

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Holy Week

We certainly find ourselves in extraordinary times!

Many of us are unable to participate in the Holy Week liturgies in person. We find ourselves in some level of social distancing if not quarantine from others outside members of our household.

We've put together a series of devotions based upon the readings for each day of Holy Week. You may choose to use one, two, or more readings as a focus and source for your prayer, encountering the Lord through them and through your imagination.

Work - even from - home, family responsibilities, and daily demands may make it challenging to find time to sit at the Lord's feet. Give yourself permission: allow Him to love you, care for you, minister to you, and equip you to love and care for those to whom he sends you. Wherever and however you can, this tool can help you enter into that experience.

The first page for each day provides you with a daily devotion you can do alone, or with others. There is also a separate supplement intended for a small group that incorporates a reading from a saint, a pope or Church teaching.

Some ideas you may wish to consider:

- Read the Scripture and pray with members of your household;
- Use the Optional Small Group handout to pray virtually with friends or a small group to which you belong. Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout, Zoom and others are offering free versions to support us in staying connected to one another during this time;
- If you prefer to listen to the readings, you can find them here: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings-audio.cfm>
- If your church or Adoration chapel is open (or, if you have the opportunity to pray from your car in your parish parking lot), take this with you and pray with Jesus there. If not, you can pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament virtually in many parts of the world by following this link: <https://virtualadoration.home.blog/?fbclid=IwAR1mFqj-9BVZBqVH8OJmmslUzDrh0anoLHZSnnK8BoiJk5ciph55fR6vI>

NOTE: Additional resources have been provided for the Triduum. Read through them and use what best suits your time and circumstances.

Let us pray with and for one another during this most extraordinary Holy Week!

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Monday of Holy Week

The Readings for today can be found here: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/040620.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7

Reflection Question: This passage echoes Jesus' life and ministry. How have you experienced the healing presence of Jesus? Has he brought light into your darkness? Sight into an area of blindness? Freedom?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 27:1-3, 13-14

Reflection Question: Where has the Lord dispelled fear in the past few weeks? Where has He brought light? Where has he brought hope?

Gospel: John 12:1-11

Reflection Question: Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet with the expensive nard was an extravagant act of love, honor and devotion. How do you honor Jesus?

To begin, pray:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there."—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God "speaking" to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

Optional Small group session to follow these daily reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.” —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: John 12:1-11

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words from Pope Francis¹

The emblem of the infinite patience that God has for man is reflected in the infinite patience that Jesus has for Judas.

Jesus did not say: 'You are a thief'. Instead “he was patient with Judas, trying to draw him closer through patience, his love. During Holy Week, we would do well to think of the patience of God, the patience that God has with each one of us, with our weaknesses, our sins.

The patience of God is a mystery! How much patience he has with us! We do so many things, but He is patient.

God is patient like the prodigal son’s father who waits everyday for his son to come home. And if we think of this, applying it to each one of us, only one thought can escape our hearts: thank you. This is God's patience, this is the patience of Jesus.”

Let us think of our personal relationship, in this week: How patient has Jesus been with me in my life? Just this. And then the words will rise from our hearts: 'Thank you, Lord! Thank you for your patience.

Reflection questions:

Where have you experienced Jesus’ patience with you?

Discuss

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this past week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for. If it is possible, at this time move to a chapel or the church for the closing prayer.

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord’s presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc.

¹<http://www.popefrancishomilies.com/john>

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Tuesday of Holy Week

The Readings for today can be found here: <http://uscpcb.org/bible/readings/040720.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 49:1-6

Reflection Question: What does it mean to you that the Lord desires that Jacob, Israel, *and you*, to be brought back to him, who called you from your birth?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 71:1-6, 15, 17

Reflection Question: Where do you find refuge, hope in God? What deeds of his do you want to share with others?

Gospel: John 13:21-33, 36-38

Reflection Question: Imagine that you are among the disciples at the Last Supper. What do you see? What do you hear? Peter has many questions for Jesus—what questions do *you* have?

To begin, pray:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.”—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God “speaking” to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

Optional Small group session to follow these daily reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.” —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: Isaiah 49:1-6

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

713 The Messiah's characteristics are revealed above all in the "Servant songs." These songs proclaim the meaning of Jesus' Passion and show how he will pour out the Holy Spirit to give life to the many: not as an outsider, but by embracing our "form as slave." Taking our death upon himself, he can communicate to us his own Spirit of life.

Reflection questions:

How does Jesus give life to *you*? What is different because of this gift?

Discuss

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this past week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for. If it is possible, at this time move to a chapel or the church for the closing prayer.

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord's presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc.

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Wednesday of Holy Week

The Readings for today can be found here: <http://uscpcb.org/bible/readings/040820.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9

Reflection Question: How is God your help?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 69:8-10, 21-22, 31, 33-34

Reflection Question: How do you know the Lord hears you?

Gospel: Matthew 26:14-25

Reflection Question: Imagine that you are among the disciples at the Last Supper. Imagine the conversation between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. What are you thinking? Feeling?

To begin, pray:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.”—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God “speaking” to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

Optional Small group session to follow these daily reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.” —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: Isaiah 49:1-6

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Dear brethren, the Lord has marked out for us the fullness of love that we ought to have for each other. He tells us: *No one has greater love than the man who lays down his life for his friends*. In these words, the Lord tells us what the perfect love we should have for one another involves. John, the evangelist who recorded them, draws the conclusion in one of his letters: *As Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers*. We should indeed love one another as he loved us, he who laid down his life for us.¹

Reflection questions:

Jesus allows Judas to betray him, to hand him over to his death, so that he may lay his life down for us. What does it mean for you that Jesus died for *you*, so that you may gain eternal life?

Discuss

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this past week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for. If it is possible, at this time move to a chapel or the church for the closing prayer.

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord's presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc.

¹ St. Augustine, *Treatise on John*, from the Second Reading, Office of Readings, Wednesday of Holy Week

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Holy Thursday – Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper

The Readings for today can be found here: <http://cms.usccb.org/bible/readings/040920-lord-s-supper.cfm>

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

Reflection Question: God promises to pass over and save the eldest male in the households of the Israelites. How do you experience the saving power of God in your life today?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116: 12-13, 15-18

[The response is from 1 Corinthians 10:16:
Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ]

Reflection Question: The psalmist testifies that the Lord has ‘loosed my bonds.’ How has God liberated you?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Reflection Question: How have you met Jesus in Holy Communion: in His Body and in His Precious Blood?

Gospel: John 13:1-15

Reflection Question: Imagine that you are among the disciples at the Last Supper. Imagine you are watching Jesus wash the disciples’ feet. What are you thinking? Feeling? What would *you* do if Jesus approached to wash *your* feet?

To begin, pray:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.”—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God “speaking” to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

COULD YOU NOT WATCH WITH ME FOR ONE HOUR?

A “Holy Hour” of Prayer for an Unusual Time

In years past, you may have had an opportunity to pray at an Altar of Repose on Holy Thursday. The Blessed Sacrament, at the end of the evening’s Mass, was often processed to a place prepared for Adoration by the faithful. Individuals would take turns keeping watch and prayer for an hour before the Blessed Sacrament, remembering the account of Jesus and the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane.

For many places in the world, this is not to be this year.

It is my prayer that this exercise may be a source of commemoration and consolation in a most unusual Holy Week. I pray that, in your prayer, you may meet the Lord as he desires to meet you: in the room of your heart prepared just for him.

Several passages from this Gospel account are included here, along with other suggested spiritual reading. Feel free to use them as best suits your prayer. There is no set or right way to use them: you may find yourself drawn to only one, or more, during your prayer time.

If you are unable to go to your parish, praying with one of these streams of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may help you pray: <https://virtualadoration.home.blog/?fbclid=IwAR1mFfqj-9BVZBqVH8OJmmsIUzDrh0anoLHZSnnK8BoiJk5ciph55fR6vI>

Reading #1: John 13:31-35

After Judas departs the Upper Room, Jesus addresses his disciples. He tells them he must leave them soon. He then leaves them with a new commandment: “love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how I will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

St. Catherine of Siena, in a letter to Regina della Scala, wife of Bernabò Visconti, wrote:¹

Love is had only by loving. If you want love, you must begin by loving—I mean you must want to love. Once you want it, you must open the eye of your understanding to see where and how love is to be found. And you will find it within your very self. How? When you recognize your nothingness. And once you see that of yourself you do not even exist, you will recognize and appreciate that God is the source of your existence and of every favor above and beyond that existence—God’s graces and gifts both temporal and spiritual. For without existence, we would not be able to receive any grace at all. So everything we have, everything we discover within ourselves, is indeed the gift of God’s boundless goodness and charity.

This discovery and sight of our Creator’s tremendous goodness to us makes us rise to such a growth of love and desire that we count as nothing ourselves and the world and all the world’s pleasures. This doesn’t surprise me, because this is love’s way, that when we see ourselves loved we love in return. And because we love, we would rather die than offend the one we love. We are fed in love’s fire because we realize how loved we are when we see that we ourselves were the soil and the rock that held the standard of the most holy cross. For you know very well that neither earth nor rock could have held the cross, nor could cross or nails have held God’s Only Begotten Son, had not love held him fast. So God’s love for our souls was the rock and the nails that held him fast.

¹ Letter 18, *The Letters of St. Catherine of Siena*, vol. 1, Suzanne Nofke, O.P., p. 73

Reflection Question: In choosing to love another, have you encountered God's love for you in a different or deeper way?

Reading #2: Matthew 26:36-41

Jesus and the disciples come to Gethsemane. And thus begins the Agony in the Garden.

4. *The hour of our redemption.* Although deeply troubled, Jesus does not flee before his "hour". "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour" (Jn 12:27). He wanted his disciples to keep him company, yet he had to experience loneliness and abandonment: "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt 26:40- 41).²

...while the Eucharist is reserved in churches or oratories—that Christ is truly Emmanuel, which means, "God with us." For He is in the midst of us day and night; He dwells in us with the fullness of grace and truth.³

Reflection Question: The same Jesus who asked the disciples to wait for him in Gethsemane, is among us in his Real Presence: Body, Blood, Soul, Divinity, His Saving Power in the Eucharist. He is present in the image on our screen, as well as the tabernacle nearest to where you are now, whether in a parish church, convent, chapel. It is the same Jesus there who prayed to the Father, 'not as I will, but as you will.' (Mt 26:39). One fruit of Jesus' obedience to the Father is his continued presence to us in the Eucharist. What would you like to say to Jesus in response to this gift?

Reading #3: Matthew 26:42-46

The disciples are unable to stay awake with Jesus.

...the tabernacle is the complete fulfillment of what the Ark of the Covenant represented. It is the place of the "Holy of Holies." It is the tent of God, His throne. Here He is among us. His presence (*Shekinah*) really does now dwell among us—in the humblest parish church no less than in the grandest cathedral.⁴

"Moreover, I want to encourage everyone to visit – if possible, every day – especially amid life's difficulties, the Blessed Sacrament of the infinite love of Christ and His mercy, preserved in our churches, and often abandoned, to speak filially with Him, to listen to Him in silence, and to peacefully entrust yourself to Him."⁵

Reflection Question: As you contemplate Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, ask for the grace to be attentive to his Eucharistic Presence, although the Blessed Sacrament may be miles from you. Turn to your own inner room and begin to speak with Jesus. What experiences from this most unusual Lent come to mind? What do you share with Jesus? What does he say to *you*?

Reading #4: Matthew 26:47-56

Jesus and the disciples meet Judas. Jesus is arrested and taken away and begins his Way of the Cross

² St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

³ St. Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 67.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 55-56.

⁵ Pope Francis, message to the Eucharistic Congress in Genoa, July 7, 2016

The God who shares our sufferings, the God who became man in order to bear our cross, wants to transform our hearts of stone; he invites us to share in the sufferings of others. He wants to give us a “heart of flesh” which will not remain stony before the suffering of others, but can be touched and led to the love which heals and restores. Here, once again, we return to the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat, which he himself laid down as the fundamental axiom of the Christian life: “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25; cf. Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24 and 17:33: “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it”).

We also see more clearly the meaning of the words which, in the Synoptic Gospels, precede this summation of Christ’s message: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24). Jesus himself interpreted for us the meaning of the “Way of the Cross”; he taught us how to pray it and follow it: the Way of the Cross is the path of losing ourselves, the path of true love. On this path he has gone before us, on it he teaches us how to pray the Way of the Cross. Once again we come back to the grain of wheat, to the Most Holy Eucharist, in which the fruits of Christ’s death and Resurrection are continually made present in our midst. In the Eucharist Jesus walks at our side, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus, making himself ever anew a part of our history.⁶

Reflection Question: What does it mean for you, at this most unusual time, that God shares in our sufferings?

As you close your prayer time with Jesus, if you were not able to attend Holy Thursday Mass, you may wish to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.

⁶ Cardinal Ratzinger, “Meditations for Way of the Cross,” March 24, 2005, <https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-ratzinger-s-meditations-for-way-of-the-cross/>

Optional Small group session to follow this day's reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there." —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words:

The God who shares our sufferings, the God who became man in order to bear our cross, wants to transform our hearts of stone; he invites us to share in the sufferings of others. He wants to give us a "heart of flesh" which will not remain stony before the suffering of others, but can be touched and led to the love which heals and restores. Here, once again, we return to the words of Jesus about the grain of wheat, which he himself laid down as the fundamental axiom of the Christian life: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25; cf. Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24 and 17:33: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it").

We also see more clearly the meaning of the words which, in the Synoptic Gospels, precede this summation of Christ's message: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus himself interpreted for us the meaning of the "Way of the Cross"; he taught us how to pray it and follow it: the Way of the Cross is the path of losing ourselves, the path of true love. On this path he has gone before us, on it he teaches us how to pray the Way of the Cross. Once again we come back to the grain of wheat, to the Most Holy Eucharist, in which the fruits of Christ's death and Resurrection are continually made present in our midst. In the Eucharist Jesus walks at our side, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus, making himself ever anew a part of our history.⁷

Reflection questions:

What sentence in the Scripture, or in the passage from then-Cardinal Ratzinger sticks out for you?

Why do you think that is so?

Where have you experienced God's presence this Lent?

How have you grown in your understanding of, and hunger for, the Eucharist in these past few weeks?

Discuss

⁷ Cardinal Ratzinger, "Meditations for Way of the Cross," March 24, 2005, <https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-ratzinger-s-meditations-for-way-of-the-cross/>

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this past week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for.

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord's presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc. You may also wish to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,

I believe that You

are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment

receive You sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You. **Amen.**

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

The Readings for today can be found here: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/041020.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Reflection Question: What does Jesus' suffering and obedience unto death...even death on the Cross, mean for you?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25

Reflection Question: The psalmist proclaims he takes refuge in the Lord and because of that, he can withstand persecution and suffering. Do you desire to take refuge in the Lord? Does that prospect bring you peace and consolation?

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

Reflection Question: What does it mean to you that your Savior "offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears"...and was heard because of his reverence and obedience?

Gospel: John 18:1-19:42

Reflection Question: Imagine that, after walking along with the crowds the Way of the Cross, you are at the cross with the others as Jesus dies. What in particular, sticks out for you from this experience?

To begin, pray:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there."—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God "speaking" to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

JESUS' FINAL HOURS ON THE CROSS: TRE ORE

In years past, you may have had an opportunity to attend Good Friday services or the Stations of the Cross at your parish church.

For many places in the world, this is not to be this year.

It is our prayer that on this Good Friday you may meet the Lord as he desires to meet you: in the room of your heart prepared just for him. Here are two options:

1. Pray the Stations of the Cross. Here a couple of websites that can help you pray the Stations.
 - a. Stations composed by St. Alphonsus Ligouri: <https://mycatholic.life/catholic-prayers/stations-of-the-cross/>
 - b. Scriptural Stations of the Cross from the US Catholic Conference of Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/stations-of-the-cross/scriptural-stations-of-the-cross.cfm>
 - c. Video Stations of the Cross from St. Anthony of Padua, Woodland, TX: https://vimeo.com/399275116?fbclid=IwAR0VmiLNW5oBSypfc_RIP9WcXKw1ffasGg9Ao9bQ1by8YPvAfS3holMNqi4
 - d. Video Stations of the Cross with Bishop Robert Barron: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJNjtA-Awb4>

2. A practice on Good Friday by Christian churches is the Three Hours' Agony, or Tre Ore. It is traditionally celebrated from noon to 3 pm. The scriptural texts which form the source of prayer and meditation are the traditional Seven Last Words of Jesus.

Several passages from this Gospel account are included here, along with other suggested spiritual reading. Feel free to use them as best suits your prayer. There is not set or right way to use them: you may find yourself drawn to only one, or more, during your prayer time.

To help focus your prayer, find a crucifix upon which you can meditate, as you spend time with the Lord this day. Recall his saving work on the cross, which continues to be available to us today through the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. (Note: another option is to take this prayer, to Eucharistic Adoration, or with an image of the Blessed Sacrament displayed on a screen.)

First Word: Luke 23:33-38

As Jesus is crucified, with a criminal to each side, amidst the jeers of the crowd, he says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

On Good Friday, as he hung on the Cross, Jesus bequeathed to us his testament of forgiveness: "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23: 34). Jeered and tormented, *he implored mercy for his torturers*. In this way his wide-open arms and pierced side became the universal sacrament of the fatherly tenderness of God, who offers forgiveness and reconciliation to all.

Reflection Question: Where have you encountered Jesus' forgiveness in the midst of your own suffering?

Second Word: Luke 23:39-43

To the 'good thief' who rebukes the other thief and pleads, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus responds, 'This day you will be with me in paradise.'

The good thief had done no good works in his life and had nothing to show Jesus that he had earned or was worthy of heaven, he said. "He had nothing, but he trusted in Jesus, whom he recognized as someone innocent, good, so different from himself."

The "good thief reminds us of our true condition before God: that we are his children, that he feels compassion for us," that he can't resist "every time we show him we are homesick for his love."¹

Reflection Question: What does it mean to you that Jesus desires the company of the 'good thief'...and you...eternally?

Third Word: John 19:25-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother."

My dear young people, you are more or less the same age as John and you have the same desire to be with Jesus. Today, it is you whom Jesus expressly asks to receive Mary "into your home" and to welcome her "as one of yours"; to learn from her the one who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2,19) that inner disposition to listen and the attitude of humility and generosity that singled her out as God's first collaborator in the work of salvation. She will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mould you until Christ is fully formed in you.²

Reflection Question: How do you learn from Mary how to better follow Jesus?

Fourth Word: Matthew 27:46

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As is well known, the initial cry of the Psalm [22], "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", is recorded by the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as the cry uttered by Jesus dying on the Cross (cf. Mt 27:46, Mk 15:34). It expresses all the desolation of the Messiah, Son of God, who is facing the drama of death, a reality totally opposed to the Lord of life. Forsaken by almost all his followers, betrayed and denied by the disciples, surrounded by people who insult him, Jesus is under the crushing weight of a mission that was to pass through humiliation and annihilation. This is why he cried out to the Father, and his suffering took up the sorrowful words of the Psalm. But his is not a desperate cry, nor was that of the Psalmist who, in his supplication, takes a tormented path which nevertheless opens out at last into a perspective of praise, into trust in the divine victory.³

Reflection Question: When has confidence in God's providence sustained you through a difficult time?

Fifth Word: John 19:28

I thirst

I THIRST FOR YOU – just you, as you are.

You don't need to change to believe in My love, for it will be your confidence in that love that will make you change. You forget Me, and yet I am seeking you every moment of the day – standing before the doors of your heart and calling.

Do you find this difficult to believe? If so, look at the Cross, look at My Heart that was pierced for you.

Have you not understood My Cross? Then listen again to the words I spoke there, for they tell you clearly why I endured all this for you:

¹ Pope Francis, Wednesday General Audience, October 25, 2017,

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171025_udienza-generale.html

² St. John Paul II, message for World Youth Day, April 23, 2003 http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/youth/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20030311_xviii-world-youth-day.html

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, September 14, 2011. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110914.html

“...I THIRST” (John 19: 28)
YES, I THIRST FOR YOU.⁴

Reflection Question: What does it mean that Jesus thirsts for you?

Sixth Word: John 19:30

It is finished.

How beautiful it will be when we all, at the end of our lives, with our errors and our faults, as well as our good deeds and our love of neighbour, can say to the Father as Jesus did: “It is finished”; not with kind of perfection with which He said it, but to say: “Lord, I did everything that I could do. It is finished”. Adoring the Cross, looking to Jesus, let us think of love, of service, of our lives, of the Christian martyrs, and it will do us good too to think of the end of our lives. No one knows when that will be, but we can ask for the grace to be able to say: “Father, I did what I could do. It is finished”.⁵

Reflection Question: If the end of your life were today, could you with confidence say, “It is finished.”? If not, what remains undone in your life? Where is God calling you to participate in his Kingdom work now?

Seventh Word: Luke 23:46

Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.

Good Friday is the greatest day of hope, come to fruition upon the Cross, as Jesus dies, as he draws his last breath, crying out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46). Entrusting his “given” existence into the Father’s hands, he knows that his death is becoming the source of life, just as the seed in the earth must be destroyed that a new plant may be born: “If a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Jesus is the grain of wheat that falls to the earth, is split open, is destroyed and dies, and for this very reason is able to bear fruit. From the day on which Christ was raised upon it, the Cross, which had seemed to be a sign of desolation, of abandonment, and of failure, has become a new beginning: from the profundity of death is raised the promise of eternal life. The victorious splendour of the dawning day of Easter already shines upon the Cross.⁶

Reflection Question: What does it mean for you, that Jesus gave over his life so that you might have eternal life?

⁴ St. Teresa of Kolkata, “I Thirst for You,” <https://catholic-link.org/quotes/i-thirst-letter-written-mother-teresa-quote/>

⁵ Pope Francis, General Audience, April 1, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150401_udienza-generale.html

⁶ Pope Benedict, “Way of the Cross,” April 2, 2010 http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100402_via-crucis-colosseo.html

As your prayer time this Good Friday draws to a close, consider uniting your voice with the Church in praying the Solemn intercessions at the Good Friday Celebration of Our Lord's Passion:

I. For Holy Church

Let us pray, for the holy Church of God,
that our God and Lord be pleased to give her peace,
to guard her and to unite her throughout the whole world
and grant that, leading our life in tranquility and quiet,
we may glorify God the Father almighty.

II. For the Pope

Let us pray also for our most Holy Father Pope Francis
that our God and Lord,
who chose him for the Order of Bishops,
may keep him safe and unharmed for the Lord's holy Church,
to govern the holy People of God.

III. For all orders and degrees of the faithful

Let us pray also for our Bishop N.,
for all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons of the Church
and for the whole of the faithful people.

IV. For catechumens

Let us pray also for (our) catechumens,
that our God and Lord
may open wide the ears of their inmost hearts
and unlock the gates of his mercy,
that, having received forgiveness of all their sins
through the waters of rebirth,
they, too, may be one with Christ Jesus our Lord.

V. For the unity of Christians

Let us pray also for all our brothers and sisters who believe in Christ,
that our God and Lord may be pleased,
as they live the truth,
to gather them together and keep them in his one Church.

VI. For the Jewish people

Let us pray also for the Jewish people,
to whom the Lord our God spoke first,
that he may grant them to advance in love of his name
and in faithfulness to his covenant.

VII. For those who do not believe in Christ

Let us pray also for those who do not believe in Christ,
that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit,
they, too, may enter on the way of salvation.

VIII. For those who do not believe in God

Let us pray also for those who do not acknowledge God,
that, following what is right in sincerity of heart,
they may find the way to God himself.

IX. For those in public office

Let us pray also for those in public office,
that our God and Lord
may direct their minds and hearts according to his will
for the true peace and freedom of all.

X. For those in tribulation

Let us pray, dearly beloved,
to God the Father almighty,
that he may cleanse the world of all errors,
banish disease and pandemic, drive out hunger,
unlock prisons, loosen fetters,
granting to travelers safety, to pilgrims return,
health to the sick, especially those suffering from coronavirus,
and salvation to the dying, especially those dying from coronavirus in isolation from their loved ones.

For an end to the pandemic

Let us pray, dearly beloved,
for a swift end to the coronavirus pandemic
that afflicts our world,
that our God and Father will heal the sick,
strengthen those who care for them,
and help us all to persevere in faith.

[and any personal intentions you may have]

As you conclude your prayer, if you were not able to attend Good Friday services, you may wish
to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.
I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You.
Amen.

Optional Small group session to follow this day's reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

“Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there.” —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words from Pope Benedict XVI⁷:

What remains now before our eyes? It is a crucified man, a cross raised on Golgotha, a cross which seems a sign of the final defeat of the One who brought light to those immersed in darkness, the One who spoke of the power of forgiveness and of mercy, the One who asked us to believe in God's infinite love for each human person. Despised and rejected by men, there stands before us “a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity, one from whom others hide their faces” (*Is* 53:3).

But let us look more closely at that man crucified between earth and heaven. Let us contemplate him more intently, and we will realize that the cross is not the banner of the victory of death, sin and evil, but rather the luminous sign of love, of God's immense love, of something that we could never have asked, imagined or expected: God bent down over us, he lowered himself, even to the darkest corner of our lives, in order to stretch out his hand and draw us to himself, to bring us all the way to himself. The cross speaks to us of the supreme love of God and invites, today, to renew our faith in the power of that love, and to believe that in every situation of our lives, our history and our world, God is able to vanquish death, sin and evil, and to give us new, risen life. In the Son of God's death on the cross, we find the seed of new hope for life, like the seed which dies within the earth.

Reflection questions:

What sentence in the Scripture, or in the passage from Pope Benedict XVI sticks out for you? Why do you think that is so?

What does Jesus' suffering and death on the cross mean to you?

What meaning does the cross hold for you today?

Discuss

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this past week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Way of the Cross, April 22, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110422_via-crucis-colosseo.html

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord's presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc. You may also wish to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,

I believe that You

are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment

receive You sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

PRAY WITH SCRIPTURE, MEET GOD

Holy Saturday

At the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

All the Readings for today can be found here:
<http://uscceb.org/bible/readings/041120.cfm>

Easter Vigil begins no earlier than sunset on Holy Saturday.

Consider beginning your prayer this day with lighting a candle. (See the next page for ideas for a prayer table.)

Reading III: Exodus 14:15-15:1

Reflection Question: Have you experienced God leading you through a challenging time to freedom? What was life like 'on the other side'? How has he led you to freedom during this most unusual Lent?

Reading V: Isaiah 55:1-11

Reflection Question: For what do you hunger and thirst? How did God come near to you this recent Lent?

Reading VII: Ezekiel 36:16-28

Reflection Question: How have you experienced God bringing his people together this recent Lent?

Epistle: Romans 6:3-11

Reflection Question: What of your 'old self' has been buried during Lent? How has Jesus come nearer to you?

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

Reflection Question: What good 'resurrection news' do you want to share with your brothers and sisters in Christ this Easter?

To begin, pray:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there."—Guigo II, the Carthusian (ca. 1113-1193)

For each passage (you may choose to read one, or all of the readings for today in this manner)

Read the passage once, slowly:

Take 2-3 minutes to ponder the passage. Note any phrase, word or image that stands out for you.

Read the passage a second time, slowly:

Take a few minutes to ponder the passage again. Stay with the text: Why do you think the words or image stand out the first time? Is your mind drawn to another part of the text? What do you think God is trying to tell you through the text today?

Consider the Reflection Question:

Jot down any thoughts or responses you have to this question—also make note of any questions that rose from the text.

Pray

1. Take a few minutes to be still and present to God.
2. Share your thoughts, questions with God.
3. Is God "speaking" to you? Remember: it may not be a voice you hear but a nudge, a consolation or an insight. If you are keeping a journal, you may want to write these down.
4. What needs do you wish to bring to the Lord this day? Take the time to name them in your prayer.
5. When you feel done, say a quick prayer thanking God for this time with him.

REFLECTING ON THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, EUCHARIST

In years past, you may have had an opportunity to attend Easter Vigil in your parish church.

For many places in the world, this is not to be this year.

It is our prayer that on this Holy Saturday, you may meet the Lord as he desires to meet you: in the room of your heart prepared just for him.

This reflection on the sacraments of initiation are offered as an opportunity to honor this day by reflecting upon when *you* received these sacraments—when one at a time, or at the same celebration.

To help focus your prayer, if possible, create a prayer table wherever you are. Items to place on your table could include: a white cloth, a crucifix, a Bible, a lit candle, two bowls or containers: one with water; one with oil.

Baptism

Take a moment and recall your own baptism.

Consider then these words¹:

Today let us do honour to Christ's baptism and celebrate this feast in holiness. Be cleansed entirely and continue to be cleansed. Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of men, for whom his every word and every revelation exist. He wants you to become a living force for all mankind, lights shining in the world. You are to be radiant lights as you stand beside Christ, the great light, bathed in the glory of him who is the light of heaven. You are to enjoy more and more the pure and dazzling light of the Trinity, as now you have received – though not in its fullness – a ray of its splendour, proceeding from the one God, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.²

Reflection Questions:

- Recall your own baptism. When did you begin to cooperate with the gift of baptismal grace?
- How is God calling you to be a light to the world, standing alongside Christ?

Confirmation

Take a moment and recall your own confirmation.

Consider these words from Pope Benedict XVI:

[St. Symeon the New Theologian] focused his reflection on the Holy Spirit's presence in the baptized and on the awareness they must have of this spiritual reality. "Christian life", he emphasized, "is intimate, personal communion with God, divine grace illumines the believer's heart and leads him to a mystical vision of the Lord".

Along these lines, Symeon the New Theologian insisted that true knowledge of God does not come from books but rather from spiritual experience, from spiritual life. Knowledge of God is born from a process of inner purification that begins with conversion of heart through the power of faith and love. It passes through profound

¹ St. Gregory Nazianzen, Office of Readings, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

repentance and sincere sorrow for one's sins to attain union with Christ, the source of joy and peace, suffused with the light of his presence within us. For Symeon this experience of divine grace did not constitute an exceptional gift for a few mystics but rather was the fruit of Baptism in the life of every seriously committed believer.

A point on which to reflect, dear brothers and sisters! This holy Eastern monk calls us all to pay attention to our spiritual life, to the hidden presence of God within us, to the sincerity of the conscience and to purification, to conversion of heart, so that the Holy Spirit may really become present in us and guide us.³

Reflection Question: Where do you find the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Eucharist:

Consider these excerpts from St. Augustine's sermon to the Neophytes:

What you see on God's altar, you've already observed during the night that has now ended. But you've heard nothing about just what it might be, or what it might mean, or what great thing it might be said to symbolize. For what you see is simply bread and a cup - this is the information your eyes report. But your faith demands far subtler insight: the bread is Christ's body, the cup is Christ's blood. ...When you were baptized, you were "leavened."

When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit, you were "baked."

Be what you see; receive what you are.

...This is the image chosen by Christ our Lord to show how, at his own table, the mystery of our unity and peace is solemnly consecrated. All who fail to keep the bond of peace after entering this mystery receive not a sacrament that benefits them, but an indictment that condemns them.

So let us give God our sincere and deepest gratitude, and, as far as human weakness will permit, let us turn to the Lord with pure hearts.

With all our strength, let us seek God's singular mercy, for then the Divine Goodness will surely hear our prayers.

God's power will drive the Evil One from our acts and thoughts; it will deepen our faith, govern our minds, grant us holy thoughts, and lead us, finally, to share the divine happiness through God's own son Jesus Christ. Amen!⁴

As you conclude your prayer, if you were not able to attend Easter Vigil in person, you may wish to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,

I believe that You

are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment

receive You sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, September 16, 2009, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090916.html.

⁴ St. Augustine, Sermon 227, "On the Nature of the Sacrament of the Eucharist," https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine_sermon_272_eucharist.htm

Optional Small group session to follow this day's reflections:

Pray the following prayer or one in your own words:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the Son of the living God, teach me to listen to what you tell me in the holy Scriptures, and to discover your face there." —Guigo II, the Carthusian (d.1297)

Allow each person to reflect silently upon their individual encounters with the Word today.

Read: Matthew 28:1-10

- Have one person read the complete passage twice, with a 1-2 minute pause between readings.
- Allow time for silent reflection.
- What stands out when you hear the text together? Is it something that stood out before, or is it something new?

Meditate

- Have someone else read the passage once more.
- Where do you meet God today in the Word? Does he speak, or communicate in another way?
 - Sit quietly with God and wait for his response.

Ponder

Allow time for each person to quietly reflect upon these words from Pope Francis⁵:

Galilee is *the place where [the disciples] were first called, where everything began!* To return there, to return to the place where they were originally called. Jesus had walked along the shores of the lake as the fishermen were casting their nets. He had called them, and they left everything and followed him (cf. *Mt* 4:18-22).

To return to Galilee means *to re-read* everything on the basis of the cross and its victory, fearlessly: "do not be afraid". To re-read everything – Jesus' preaching, his miracles, the new community, the excitement and the defections, even the betrayal – to re-read everything starting from the end, which is a new beginning, *from this supreme act of love*.

For each of us, too, there is a "Galilee" at the origin of our journey with Jesus. "To go to Galilee" means something beautiful, it means rediscovering our baptism as a living fountainhead, drawing new energy from the sources of our faith and our Christian experience. To return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light with which God's grace touched me at the start of the journey. From that flame I can light a fire for today and every day, and bring heat and light to my brothers and sisters. That flame ignites a humble joy, a joy which sorrow and distress cannot dismay, a good, gentle joy.

In the life of every Christian, after baptism there is also another "Galilee", *a more existential "Galilee"*: the experience of a *personal encounter with Jesus Christ* who called me to follow him and to share in his mission. In this sense, returning to Galilee means treasuring in my heart the living memory of that call, when Jesus passed my way, gazed at me with mercy and asked me to follow him. To return there means reviving the memory of that moment when his eyes met mine, the moment when he made me realize that he loved me.

⁵ Pope Francis, Homily, April 19, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140419_omelia-veglia-pasquale.html

Today, tonight, each of us can ask: *What is my Galilee?* I need to remind myself, to go back and remember. *Where is my Galilee?* Do I remember it? Have I forgotten it? Seek and you will find it! There the Lord is waiting for you. Have I gone off on roads and paths which made me forget it? Lord, help me: tell me what my Galilee is; for you know that I want to return there to encounter you and to let myself be embraced by your mercy. Do not be afraid, do not fear, return to Galilee!

The Gospel is very clear: we need to go back there, to see Jesus risen, and to become witnesses of his resurrection. This is not to go back in time; it is not a kind of nostalgia. It is returning to our first love, in order to *receive the fire* which Jesus has kindled in the world and to bring that fire to all people, to the very ends of the earth. Go back to Galilee, without fear!

Reflection questions:

What sentence in the Scripture, or in the passage from Pope Francis sticks out for you? Why do you think that is so?

Where is your “Galilee”, that place where you first heard the call of Jesus to follow him?

How have you revisited your “Galilee” this Lent and Holy Week? How has this new encounter with Jesus renewed your faith?

Discuss

Allow each person to share what they encountered in their prayers this Holy Week. They can respond to any question from their daily reflection or this session or share an insight or experience that rose out of their prayer.

As the discussion draws to a close, ask if there are any needs members would like the group to pray for.

Pray

Allow a time of silent prayer, allowing each person to offer their own silent prayers of praise thanksgiving, and petition to the Lord.

Allow additional time to sit in the Lord’s presence.

If possible and appropriate, allow each person to offer any prayers aloud.

Close with prayer as is your custom. Or, it could be: a spontaneous prayer, a parish prayer for renewal said together, an Our Father, Glory Be or prayer to the patron saint of the parish asking his/her intercession, etc. You may also wish to close with an Act of Spiritual Communion.

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus,

I believe that You

are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment

receive You sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.