

DIOCESE OF DALLAS YOUNG ADULTS

ORDINARY TIME

SMALL GROUP CONTENT | SEASON ONE





Why Small Groups?

The Church has been gathering in small Christian communities since the beginning. These small Christian communities have formed the Church we know today.

In light of the modern realities of Covid-19, the small group model offers the faithful within the Diocese of Dallas the opportunity to safely gather in community, pray together, and grow in faith.

Thank you for participation in Season One of our small groups. Thank you for rising to the occasion. Thank you for answering the call to be Church.

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.

In addition to being specifically written to attend to Dallas realities, the small group content is inspired by the liturgical seasons of the Church as well as the Holy Scriptures. In both, there is a treasure of grace that we hope to make accessible to faithful in Dallas in a new, engaging manner.

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.



**YOUNG ADULT
SMALL GROUPS**

— DIOCESE OF DALLAS —



A Note from the Authors

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

Each week of content contains the following:

- Brief Overview (with intro question)
- Weekly Scripture Readings
- Spiritual Reading
- Group Conversation Guide with Questions
- Prayer/Journal Prompt
- Closing Prayer

We've provided a brief "overview" and opening thoughts on the theme of the week. These opening thoughts include questions that can act as a sort of "entry" to the time together, or could just be a chance to spark thought/conversation on your own. Don't feel obligated to use these questions in discussion, but instead as a springboard to get things moving and have people begin to think and process.

We encourage group leaders to send out the Scripture references & the spiritual reading passages ahead of time, to perhaps give people time to read and reflect before gathering, make notes in their own Bible, or even print out a copy of

the spiritual reading. This could also free up more time for dialogue, discussion, and fellowship. At the very minimum, we think the group should read the Gospel aloud (by a designated facilitator/guide) so that there is a time of centering/focus on the Word while gathered together. We have also made note of the key passage or line from the weekly Scripture that we think is most relevant to the theme, so at the minimum, if the group is unable/doesn't wish to read all the passages together, they have something to reference in discussion.

The spiritual readings we've selected are a chance to go a bit deeper into the weekly theme, and perhaps even inspire some further study. We've referenced where the passage is from and we've highlighted the key passage/statement we think is important to focus on. We of course fully expect (and hope) that each group would find and point out the things that stick out most to them in the Scripture and Spiritual Reading.

The following is used for the Spiritual Readings:

- Pope Francis
- Pope Benedict XVI
- St. Teresa of Avila's The Way of Perfection
- Servant of God Dorothy Day
- Lumen Gentium
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church

When working through the discussion questions, they do not have to be asked or answered in order. We of course hope there's free-wheeling

conversation, and that the questions should not just be asked in a “rote” manner, but instead allow people to begin ping-ponging off of one another with ideas, insights, and reflections. If everyone has a copy of the questions, perhaps the conversation could be more organic and free flowing.

The prayer and journal prompt is a much more personal and introspective series of questions, and we think a time to process, reflect, and write 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 individually – each person taking a few moments to write and think silently and on their own. If the group wants to continue discussion and use these questions as prompts, that’s of course fine too.

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/style. As with the entire small group guide, the group has the option to always “do their own thing” that fits the needs of the group members, especially in regards to how to conclude the time together in prayer.

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 if this is done via Zoom calls/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 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?

Lastly, a word about small group dynamics. It’s probably best if there’s a designated “facilitator” (one or two each session) to help guide the questions being asked, even to just pay attention to the way things are flowing, if some people aren’t sharing, and to encourage participation and conversation. While there’s of course the designated “group leader,” we think these facilitators could change week to week, each person in the group getting to take the lead in reading, asking the questions, etc. Bouncing off one another, this could help if there’s a lull in the conversation, or just to move things along if there’s a lot of lingering and delay.

FORMING & GROWING IN COMMUNITY

Opening Thoughts

The readings this week clearly point to the need for community that is consistent, based in charity, focused on each member's journey to heaven, and the need for every person in a community to focus on God's presence in their midst. The second reading especially highlights this - loving our neighbor, and the Gospel picks this theme up - by saying we're called to be in close relationship with our neighbor, even offering correction within our community, as needed.

This is perhaps perfect at the start of a small group beginning to form, because it calls to mind the deep need every single person has to be in relationship with others. We are not isolated. We are not meant to live "unto" or "for" ourselves, but instead to love one another, which is in person, face to face, in communion with one another.

Pope Francis reminds us that community is, in some sense, a "pooling of one's goods" - it's a bringing together of people for a common goal, a common purpose. So, what's the common purpose and goal of this small group? What's the point of gathering together, two or three alone meaning the Lord will be in your midst?

Why have you come here, seeking community? Everyone take a moment answer this question, along with briefly introducing yourselves (if your group did not do a "Session Zero").

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

"You, son of man, I have appointed watchman..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts"

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-10

"...love is the fulfillment of the law."

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them..."

Spiritual Reading

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

The Christian Community is born from the superabundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit and it grows thanks to the leaven of sharing among brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a dynamism of solidarity which builds up the Church as the family of God, for whom the experience of koinonia is central. What does this strange word mean? It is a Greek word which means "pooling one's goods", "sharing in common", being a community, not isolated. This is the experience of the first Christian community, that is, "communality", "sharing", "communicating, participating", not isolation. In the primitive Church, this koinonia, this communality, refers primarily to

participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. This is why when we receive Holy Communion, we say that “we communicate”, we enter into communion with Jesus, and from this communion with Jesus we reach a communion with our brothers and sisters. And this communion in the Body and Blood of Christ that we share during Holy Mass translates into fraternal union and, therefore also into what is most difficult for us; pooling our resources and collecting money for the mother Church in Jerusalem (cf. Rm 12:13, 2 Cor 8-9) and the other Churches. If you want to know whether you are good Christians, you have to pray, try to draw near to Communion, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

But the sign that your heart has converted is when conversion reaches the pocket, when it touches one's own interests. That is when one can see whether one is generous to others, if one helps the weakest, the poorest. When conversion achieves this, you are sure that it is a true conversion. If you stop at words, it is not a real conversion...

In this way, the community, or *koinonia*, becomes the new way of relating among the Lord's disciples. Christians experience a new way of being and behaving among themselves. And it is the proper Christian method, to such an extent that Gentiles would look at Christians and remark: “Look at how they love each other!” Love was the method. But not love in word, not false love: love in works, in helping one another, concrete love, the concreteness of love. The Covenant with Christ establishes a bond among brothers and sisters which merges and expresses itself in the communion of material goods too. Yes this method of being together, of loving this way, ‘up to the pocket’, also brings one to strip oneself of the hindrance of money and to give it to others, going against one's own interests. **Being the limbs of the Body of Christ makes believers share the responsibility for one another. Being believers in Jesus makes us all responsible for each other.** “But look at that one, the problem he has. I don't care, it's

his business”. **No, among Christians we cannot say: “poor thing, he has a problem at home, he is going through this family problem”. But “I have to pray, I take him with me, I am not indifferent”. This is being Christian. This is why the strong support the weak (cf. Rom 15:1) and no one experiences poverty that humiliates and disfigures human dignity because they live in this community: having one heart in common. They love one another. This is the sign: concrete love...**

Falling short of sincere sharing, indeed, falling short of the sincerity of love means cultivating hypocrisy, distancing oneself from the truth, becoming selfish, extinguishing the fire of communion and choosing the frost of inner death. Those who behave in this manner move in the Church like a tourist. There are many tourists in the Church who are always passing through but never enter the Church. **It is spiritual tourism that leads them to believe they are Christians whereas they are only tourists of the catacombs. No, we should not be tourists in the Church but rather one another's brothers and sisters. A life based only on drawing gain and advantages from situations to the detriment of others, inevitably causes inner death.** And how many people say they are close to the Church, friends of priests, of bishops, while they only seek their own interests. Such hypocrisy destroys the Church!

May the Lord — I ask this for all of us — pour over us his Spirit of tenderness which vanquishes all hypocrisy and generates that truth that nourishes Christian solidarity, which, far from being an activity of social work, is the inalienable expression of the Church, the most tender mother of all, especially of the poorest.

-Pope Francis

Excerpt from a General Audience Address given on August 21, 2019

SEPTEMBER 13TH | 24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LIVE IN MERCY

Opening Thoughts

What does it mean to forgive?

Why do we seek to both receive and give mercy?

And why is it so hard to do?

When the concept of “merciful compassion” or “tender forgiveness” comes up, it’s easy to assume that we’re “good at it.” We can believe that we are good at being forgiving to those who have hurt us or done wrong, giving people grace and room to grow, make mistakes, and move on. We hope we are that way, at least.

But Jesus challenges us this week to actually confront ourselves, and our feelings towards mercy and forgiveness. Are we actually merciful? Are we truly forgiving? Or, do we just say that (or think that) about ourselves because we know we should be, because mercy and forgiveness has been shown to us?

Ultimately, being merciful and forgiving doesn’t mean we are weak, or a pushover. It doesn’t mean we just ignore wrongs or give people a free pass. It means we love one another, in the same way Christ first loved us - without hesitation, in spite of what we have done, always in pursuit of healing, renewal, and growth. We don’t, as the second reading says,

just live for ourselves. We live for Christ, and for others. And if the Lord is kind and merciful (which he is), then are we that too?

Do you consider yourself to be a merciful and forgiving person? Why? Or why not?

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Sir 27:30-28:7

“Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the LORD?”

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 103

“The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion...”

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

“For if we live, we live for the Lord...”

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

“...unless each of you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Spiritual Reading

I cannot believe, that a soul which has arrived so near to Mercy itself, where she knows what she is, and how many sins God has forgiven her, should not instantly and willingly forgive others, and be pacified and wish well to everyone who has injured her, **because she remembers the kindness and favors our Lord has shown her**, whereby she has seen proofs of exceeding great love, and she is glad to have an opportunity offered to show some gratitude to her Lord.

I say again, I know many persons on whom God has bestowed the favor of exalting them to a supernatural state, bestowing on them this prayer, or the contemplation mentioned above; and though I have noticed many defects and imperfections in them, yet not one have I noticed, when they were in possession of this favor; nor shall I ever notice any, I believe, if these favors come from God, as I have said.

-St. Teresa of Avila

Excerpt explaining the words "Forgive Us Our Trespasses..." in The Way of Perfection

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from Scripture and the Spiritual reading?
- Why is it hard to be forgiving and merciful? What makes it tough for you specifically, in your state of life?
- When have you needed forgiveness, and received it? When have you needed mercy, and it's been denied, or hard to come by? (Whether with others - friends, family, spouse, children - in your spiritual life, or with yourself?)
- What does it mean, to you, to "live with the Lord" and "die with the Lord." (Romans 14:7-9) What does that life, and that death, look like for you, in your day to day experiences?
- What causes anger in your life? What brings peace?
- St. Teresa of Avila makes reference to "an opportunity to show gratitude" to the Lord. What do you have to be grateful for, especially in terms of mercy and forgiveness, in your life?
- How are you, in your state of life, called to love your neighbor with the same merciful love of Jesus? What is unique about how you can love others?

Prayer/Journal Prompt

- When has the Lord been slow to anger and rich in compassion with you? When have you not been that way with yourself, or with others?
- What is persistently and perpetually causing you to drift away from the heart of Jesus? What sin are you repeatedly asking forgiveness from?

Time of Prayer

Go through this simple examination of conscience together (each person reflecting silently) and then pray an Act of Contrition together, at the end.

Do I often consider that God is my Father? Do I offer him my work? Do I make good use of my time? Am I attentive to the needs of others? Am I slow to anger and rich in compassion with the people I meet, work with, spend time with, and love? Have I been prideful, impatient with, or quick to judge others? Do I turn to the Lord for comfort and guidance? Am I forgiving and merciful myself?

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess myself ins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

SEPTEMBER 20TH | 25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

GOD'S WAYS

Opening Thoughts

We hear this week that God is a God who has a unique approach, perhaps unknown and vastly different from the way we may approach life, work, relationships...

Does that make you uncomfortable? Because, maybe it should.

If his ways are not our ways, do we need to maybe conform ourselves a bit more to him?

The readings today offer a simple theme: God does things differently, and he invites us to see the goodness of his ways through the lense of abundant generosity. His ways are not simply frivolous, cavalier, or haphazard. They are focused on the giving of himself abundantly, and then inviting us to do the same - to be generous too.

How have you experienced God's generosity in your life? How have you been generous with others? And when have you heard God distinctly calling you into the vineyard, to work alongside him?

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps.145

"The Lord is near to all who call upon him..."

Second Reading: Philippians 1:20-24, 27

"...conduct yourselves in a way worth of the gospel of Christ."

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

"Are you envious because I am generous?"

Spiritual Reading

Well, in today's Gospel (cf. Mt 20: 1-16), Jesus recounted the very same parable of the owner of the vineyard who at different hours of the day hires laborers to work in it. And in the evening he gives them all the same wages, one denarius, provoking protests from those who began work early. That denarius clearly represents eternal life, a gift that God reserves for all. Indeed those who are considered the "last", if they accept, become the "first", whereas the "first" can risk becoming the "last". The first message of this parable is inherent in the very fact that the landowner does not tolerate, as it were, unemployment: he wants everyone to be employed in his vineyard. **Actually, being called is already the first reward: to be able to work in the Lord's vineyard, to put oneself at his service, to collaborate in his work, is in itself a priceless recompense that repays every effort.** Yet only those who love the Lord and his Kingdom understand this: those who instead work only for the pay will never realize the value of this inestimable treasure.

-Pope Benedict XVI

Excerpt from speech given on Sunday, September 21, 2008, at Castel Gandolfo

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from Scripture and the Spiritual reading?
- Do you consider yourself someone who is sort of "stuck in their ways" and unable to adapt or change quickly? Why? Or why not?
- What is generosity? When have you experienced it? When have you been generous? Do you find it hard to be a generous person?
- When in your life have you experienced or noticed "God's ways" working? (Isaiah 55:6-9) Have you reacted/responded? Were you resistant? Open? Nervous?
- What do you think it means to "conduct yourselves in a way worth of the gospel of Christ"? What is the gospel of Christ, to you, in your state of life? How can you live in a way worth of it? Have you been doing that? Are you resistant to it? (Philippians 1:20-24)
- The Gospel today highlights the generosity of God - that he can give freely. We seem to be the ones who resist that generosity, or judge it when it's given to others. Have you ever done this, or felt this way in your life? When and why?
- Pope Benedict says the reward we're given is being called by the Lord. How have you felt called by God? To do what? To go where? How have you responded?
- If you were in the vineyard, having heard "the call" to go work - what time of day do you think you would've been called? When would you have gone in? (Matthew 20:1-16)

SEPTEMBER 27TH | 26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LOVING OTHERS

Opening Thoughts

Every day, we are invited to embrace the ways of God. This is at the heart of the Christian life - to boldly want our ways to become his ways. This time as a small group has unpacked this idea by thinking of how we can love one another as we grow in community and how we are called to be kind, merciful, and forgiving to those with whom we are in relationship.

Ultimately, it seems to boil down to this: how do we love others? What does that look like? And how are you specifically loving those around you, in the state of life you're in?

As we love others, are we also working to repent of our sins, to return to the heart of God? Are we working to weed out selfishness, so that we can focus on those around us who are in need? Are we trying to embrace the attitude of Christ Jesus?

Easy questions to ask, but hard to evaluate within ourselves.

This week, the readings point to the need for repentance and humility, so that we can embrace both the invitation to draw close to the Lord and to love those around us. This week's Gospel, a parable with a quiz attached to it, highlights the importance of taking up the "work" we are called to, by Jesus. The question is: what is that work? It seems it's a two fold work, of both repentance internally and to serve others externally.

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

"But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, he does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 25: 4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

"Teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior..."

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

"Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others."

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

"Jesus said to them, 'Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.'"

Spiritual Reading

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor in other words, we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. **We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We can give away an onion.**

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.

This is the month of the Sacred Heart, the symbol of Christ's love for man. **We are supposed to love as Christ loved, to the extent of laying down our lives for our brothers. That was the New commandment. To love to the extent of laying down our lives, dying to ourselves.** To accept the least place, to sit back, to ask nothing for ourselves, to serve each other, to lay down our lives for our brothers, this is the strange upside-down teaching of the Gospel.

-Servant of God Dorothy Day

Article in The Catholic Worker, June 1946

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from Scripture and the Spiritual reading?
- The readings this week almost seem a bit disjointed, as if they could each stand alone, but also could fit together. What do you see as the thru-line/theme of these readings? What stands out to you?
- When have you found yourself tempted to “turn away from virtue” or “turn from wickedness”? How have those struggles affected you, your relationships, and your faith? (Ezekiel 18:25-28)
- What is humility to you? Who is an example of humility in your life? What ways are you called to be humble, at home, at work, with friends? (Philippians 2:1-11)
- Dorothy Day mentions a need for God to “enlarge our hearts to love each other.” In what ways can your heart be enlarged? What do you need to make room for? What “onions” do you have to give?
- In the same vein, what is most challenging, for you, when it comes to loving your neighbor? In your state of life (single, dating, engaged, married, parenting) what “thing” can make loving others most difficult/challenging?
- Why do you think prostitutes and tax collectors have a greater shot at entering Heaven? (Matthew 21:28-32)

Prayer/Journal Prompt

- Do you think you'd be more like the first son or the second son in the Gospel story? Are you more likely to repent or resist?
- When do you find that you are most likely to be selfish? Most likely to be humble? Do you find there are certain places, people, or circumstances that tend to lead you one way or the other, especially when it comes to your relationships with others?

Time of Prayer

Pray the Litany of Humility together, and when done, the group could spend some time sharing which petition they each need to work on.

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart,
Hear me.
From the desire of being esteemed,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being loved,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being extolled,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being honored,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being praised,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being preferred to others,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being consulted,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the desire of being approved,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being humiliated,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being despised,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of suffering rebukes,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being calumniated,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being forgotten,
Deliver me, O Jesus.

From the fear of being ridiculed,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being wronged,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
From the fear of being suspected,
Deliver me, O Jesus.
That others may be loved more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be esteemed more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be chosen and I set aside,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be praised and I go unnoticed,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may be preferred to me in everything,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

OCTOBER 4TH | 27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

WE, THE CHURCH

Opening Thoughts

The Church is not just a building. But, Lumen Gentium says it kind of is a building, with Christ as the cornerstone, and us inside, while also being the very Body of Christ, of which we are a part. Not confusing at all.

The central, unifying element - Jesus Christ, Himself. And we, part of that unified Church, living stones of that Church, and members of His Body.

This week, we dive into the idea and understanding that the community we're a part of, both this one and others in our lives (be they friends, our own family, at the workplace, within our parish) and the way we humbly forgive, love, and serve others (as we've talked about week to week) is all part of being within this Church, God's own Kingdom.

Nothing we do is done in isolation, because we are always part of the Church, whether we feel like we are.

So we have to ask ourselves: how do I fit into the life of the Church, and how in learning about God's relationship with the Israelites help me to be better member of Christ's own body today?

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

"The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant..."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 80: 9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

"Once again, O LORD of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted the son of man whom you yourself made strong."

Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God."

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

The Church is a cultivated field, the tillage of God. On that land the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again. That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator. **Yet the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ, without whom we can do nothing.**

Often, too, the Church is called the building of God. The Lord compared himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the corner-stone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles and from it the Church receives solidity and unity. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which his family dwells; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling-place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple. This temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. As living stones we here on earth are built into it. It is this holy city that is seen by John as it comes down out of heaven from God when the world is made anew, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

-Lumen Gentium, 6

A document of Vatican II, "Light of the World" (Lumen Gentium)

addresses the mission and identity of the church and the duty of the faithful.

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you? What struck you from Scripture and the Spiritual reading?
- Have you ever taken time to cultivate something, whether a garden, or learning a new skill, or investing in the creation of something new? What was that process and experience like? What was frustrating? What was exciting? How did doing "that work" make you feel? (Isaiah 5:1-7)
- How do you see yourself "in the Church"? Are you very involved? Are you minimally involved? Somewhere in between?
- Even if you would say you are "very involved," imagine for a moment you're an "outsider" looking into the Church. What do you see? What do you think? What invites you in? What turns you off?
- When in your life has the Church felt like home to you? When has it not? Why? What were some key things you noticed during those times?
- What requests have you made to God? Were you confident in those requests? Anxious about them? Why? (Philippians 4:6-9)
- Lumen Gentium makes reference to us - members of the Church - being "living stones here on earth." What does that phrase mean to you? How do you unpack that analogy, based on the circumstances and state of your life?
- Have you ever rejected the cornerstone (Jesus), and if so, why? What led to your resistance?

OCTOBER 11TH | 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

INVITED TO THE KINGDOM

Opening Thoughts

What do you picture when you think of the kingdom of heaven? A banquet table with fine china and a gourmet meal? A large living room, comfy couches and people sitting around talking? A Mass that never ends? A choir of angels musically narrating every moment

We each have a “picture” of the Kingdom of God, and we are each invited to both long for and work to build the Kingdom. The poor, the lowly, the sinner, and the righteous - every one is welcomed, invited to conversion, and offered forgiveness.

The challenge is whether or not we want to do that work, or if our hearts are open to the longing.

Dark valleys, towering mountains, times of desolation - they can get in the way of a rightly ordered heart focused on the kingdom, and we can forget God’s providence and ignore the invitation.

Or, we show up, but we aren’t ready to be there, because we haven’t paid attention to the invitation before.

What invitation have you heard lately? And how are you responding?

Sunday Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10

“The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face...”

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 23:1-6

“Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil, for you are at my side...”

Second Reading: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

“I can do all things in him who strengthens me...My God will fully supply whatever you need”

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

“Many are invited, but few are chosen....”

Spiritual Reading

Everyone is called to enter the kingdom. First announced to the children of Israel, this messianic kingdom is intended to accept men of all nations. To enter it, one must first accept Jesus' word: The word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear it with faith and are numbered among the little flock of Christ have truly received the kingdom. Then, by its own power, the seed sprouts and grows until the harvest.

The kingdom belongs to the poor and lowly, which means those who have accepted it with humble hearts. Jesus is sent to "preach good news to the poor"; he declares them blessed, for "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To them - the "little ones" the Father is pleased to reveal what remains hidden from the wise and the learned. Jesus shares the life of the poor, from the cradle to the cross; he experiences hunger, thirst and privation. Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom.

Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents". The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life "for the forgiveness of sins".

Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of parables, a characteristic feature of his teaching. Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything. Words are not enough, deeds are required. The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word? What use has he made of the talents he has received? Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven". For those who stay "outside", everything remains enigmatic.

-Catechism of the Catholic Church, 543-546

OCTOBER 18TH

WRAP UP / FELLOWSHIP

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.

Here's what we've focused on:

- Building Community
- Being Merciful & Forgiving
- Paying attention to God's ways & providence
- Loving Others
- Being members of the Church
- Living in, and for, the Kingdom of God

The common theme that we hope has manifested in your prayer, reflection, and conversations is simple: How do you love others? And how are you a member of the Church, where you get to love others? And in what ways are you called to serve others in and through the Church, in your particular circumstances?

Does that happen for you in a small community, perhaps this one? In your parish? Amongst your own family? Are you able to give witness to this Church and your faith to perfect strangers, or in your workplace?

We want tonight's gathering to be a chance to share - what you've thought on over these past few weeks, what you've taken home and continued to ponder, and what you'd like to continue discussing in the future. And, we hope tonight is a chance to just celebrate one another's company with good food, drinks, and fun.

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

- Board Games (Mexican Train, Ticket to Ride, Bananagrams, SkipBo - all excellent large 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 (But not necessarily just 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

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 Mass, together, as a group, at some point this week.