet, both of which point to the coming of the Messiah.

HOW WE WILL STUDY THE APOSTLES

We will continue to dive into Scripture as we get to know the Apostles, and the ways that Baptism and repentance were foundational to their calls. We will approach Scripture through several lenses. These lenses are considered the "four senses of Scripture".

The first sense of Scripture is historical- or literal- which pays attention to what actually happened in time and space. We will come to know the Apostles as real people with whom we can have a relationship.

The second sense of Scripture through which we will approach the Apostles is the allegorical sense. An allegory is a symbolic expression of a deeper meaning. The Apostles and their ministry represent a movement within the salvific plan of God. As we take a bird's eye view of this plan, we will note what is happening beneath the surface as Jesus calls and forms his Apostles.

The third sense of Scripture is called the moral sense. The moral sense provides us with lessons that show us how to best follow the Way of Jesus. Lessons from the lives of the Apostles will apply to our own and help us foster a strong relationship with Jesus.

The last sense of Scripture is called the anagogical sense, which concerns itself with the future and the journey toward it, specifically what we refer to as the "Last Things": death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Jesus ushers in a cosmic reality through the Apostles, who participate in the structure of the New Jerusalem, our home in eternity. You will recognize these senses woven throughout our reflections on the lives of the Apostles.

CALLING OF THE FIRST APOSTLES

Now, friends, it is time to begin our meeting of the Apostles. We return to the Gospel of Matthew. As noted, in Chapter 3, we have the preaching of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus. In Chapter 4, we have the Temptation of Jesus and Call of the First Disciples. Here we are introduced to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, later to be known as the first of the twelve Apostles.

"As [Jesus] was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him."

The first Apostles are approached by Jesus on what appears to be a pretty ordinary day.

They are going about their family business, which is fishing, when they are called by the Lord. “I will make you fishers of men” is an allusion to the new business to which Jesus is calling them, that of evangelization and spreading the Gospel of God’s love.. Of note in this passage is how Matthew describes the rapidity of the Apostles’ responses to Jesus. Of Simon Peter and Andrew, “at once they left their nets and followed him”. Of James and John, “immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.” Our introduction to the first Apostles is a precious one and, in particular, these four play a key role in Jesus’ earthly mission, which we will further explore next week. Each episode is accompanied by reflections for your small groups. Please take some time to reflect and discuss, and to pray with Scripture.

Sts. Peter, Andrew, James, and John- pray for us, that we may be counted among you!

EPISODE TWO

Welcome to “Counted Among Them,” the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! My name is Roy Becerra, and this is the second of six episodes in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles.

Episode One presented the two characteristics of Lent: 1) Baptism— either a preparing for or a recalling of, and 2) repentance. As we begin Episode Two, we would like to remember in prayer those in OCIA- the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults— both non-Christians preparing to enter the Catholic Church and baptized Christians seeking full initiation with the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. An optional Penitential Rite is celebrated by some parishes during the second week of Lent in order to prepare the baptized Christian candidates to receive their remaining sacraments with a pure heart. This is a friendly reminder to seek an opportunity to participate in Reconciliation this Lent!

We embrace Baptism and repentance— a change in mind or heart— for it is through these two means that we grow in intimacy with Jesus, and by extension, intimacy with the community of Jesus’ followers. For this episode, I invite you to reflect upon the intimacy the first four Apostles had with Jesus, as well as one another, as we return to their story of their call.

If we were to look at the call of the first apostles within the Gospel of Matthew alone, as we did in episode one, we would miss some important details that provide a fuller picture. The Gospel of Matthew, similarly to the Gospel of Mark, provides a succinct account of Jesus’ call in which the four fishermen— Simon and Andrew, James and John— quickly answered Jesus’ command, “follow me.” But that’s not the entire story.

Before being disciples of Jesus, some of the Apostles were disciples of John the Baptist, who prepared for Jesus’ mission by offering a Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and preaching repentance. In the Gospel of John, we read, “The next day John [the Baptist]

was there again with two of his disciples and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.'... Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). Then he brought him to Jesus." The "other disciple" alongside Andrew is traditionally believed to have been the Apostle John, who refers to himself by this title as well as "the disciple whom Jesus loved".

Due to this passage, Andrew is referred to as the Apostle "First-Called" or in Greek, the *protokletos*. What a significant title to hold! From Andrew's commitment to discipleship, we can assume of Andrew that he was a holy man seeking truth and formation. In this passage from John, it is Andrew that first collects his brother, Simon Peter, and brings him to Jesus. Andrew's initial sharing of the Gospel with his brother is an expression of his "unusual apostolic spirit" that would later lead him "to the ends of the earth" to share about Jesus. Tradition holds that Andrew became the Apostle to the Greeks and was crucified in Patras for preaching the Gospel. Tradition continues that Andrew requested to be crucified on a diagonal cross, as he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Though Andrew holds a pride of place as the first called, Scripture indicates that Peter, James, and John comprised an inner circle within Jesus' Apostles. The three were present at events with Jesus that the rest of the Twelve were not, including: the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the healing of Jairus' daughter, and the major events of the Transfiguration, and the Agony in the Garden. Furthermore, even within the inner circle, there is a heightened importance to the Apostle Peter which we refer to as the "primacy of Peter." This is evident in Luke's account of the calling of the first four Apostles. Please note that Peter's original name was Simon, so you will hear him referenced by both names at times.

"While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret (another name for the Sea of Galilee). He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.' Simon said in reply, 'Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets. When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw them, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made, seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now you will be catching men.' When they

brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.”

It is Peter’s boat from which Jesus chooses to preach and it is Peter that Jesus directs to lower his nets. Note Peter’s act of repentance, falling upon his knees and saying, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Yet, Jesus loved Peter very much and would continue to elevate Peter’s role in his mission.

Scripture provides us with key moments that reveal Peter’s faith and relationship with Jesus. It was Peter who expressed fidelity on behalf of the Apostles when many of the crowd dispersed after hearing Jesus’ Bread of Life discourse. It was Peter that responded with the confession, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” in response to Jesus’ question, “But who do you say that I am?” It is Peter who is rebuked by Jesus— “Get behind me Satan”— when Peter protests Jesus’ prediction about his coming Passion. And perhaps most telling of Peter’s role among the Twelve, it was to Peter that Jesus speaks the following, “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” In Scripture, God often changes one’s name to indicate a new mission, such as when Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, or Jacob to Israel. Here, Jesus changed Simon’s name to Cephas, coming from the Aramaic word *kēpā*, meaning rock, and in doing so, ultimately establishes Peter’s primacy as the rock upon which the Church would be built— in both a spiritual and structural sense. “When Christ instituted the Twelve, ‘he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen among them.’” The Catholic Church is structured around the papacy, or office of the Pope, and it is believed that, in this passage, Jesus is appointing Peter as the very first of a long lineage of popes. At times, Peter struggles immensely in understanding the mission to which he is called, evidenced in Jesus’ conversation with Peter before washing his feet and Jesus’ prayer for Peter’s faith to sustain the test during the events of his Passion and after. Even still, following the Resurrection, it was to Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved that Mary of Magdala ran to tell about the empty tomb and it was Peter that the other disciple allowed to enter the tomb first. Tradition holds that Peter was martyred by crucifixion on an upside cross in Rome, during the persecution of Nero in AD 64. Like his brother, Peter did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Next within the inner three are James and John of Zebedee, whom Jesus nicknamed “Sons of Thunder.” There are two Apostles named James, James the Greater and James the Lesser, referring to age. Here, we are talking about James the Greater.

The Transfiguration is one of the privileged moments that James experienced as part of the three. The Transfiguration took place on a mountain, and during prayer, Jesus’ face “changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white.” Figures of Moses and

Elijah “appeared in glory and spoke of [Jesus’] exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” Jesus’ transfiguring before their very eyes was a supernatural foreshadowing of what was to be accomplished through the Passion. The visit of Moses and Elijah— representing the two bodies that composed the Hebrew Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets— undeniably asserts Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, which is the coming of the Messiah. Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John to keep what they had seen to themselves. Consider the many wonders that James may have held in his heart along with the Transfiguration. At times, Jesus gives us precious moments that are intended to be intimate and not shared publicly. Other times, he asks of us prudence and patience, to wait to share until the timing is right, or until his Spirit has helped us make sense of the experience. Earlier during Jesus’ earthly ministry, the mother of James and John had requested that Jesus permit her sons to sit at his left and at his right in Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus replies by saying, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” It is assumed that Jesus was referring to his Passion. James, who desired a position of glory within the ranks of Christ, would indeed experience his own passion. Acts 12:2 informs us that King Herod had “James, the brother of John, killed by the sword.” St. James was the first of the Apostles to be reported as martyred.

With the exception of Judas, John, the other Son of Thunder, is the only other Apostle that tradition claims was never martyred, but rather, died in Ephesus at an old age. John— to whom the Gospel of John, three New Testament letters, and Book of Revelation is attributed— reveals his heart through his writings. A glimpse of John’s intimacy with Jesus can be accessed in his depiction of a profound exchange between himself, Peter, and Jesus at the table of the Last Supper. “...Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus’ side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus’ chest and said to him, ‘Master, who is it?’” The passage illustrates John’s close relationship with Jesus, of course, but also, Peter. Already mentioned was the fact that John let Peter first enter the tomb after the Resurrection. Yet, even before that, it was Peter and John who prepared the place of the Last Supper, Peter and John who followed Jesus to the courtyard for his trial before Crucifixion, and then, after, John who helps Peter recognize the Risen Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias (yet another name for the Sea of Galilee), and Peter who inquires specifically about John when talking to the Risen Jesus.

The intended area of reflection for this episode is of intimacy— the intimacy Jesus had with his Apostles and the intimacy they had with one another. There is no discipleship without a relationship with Jesus. You can do “all the things”, but if you don’t have love, you are a resounding gong. Furthermore, there are no true disciples outside of the context of

community. Frankly, the Christian life is too difficult to be lived as it was intended to be, without the invested and constant support of others. We make a grave error if we believe that anyone can be fully Christian with only Christian acquaintances or occasional Christian company and conversation. May this episode serve as an invitation to you to seek intimacy with Jesus and other followers of Jesus.

Sts. Peter, Andrew, James, and John- pray for us, that we may be counted among you!

EPISODE THREE

Welcome “to Counted Among Them”, the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! My name is Nadia Mendez, and this is the third of six episodes in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles.

As we continue through Lent, we hit a series of three weeks in which the Scrutinies, rites of repentance, are practiced in OCIA, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. The Scrutinies are held within the context of Mass, but if you don’t go to the Mass time at which the OCIA rites typically take place, you may miss them all together and not even know they exist! If you’ve never witnessed a Scrutiny before, you are invited to inquire at your parish about at which Mass they are held and attend one over the next three weeks. Some trivia knowledge for you related to the Scrutinies: The readings at Mass appear on a three-year rotation— Year A, Year B, and Year C. The readings at the Scrutiny Masses are the same every year and are taken from Year A, no matter what. This means during Years B and C, the Scrutiny Masses will hear a different Gospel than the congregations at the other Masses hear. The three Scrutiny readings are the Woman at the Well from John 4, the Healing of the Blind Man from John 9, and the Raising of Lazarus from John 11. This year is Year A, so we will all hear the same Gospel, no matter which Mass you attend. The first Scrutiny Gospel will be particularly relevant as we explore our focus for this episode: why twelve?

This episode will also introduce us to two more Apostles, James the Lesser and Thomas.

So, why the Twelve? Jesus called twelve Apostles and the number twelve is significant in the context of Jewish history and in light of Jesus’ salvific mission. In the Old Testament, we learn of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, who are the families that formed under the 12 patriarchs or sons of Jacob (Jacob was renamed Israel). The People of Israel were the Chosen People of God and while they were united into a single nation under King David, they later split into two nations: Israel and Judah. Then, Israel and Judah met their individual downfalls in what are known as the Exiles. During the Exiles, dominant nations in the area overcame Israel and Judah. Israel fell to the Assyrians and Judah fell to the Babylonians. The Jewish people were scattered and their identity as the Chosen People threatened. This was an incredibly painful time in Jewish history, and it ushered in the era of the prophets, who exhorted the Jewish

people to remain faithful to God, even among foreign nations with foreign gods. The prophets spoke of a Messiah who was to come and be the salvation of the fallen kingdom.

When Jesus enters public ministry, he announces a new kingdom, “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Then he calls twelve Apostles, harkening to the twelve scattered tribes of Israel. “In choosing the Twelve... Jesus wants to say that the definitive time has arrived in which to constitute the new People of God, the people of the twelve tribes, which now becomes a universal people, his Church.” Yet, before the mission of Jesus extends to encompass a universal people, it exists primarily for the Jews, the descendents of the Tribes of Israel. “In the Gospel Jesus seemed to limit his mission to Israel alone: ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ In a similar way he seemed to restrict the mission entrusted to the Twelve: “These Twelve Jesus sent out, charging them: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” At first glance, this may seem disturbingly exclusive of Jesus. However, Jesus’ focus on gathering the people of Israel was to create the vehicle or method for gathering all peoples from the ends of the earth. It was in seeing his work accomplished in Israel that the whole world was to come to believe.

Despite what Jesus said to his Apostles about refraining from ministering to Gentiles, Jesus ministers to Gentiles several times throughout the Gospels and one of the accounts with the most details is that of the Samaritan woman at the well. In this account, Jesus finds himself talking to a Samaritan woman at the high heat of day. There was a deep animosity between the southern Jews and the Samaritans, who were half Jew-half Gentile, as they had been overcome by the Assyrians and engaged in interfaith marriages. In the passage, when Jesus says to the woman, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’, for you have had five husbands...”, Jesus is at once referring to the woman’s personal life and to the historical realities of the Samaritans who, in intermarriage with five non-Israelite nations, took on their pagan gods. The pagan gods were addressed as “Baal”, a Hebrew word meaning “lord” or “husband.” Jesus offers the Samaritan woman “living water,” an allusion to Baptism. Compelled by Christ’s knowledge of her, the Samaritan woman runs to her city to tell the people of Jesus. The people of Samaria confess, “...we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.” Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritans reveals glimmers of his salvific plan to draw in the scattered people of Israel and to, later, found a Church to be in fidelity to him alone.

The calling of the Twelve, and their role within the foundation of the Church, expresses Jesus’ desire that we may all be one. The Apostles are essential in maintaining the “oneness” of our Church, both in fidelity to the same Gospel and in unity with one another. Without intentional and spirit-guided efforts, the stories of Jesus’ life could easily, over time, become so refracted and the meaning of his preaching so contaminated with human philosophy that neither resemble what was accomplished and passed down by the historical Jesus. “It is

through the Apostles, through their word and witness, that we receive the truth of Christ.” In other words, it is through the Apostles that we maintain the integrity of the Gospel. Since the Apostles have obviously perished long ago, we rely on apostolic succession to preserve our oneness. Apostolic succession is “the handing on of apostolic preaching and authority from the Apostles to their successors the bishops through the laying on of hands, as a permanent office in the church.” The Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, who have been charged with maintaining and preserving the truth that was passed down to them. The structure of the Catholic Church, while of course far from perfect in its humanity, possesses a divine wisdom and provides for the most perfect preservation of the deposit of faith possible. Without the Apostles and their successors, we continue to splinter into innumerable denominations that hold their own slightly-varied version of the Gospel and Gospel practices. While not denying the presence of the Spirit in all Christian churches and leaders that desire to serve the Lord—“whoever is not against us is for us”— the multiplicity of Christian churches is undoubtedly a counter-witness to the oneness of God.

Efforts to maintain the oneness of the Christian community are illustrated in Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem. At this time, let’s take a look at James the Lesser (the younger), as he plays a prominent role in the council. First, we do not know anything of the call of this James, but he appears in the lists of the Twelve who were hand-selected by Jesus. Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament letters tell us that James’ church (Jerusalem) was a pillar alongside of Peter’s (Rome). We also are able to enter into the heart and faith of James through the New Testament letter which is attributed to him. The Council of Jerusalem is important to us for several reasons: one, it is important in and of itself as it was called to seek resolution over a debate about how Gentiles were to enter the Church. Two, it is important as it provided a template that would continue to be used within the Church to settle disputes and/ or address the needs of the Church. In reading Acts 15, it is evident that James possessed Jesus’ love for the Gentiles and understood Jesus’ mission. James quotes the prophet Amos, “After this I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruins I shall rebuild it and raise it up again, so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked. Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things, known from of old.” While there were some who believed Gentiles must receive Jewish circumcision before attaining salvation, others testified to the work of the Spirit among Gentiles who had not been circumcised and protested the need for Gentiles to receive circumcision in order to become heirs of salvation. James agreed that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles who turn to God...” The Apostles’ process of handling the circumcision question is emulated today in the Church. In analyzing the council, we can note several movements that took place. First, there was disagreement. Secondly, there was a gathering with the “apostles and the presbyters” in one

place, Jerusalem. Thirdly, the gathering provided space for debate, referencing the works of God, experiences of the missionaries, and Mosaic law. Fourthly, there was a ruling (first indicated by the words of Peter, affirmed by practical notions offered by James), and fifthly, dissemination of the message through a consensus among the church to send representatives to deliver the ruling by both letter and word of mouth. Note the wording of the message to follow the council: "It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on [Gentiles] any burden beyond these necessities..." It was the decision of the Holy Spirit and the apostles and presbyters. The action of the Holy Spirit is the lifeblood of any and all church structures. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we can have any confidence in our work or assurance we are living out the will of Jesus.

Oneness in the Church will always be threatened, because it is the will of God that it be maintained. At times, it can be difficult for us, as individuals, to feel close to our Church as an institution, as a body of believer, and as a deposit of faith. The life of Thomas could perhaps provide us with a relatable account to help guide us when our own "oneness" with the Church community is strained. Thomas is often referred to as "Doubting Thomas" for not immediately believing the account of the other Apostles that Jesus had been raised from the dead. To label Thomas according to this one event alone would be to dismiss the great faith and fearlessness that he possessed. In the Gospel account of the Raising of Lazarus, the 3rd Scrutiny Gospel, the Apostles were distressed that Jesus wanted to return to Judea to visit the home of Lazarus because doing so would take him into close proximity with Jerusalem, where very recently, the Jews there had been trying to stone Jesus. It would be very dangerous for Jesus to make this journey back. Understanding that Jesus was to make the journey regardless of their protesting the risk, "Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go to die with him.'" Thomas displays such an eagerness to adhere to the will of Jesus and to follow him faithfully. During the Last Supper Discourses, recorded in John, Jesus is giving the Apostles words of consolation concerning his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Jesus says, "'Where I am going, you know the way.' Thomas said to him, 'Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?'" Again, Thomas' eagerness to follow Jesus perfectly is clear. Jesus replies to him, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." It is the same Thomas who finds himself on the other side of the Resurrection, doubting. Jesus appears to ten of the twelve Apostles, where they were hiding, for fear of the Jews. He greets them, shows them his hands and his side (marked with wounds from the Crucifixion), and breathes on them the Holy Spirit. Judas, of course, was missing from the room at this point, as well as Thomas. When the other Apostles tell Thomas that they have seen Jesus, Thomas replies, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." And it is from this statement that Doubting Thomas receives his title. But is the title not a little harsh? And the sentiments of Thomas fairly understandable? The Christian

faith is about intimacy with Jesus that relies upon true and authentic encounters with him. Sometimes, it feels like Jesus is denying us these encounters and it can be truly painful, especially when it makes us feel left out of a group. We can be criticized by others for our lack of faith, or find ourselves taking pains to hide our lack of faith out of fear of criticism, but the simple fact of the matter is: Though we may have been following Jesus for a long time, we might just have not been in the room, just as Thomas simply was not in the room when Jesus appeared. After Jesus' first appearance to the ten Apostles, he comes again, a full week later. This time, Thomas is there and Jesus turns to him directly and says, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Jesus asks us to have faith, and often reprimands the wicked generation that demands signs, so that they may believe. Yet, Jesus also wants us to fully engage our intellect with our faith. Critical thought is necessary when it comes to religion, for it allows us to fully consent to our beliefs rather than just going along with the crowd. Whether or not Thomas was "right" or "wrong" in requesting to experience the signs of Jesus' wounds, let us recognize, Jesus provided him the opportunity. Did someone tell Jesus that Thomas needed to see them? Or did Jesus just know Thomas' heart? If you find yourself like Thomas, feeling as if there is something you need from the Lord, this is your encouragement to ask Jesus for it. If repentance means a "changing of mind", then asking something of God in order to more fully believe provides an opportunity to repent.

James the lesser is said to have been killed in Jerusalem when he refused to renounce Jesus as the Messiah. Sources describe the death differently, with the consensus that he was eventually clubbed to death. You'll often see St. James depicted in art with a club. Thomas later became known as the "Apostle to India" where it is held that he founded seven churches. There are many in India that consider themselves to be "St. Thomas Christians" and there is a great devotion to St. Thomas in the area.

Saints. James and Thomas, pray for us, that we may be counted among you!

EPISODE FOUR

Welcome to "Counted Among Them," the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! This is the fourth of six episodes in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles.

In this fourth week of Lent, we continue to pray for those who are a part of the OCIA, Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, within our parishes. Those who are unbaptized will participate in the second of three Scrutinies this week.

In our last episode, we spent our time on the significance of there being specifically Twelve Apostles and why that number was meaningful within the salvific mission of Jesus.

During this episode, we will be looking at how Jesus invited the Twelve to participate in that mission, while meeting the Apostles Matthew, Simon, and Jude.

It is typically agreed upon that Jesus had three years in public ministry before his Crucifixion. During these three years, Jesus preached, performed signs and wonders, and grew in intimacy with his Apostles, forming and instructing them.

The Apostle Matthew is traditionally believed to be the author of the Gospel of Matthew. His call, like that of our four fishermen, takes place while he is busy within his profession. "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' He heard this and said, 'Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of these words, I desire mercy not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.'"

The revelation of Jesus' mission continues to be a surprise, as he invites into his mission those considered to be lowly from the perspective of the Jewish religion. Matthew was a tax collector and from his customs post, he would collect taxes not only from Jews, but from Gentiles as well. His profession also required him to work with and serve "an alien and despicably greedy authority". "Many religious Jews thus despised the occupation". The Gospel pairings of "tax collectors and sinners" and "tax collectors and prostitutes" portray the Jewish perception of tax collectors. Yet, despite whatever sinfulness was assumed of him, Matthew describes his response to Jesus' "follow me" as being immediate. "He got up and followed him."

We do not have any information regarding Jesus' calling of Simon and Jude, yet they appear in the list of the Twelve Apostles that is found in the chapter following the call of Matthew in his Gospel: "Simon the Cananaean" and "Thaddeus". This Simon is a distinct individual from the Simon that was later called Peter. "While Matthew and Mark describe him as a 'Cananaean,' Luke instead describes him as a 'Zealot.'" There is debate about whether or not Simon would have actually been a member of the group that was called the Zealots, yet "he was at least marked by passionate attachment to his Jewish identity, hence, for God, his People, and divine Law."

Jude Thaddeus, as he is called by Matthew and Mark, or "Judas, the son of James" as he is called by Luke, is also scarcely mentioned throughout the Gospel and New Testament writings. He is quoted once at the Last Supper and the New Testament Letter of Jude is traditionally attributed to his authorship.

Though little is known of these two Apostles, Simon and Jude, we must acknowledge that they, too, were specifically chosen by Jesus and by the more extensive accounts of the

calls of the other Apostles, we can be confident of the great care Jesus devoted to choosing them. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is depicted as spending time in prayer before choosing the Twelve among the many disciples that had already begun following him. “He went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed twelve [whom he named apostles] that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons...” We now get into the mission of the Twelve.

“Apostles” comes from the word meaning “to be sent.” The Apostles were sent to go away from Jesus on their own and then to return to him, in order to accomplish his work. In the Gospel of Mark, we read, “He went around to the villages in the vicinity teaching. He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick— no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, ‘wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them.’ So they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” Luke’s Gospel offers some additional details about the mission, “He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal [the sick]... Then they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.”

Now, “everywhere” actually had limits at this point. As discussed in the previous episode, Jesus’ plan of salvation had him beginning with the gathering of the scattered tribes of Israel, that the world may see the gathering and come to believe. Though the Apostles would eventually expand their mission to the ends of the earth, at this time, they were specifically instructed by Jesus, “Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In other words, no Gentiles.

The Twelve embark on their mission and return to Jesus. “The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile.’” In both Mark’s and Luke’s account of the Apostles’ return, the feeding of the five thousand comes immediately after the Twelve return to Jesus after their mission.

In sum, the key components of the Mission of the Twelve are: being sent by Jesus in pairs of two; being sent to Jews rather than Gentiles; bringing nothing for the journey so that they would need to depend on Jesus’ provision through their hosts; instruction and authority to heal illnesses and diseases, liberate from demons, and preach the good news; instruction as to what to do if the mission is unsuccessful; and lastly, the return and the reporting of

their mission to Jesus and the other Apostles.

A few points to consider: 1) “Two by two” reflected Jesus’ wisdom and awareness of the human dependence upon one another for support. Not only is there safety in numbers, but there is also community in numbers. Whenever a follower of Jesus enters “mission territory” of any sort, the follower must not do so alone. If you find yourself to be a lone ranger in your faith, remember that not even the Apostles went about the work of Jesus solo. Pray and search for another Christian disciple, that you might continue your mission as a part of a pair. 2) Jesus warns the Apostles that some homes or towns may not be open to having them there. In our desire to serve Jesus, we will find many that reject us, and even more so, reject Jesus. The rejection, or the lack of fruitfulness of a mission, does not necessarily mean that the mission was never supposed to take place. Recall the parable of the Sower and the Seed. Seed is scattered even in areas where it doesn’t take root. 3) Jesus and the community of the Apostles take time, following their mission, to convene and share about the mission. This is an essential component of mission, as well as any significant season in our lives. We must have our touch bases with Jesus and the community. It is important to reflect and share, for in this, we can glorify God for the work that he has done, intercede for those impacted by the mission, and advise and encourage one another in the areas where the mission did not see fruitfulness. This convening to share is seen in Council of Jerusalem, “The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among them Gentiles through them.” After Jesus listens to the reports of the Apostles, he tells them to come apart and rest awhile, which is an invitation many of us would benefit from responding to, as a peaceful retreat allows extended time for reflection and prayer, as well as necessary restoration.

When Jesus had suffered his Passion and risen from the dead, he visited the Apostles and commissioned them to continue on the mission for which he had spent three years preparing them. “The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’” This passage is known as the Great Commission. There are eleven disciples at this point as Judas is no longer with them and he has not yet been replaced. You will notice that, now, Jesus is not telling the disciples to stay within the sheep of Israel, but to make disciples of all nations. Though Jesus will ascend, he will not be leaving the Apostles alone, he will be with them to the end of the age through his Spirit. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Scripture doesn't tell us what became of Matthew, Simon, and Jude following Pentecost though tradition and historical writers hold accounts of their mission. As for St. Matthew, "The Roman Martyrology describes his death as occurring in a territory near present-day Egypt." "After the death and resurrection of Jesus, St. Jude traveled throughout Mesopotamia, Libya, and Persia with St. Simon preaching and building up the foundations of the early Church." St. Jude, who shares a feast day with St. Simon, is considered the patron of lost causes. There are several opinions as to how this became St. Jude's patronage, one involving the King of Edessa, who was suffering a painful illness, for which there was no hope of recovery, who was healed through the prayers of St. Jude.

Sts. Matthew, Simon, and Jude- pray for us, that we may be counted among you!

EPISODE FIVE

Welcome to "Counted Among Them," the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! This is the fifth of six episodes in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles.

In this fifth week of Lent, we continue to pray for those who are a part of the OCIA, Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, within our parishes. Those who are unbaptized will participate in the final of three Scrutinies this week, as we remember the Raising of Lazarus in the Gospel.

The three Sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Those receiving all three during the Easter Vigil will receive the sacraments in that order, with the Eucharist being last, an assertion of its primacy among the sacraments. The "Eucharistic sacrifice" is considered to be the "fount and apex" of the entire Christian life. In today's episode, we will be exploring the connection between the Eucharist and the Apostles, as we meet the Apostles Philip and Bartholomew. Many scholars believe Bartholomew to be the same person as Nathanael, whose call is intricately related with Philip's. As we do not have more information relating to an individual named Bartholomew, we are going to focus on Nathanael.

Philip and Nathanael's calls are recorded early in the Gospel of John, "The next day [Jesus] decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from the town of Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanel and told him, 'We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' But Nathanel said to him, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanel coming toward him and said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him.' Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the

King of Israel.”

Both Philip and Nathanael confess the identity of Jesus, and in their confessions, allude to their understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and the prophecies of a coming Messiah who would save Israel. Both Apostles are responsive to the invitations they receive to follow, and to come and see. It’s a beautiful reflection to consider Jesus observing Nathanael under the fig tree, witnessing his newest follower gather Nathanael, and affirming Nathanael’s character as a true Israelite with no duplicity. Scriptural references to Philip are more plentiful than to Nathanael, but we know that they both became Apostles and, therefore, were present at the major events of Jesus’ public ministry. Many of the teachings and experiences that the Apostles received from Jesus during his ministry did not necessarily make sense to them originally, but as Jesus’ Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension unfolded, the Apostles were able to understand more of the mysterious elements of Jesus’ salvific plan. One of these areas of mystery surrounds what we now consider to be the sacrament of the Eucharist, the memorial of Christ’s Passover.

To better understand the Eucharist, we must understand the history of Passover. The Jewish Feast of Passover is celebrated every year commemorating when the Spirit of God “passed over” the Israelite families in slavery under the Egyptians, whose leader was refusing to let the Israelites free. Through Moses and Aaron, God had given directions to be closely followed: “On the tenth of this month every family must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household... They will take some of its blood and apply it to the doorposts and lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They will consume its meat that same night, eating it roasted with unleavened bread and bitter herbs... For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn in the land, human being and beast alike, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt- I, the Lord! But for you the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thereby, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.”

As Jews, Jesus and his disciples participated in the Passover remembrance every year. The Passover is mentioned several times throughout the Gospels, three within the Gospel of John, which is in part why we recognize three years of Jesus’ public ministry. The second time the Passover is mentioned is within the story of the Multiplication of the Loaves in John 6, a significant Eucharistic passage. “Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, ‘Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?’ He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Two hundred days’ wages would not be enough for each of them to have a little [bit].’” Philip’s practical response to Jesus helps us grasp just how miraculous the Multiplication of the Loaves was, that not only was Jesus able to feed everyone that

was present, but the disciples gathered “twelve wicker baskets with fragments” of leftovers. Please note the allusion to the twelve scattered tribes of Israel, for whom the Eucharist is to become a sacrament of salvation. When Jesus feeds the people, the Gospel of John says, “Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining...” which is a strikingly similar formula to the writing of Luke recalling the Last Supper, “Then [Jesus] took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them...” Imagine being practical Philip, and witnessing this miracle occur before your eyes!

Following the Multiplication of the Loaves is the Bread of Life Discourse, where Jesus compares himself to the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert once freed from slavery. While the manna served as “daily bread” that satisfied but only for a while, Jesus was the Bread of Life that satisfied forever, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” Jesus was not speaking in metaphors, but in the literal sense, which is evidenced when he not only refuses to shy away from the controversial language he is using, but he goes on to say, “...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” This passage is most frequently referenced when defending the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, versus the belief that the Eucharistic is merely symbolic of Jesus’ sacrifice.

The third and final time that Passover is mentioned in the Gospel of John is the Last Supper. Here, another special encounter is shared with Philip. Philip had in common with Andrew both their hometown and the Greek origins of their names. Furthermore, many people who came from their region were bilingual, so it is assumed that Philip and Andrew were likely able to speak Greek. During the Passover, a group of Greeks had traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast and wished to see Jesus. “They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, ‘Sir, we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.” It is after this that Jesus speaks of the grain of wheat, which when it dies, bears great fruit, alluding to his accessibility to all through his death on the Cross.

Philip, along with Bartholomew, and the other ten Apostles, is gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper. Philip and Jesus share an exchange in front of the group: “Philip said to him, ‘Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’” After Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples, he expressly instructed them, “...do this in memory of me.”

The Jewish people were familiar with sacrifices, as the Levite tribe of Israel was the priestly tribe that offered sacrifices on behalf of the People of God, to reconcile them with the

Lord. In the New Covenant, the Twelve Apostles are instituted by Christ as the hierarchical, ministerial priesthood. This priesthood no longer offers sacrifices like the Levites did, as Christ's sacrifice on the cross was made once and for all, but makes present Christ's redemption in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church which is celebrated at every Mass. Jesus is truly the Lamb of God, first proclaimed by John the Baptist and then fully understood in light of his death on the Cross, in which he is the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb that was slain, whose blood covers his people from destruction and defeats Satan, and whose body his people are to consume.

The Eucharistic sacrifice is able to be made continuously present through the priesthood of Holy Orders. "Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time; thus it is a sacrament of apostolic ministry." It was the Apostles who first listened to the command "do this in memory of me" and perpetuated the memorial of the Cross through the celebration of the Eucharist, and then passed down the authority to do so to their successors through the imposition of hands, in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Through the ministry of our bishops and priests, we are able to participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass and each time we do, we are offered the opportunity to respond anew to Jesus' love on the Cross. A Eucharistic Revival has been proclaimed within the Catholic Church of the United States. Over the next several years, we are especially encouraged to rediscover intimacy with Jesus in the Eucharist. You can learn more about the revival at eucharisticrevival.org. Take this as a personal invitation to better come to know Jesus in this sacrament by seeking additional opportunities to participate in Mass outside of the Sunday obligation.

Sts. Philip and Bartholomew, pray for us, that we may be counted among you!

EPISODE SIX

Welcome to "Counted Among Them," the Young Adult Lenten Small Group Series for the Diocese of Dallas! This is the final of six episodes in which we will be entering into the stories of the Twelve Apostles.

The final week before Holy Week, we are preparing to celebrate Palm Sunday at which we read about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and recall the entire Passion Narrative during the Gospel.

We began our series with the two characteristics of Lent: 1) preparing for or recalling of Baptism, and 2) repentance, a change of mind or heart.

Our final episode will look into the events of the Passion Narrative and meet our final Apostle, Judas, and Matthias, who was to replace him. By comparing and contrasting the stories of Peter and Judas during the events of the Passion, may we come to better understand the opportunities Jesus provides for us to repent.

Let us begin with the Last Supper. The Last Supper is celebrated on Holy Thursday. In our churches, we will participate in a ritual to remember Jesus' washing of the Apostles' feet and celebrate the Eucharist for the last time until the Easter Vigil. If you have never attended a Holy Thursday Liturgy, you are highly encouraged to do so, along with any other Triduum prayers or services offered by your parish. It is a truly effective and spiritual way to enter into the Paschal Mystery.

The political-religious climate surrounding the Last Supper was tense. Outraged by Jesus' perceived blasphemous claims to be the Son of God, the chief priests had been wanting to put an end to Jesus and his ministry. They wanted to "arrest Jesus by treachery and put him to death." Therefore, Jesus and his disciples knew that they had limited time and that the chief priests would be seeking their whereabouts. Knowing the chief priests' desperation to find Jesus could be used for his gain, Judas strikes a deal. "Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over."

You may feel incredulous considering how one of the Twelve, who shared such intimacy with Jesus, could betray him in the most fullest sense of the word. Did Jesus know he was to be betrayed? Did Jesus make a mistake in calling Judas to be one of the Apostles? It said that "satan entered into Judas" immediately before he approached the high priests to arrange the betrayal.

As of the Last Supper, Judas had arranged to turn Jesus over with the high priests but had not yet done so. However, Jesus knew the time was to come. "When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, 'Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, 'Surely it is not I, Lord?' He said in reply, 'He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.' Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi?' He answered, 'You have said so.'"

Judas' betrayal was not the only offense that Jesus was to suffer by the actions of his Apostles. Jesus later says to those gathered, "'This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed'; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.' Peter said to him in reply, 'Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be.' Jesus said to him, 'Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter said to him, 'Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.' And all the disciples spoke likewise."

Both Judas and Peter sat at the table, one conniving to betray Jesus and one determined to never do so.

Jesus hands Judas a morsel, to name Judas as the Apostle that was to betray him. "After he took the morsel, Satan entered him." Then Jesus tells Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Judas took the morsel from Jesus and left the Apostles, the rest of whom were to accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane for his Agony.

The Apostles were familiar with the Garden "because Jesus had often met there with his disciples." This would be the last time he would do so. Jesus asks the Apostles to sit and pray with him in the Garden. "[Jesus] took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress." Jesus prays desperately to his Father and expresses that he will do whatever the Father asks, though he wishes to be spared his upcoming suffering. The disciples were unable to stay awake with Jesus and they fell asleep with grief, until Jesus announces that his betrayer approaches. "...Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons." "His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, 'The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him.' Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi!' and he kissed him. Jesus answered him, 'Friend, do what you have come to do.'" Then, they began to arrest Jesus. Perhaps out of true concern for Jesus and a desire to prove his fidelity, "...Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear." Jesus reprimands Peter, telling him to put his sword away, and is taken by the guards. Now, the rest of the Apostles understood the betrayal of Jesus.

Peter, and traditionally, John, followed Jesus to the courtyard where he was to go on trial before the high priest. John obtains entrance to the courtyard for Peter due to a connection John had with the high priest. At this point, Peter is actively working to be as close to Jesus as possible, to make true to his words, "...even if I should die with you..." However, it is in this very courtyard that Peter denies Jesus three times.

"They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter sat down with them. When a maid saw him seated in the light, she looked intently at him and said, 'This man too was with him.' But he denied it saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A short while later someone else saw him and said, 'You too are one of them,' but Peter answered, 'My friend, I am not.' About an hour later, still another insisted, 'Assuredly, this man too was with him, for he also is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'My friend, I do not know what you are talking about.' Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' He went out and began to weep bitterly." What a powerful, heart-wrenching reflection to imagine the Lord turning and facing Peter immediately upon his third denial. One could understand how committing such an unwanted act would cause Peter to

weep bitterly in remorse.

Now we have Judas, in the wake of his betrayal and Peter in the wake of his denial of Jesus. When Judas realized that Jesus had been condemned and what that was to mean, he “deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? Look to it yourself.’ Flinging the money into the temple, he departed and went off and hanged himself.”

Judas, recognizing what his actions had done, did indeed make an act of repentance. He admitted to his wrong doing and tried to return the silver as a gesture of consolation to himself. What is unknown, through this account, is whether or not Judas made any attempt to communicate his repentance to Jesus or to the Father in prayer. While Jesus had said of Judas, “it would have better for the man if he had never been born,” it remains a mystery if Judas had another option. If there is truly no unforgivable sin other than to reject forgiveness, could Judas have been forgiven for the ultimate crime?

Peter shows signs of repentance as well, beginning with weeping at his actions, and later, in reconciliation with the Risen Jesus. A famous painting by Eugène Burnand of John and Peter running to the empty tomb depicts so well the expressions of the two Apostles, as one whose last interaction had been receiving the mother of Jesus as his own, and as one whose last interaction had been that of betrayal.

True to his word, Jesus went before the Apostles to Galilee after his Resurrection, where he visited several of them while fishing. When John points out to Peter that Jesus had appeared on the shore and that it was Jesus who ordered them to cast their nets, Peter “tucked in his garments” and “jumped into the sea” to swim to Jesus. Later, Jesus had an important conversation with Peter, the rock of his Church.

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’” Jesus goes on to ask Peter if Peter loves him a total of three times. This threefold confession of love is seen by many scholars to be reparation for Peter’s threefold denial of Christ.

Following the Resurrection, eleven of the twelve Apostles remained and a successor was to be chosen for Judas. After telling a slightly varied account of Judas’ death, Peter goes on to say, “...It is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection.” Two potential names were selected. The Apostles prayed that the right person be selected, and gave lots, selecting Matthias, who was to be “counted with the eleven apostles”.

The Apostles are to us real, human persons who lived in the time of Christ and provide

us with authentic stories of discipleship. They represent Jesus' salvific mission to gather the lost sheep of Israel and save all people of the earth. It is through the mission of the Twelve that we preserve the truth of our faith, the oneness of our communities, and continue to participate in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass, alongside our other sacraments. Friends, we thank you for journeying alongside us for the duration of this Lenten season. We pray these episodes and accompanying reflections have allowed you to enter into your baptism and repentance more fully, know the Apostles more deeply, and draw closer to Jesus more intimately.

Sts. Peter, Andrew, James, John, James, Thomas, Matthew, Simon, Jude, Philip, Bartholomew, and Matthias- pray for us, that we may be counted among you in the Kingdom of Heaven!



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