

2004

2005



Small Faith Sharing Group Reflection Guide

Autumn Ordinary Time



Developed by
The Office For
Evangelization
& the Advisory
Committee on
Evangelization

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Introduction

*This Reflection Guide is prepared for small faith-sharing group members in Catholic parishes and communities. These pages combine Cycle A readings of the Sunday Lectionary with meditations, reflection questions and the Objectives from the Personal Mandate of **Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago** to create an evangelizing perspective to our faith.*

Autumn is an excellent time to reflect on the harvest and how God is bringing about a harvest of love and justice in and through us: personal conversion, sharing the Good News with others, and acting to transform society through just actions. During Autumn, we anticipate the time when we are called to share God's eternal banquet.

Each week we gather with other disciples of Christ. As we encounter Jesus in a new way, we grow to *believe* more deeply in Him. Our shared experience and belief empower us to *share* our faith with others. Together, we take our deepened belief into personal relationships with family, friends, the workplace, our parish, neighborhoods and nation to *transform* the world into God's Reign: a kinder, more loving and just place to live. Believe, share, transform: this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, to be a Catholic, and to evangelize.

As a member of a small faith-sharing group, you will gather weekly with others to grow in faith. Be open to the process of growth that comes from sharing. Be open to receiving the gift of holiness. Take responsibility to participate and encourage others to take part. The entire group benefits and grows together. As a small group member, please follow these guidelines:

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|------------------------|--|
| Prepare | Get ready for the meetings by reading the Scriptures and reflection material before the meeting. |
| Participate | Pray. Read the Scriptures when asked. Respond aloud to the reflection questions. However, you may choose to "pass" at any time without explanation. |
| Pray | Between meeting times, pray for the group leader, the other members of the group and for yourself. |
| Be Present | Commit to attend all meetings unless pressing circumstances prevent it. |
| Be Personal | Talk about your own experience and share your own thoughts about how God speaks to you through the Scripture. Listen to the stories of others in the group and refrain from giving advice. |
| Be Confidential | What is shared in the group stays in the group. Realize that some areas may be too sensitive for people to respond to the faith-sharing questions or share an insight. |
| Be Gentle | If differences of opinion arise, respect those differences. There are as many ways to experience God's presence as there are people. We are all growing and on the journey together. Make the effort to understand another's viewpoint by being tender and kind. (Ephesians 4:15). |

May this Season be a rich experience of God's love that leads you to share that love with others.

Cycle A The Gospel of Matthew

Insights on Evangelization

The Scripture readings for the 2004-2005 Liturgical Year are from Cycle A of the Sunday Lectionary. In Cycle A, Sunday liturgies draw their Gospel readings from Matthew. While each Gospel proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ, each of the four evangelists has a different perspective depending on the author's background, intention, audience, message and theme.

Author/Audience

Many scripture scholars believe that Matthew was of Jewish heritage and wrote to the Jewish community. The Gospel contains many allusions to people and events in the Jewish Scriptures found in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Throughout the text, Matthew shows Jesus giving new meaning to the beautiful traditions of Judaism. Scholars' estimate that the Gospel of Matthew was written about 70 AD. Matthew's Gospel is an unfolding story of the fulfilment of the promise God's salvation through the teaching of Jesus and the events in His life.

Message and Themes

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is the new Moses, who reveals who God is and what God's will is. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - his name given before He was born and reflected in His final promise to His disciples at the Gospel's end. (Matt. 28:20ff)

By reaching out in mercy to the unjust and the "enemy," Jesus revealed that God is close and compassionate to all humanity. God wants a direct, loving relationship with everyone. It is God Who will bring about salvation and justice in the world.

Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews and for the entire world. Jesus broke through the boundaries of Judaism to include the Gentiles in God's story of salvation. Mercy and compassion are the tools that Jesus uses to build the Kingdom of Heaven. Divine power works through Jesus to heal people. Jesus' words and works embody God's command to love. The many parables of Jesus point to the Kingdom of Heaven, Its presence and triumph in human history. The cross showed Jesus' death is a once-for-all sign of His love and fidelity to God; His resurrection began a new day and age to respond to God's grace by believing in Jesus.

How the Gospel of Matthew Relates to Evangelizing

All who profess to be Catholic Christians are called to be active disciples of Jesus.

Commit: Just as Matthew's Gospel is a narrative, an unfolding story of Jesus' commitment to do God's will, so are our lives a "gospel" and unfolding story of our commitment to follow Jesus and do God's will.

Believe: Jesus is the Messiah of every Christian, who is called to have an ever-deepening trust, and participate in a community of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Share: As disciples, we learn from Jesus, imitate Him and commit to the mission to "go and make disciples" of all humanity, believing that Jesus is with us always.

Transform: As disciples, we are charged to endure and do good works, not just use words. We will be judged on our love of God and neighbor by our works of love and service.

Source: Fr. Donald Senior, C.P. and PHEME PERKINS, *Gospel of Matthew, Reading Guide, The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible, Oxford Press, pages RG388-RG405*. Please review the article for more detail on this Gospel.

“All around us, people are starving for faith and love, meaning and hope. More urgently than ever, we are called to evangelize.” *Francis Cardinal George, Introduction, Spreading the Holy Fire*

The Eucharist, Jesus, is the food for humanity that fills the starving and hungry with good things – the very life of God. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, Pope John Paul II decreed The Year of the Eucharist to celebrate “*The Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church*”.

The Year of the Eucharist began in October 2004 at the International Eucharistic Congress in Guadalajara Mexico and will end with the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist this October. This Year encourages all Catholics to deepen their prayer life and develop a higher standard of Christian living. Two distinct ways include active celebration of the Eucharist at Mass and Eucharistic Adoration within the Church. To effectively evangelize, Catholics must give an authentic witness to Christ through their lives. The Eucharist is necessary for this to happen.

During the Year of the Eucharist, small faith-sharing communities have a unique opportunity to reflect upon the Word of God from the Sunday Lectionary.

At the 2004 Chicago Catechetical Conference, Fr. Donald Senior, C.P., President of Catholic Theological Union and a member of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, delivered a talk “Biblical Foundations of the Eucharist.” Fr. Senior presented three images found in the Gospels that are central to a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist: Communion, Meal and Sacrifice. *Communion* is that movement of belief in God that involves listening to others, appreciating diversity, with the end of achieving union with God. *Meal* is that movement of sharing in the life of God with others and inviting them to the table of the Eucharist. *Sacrifice* is that movement of self-emptying, giving of oneself out of love for others. As Eucharist, Jesus unites these movements.

Communion, Meal and Sacrifice are closely related to the goals of evangelizing: Believe, Share and Transform. Communion is built and builds upon belief through union with Christ. Meal presupposes a community who shares the Bread of Life with others and is always inviting and welcoming newcomers to God’s table. Sacrifice is based upon the intention, words and actions to bring about transformation of society and the world into God’s Reign.

By participating in the Year of the Eucharist, we should expect that the Holy Spirit will help us to grow deeper in our belief, instill in us a greater urgency to share our faith with others, and impel us to transform life into God’s Reign of love, justice and peace. Be prepared for this to happen.

This Liturgical Year’s series of Small Faith-Sharing Group reflection guides will offer materials through a progressive sequence through the Liturgical Calendar, outlined below.

Advent:	Preparing the table
Christmastide:	Preparing the meal; welcoming the Bread of Life
Winter Ordinary Time:	Inviting the guests
Lent:	Getting dressed for God’s feast
Eastertide:	Dining together with God
Summer Ordinary Time:	After-dinner talk: Building God’s community of love
Autumn Ordinary Time:	Preparing for God’s meal to come (harvest)

May the Year of the Eucharist renew our faith, hope and love to live and share the Good News.

Introduction to All Small Faith Sharing Sessions

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, set up two place settings with dishes, silverware, napkins and glasses. Put a small cornucopia or other fall harvest centerpiece on the table. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes celebrating God's harvest at the eternal banquet of heaven.

BECOME ACQUAINTED

Go around the group with each person sharing his or her hopes for the meeting.

GATHER TOGETHER IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Leader: As we gather together, we recall how God has come into our lives this past week and how God is present in our midst now.

After a moment of silence, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and the group:

*Come Holy Spirit,
Fill the hearts of all people with the fire of Your Love.
May all accept Your invitation to know and love Jesus as Lord and Savior.*

*Fill this Archdiocese with people who welcome
and invite others to share in the Catholic faith.
Fill our Cardinal, our bishops and priests, deacons and lay ministers
with wisdom and courage to live and
preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Fill all parish and agency staff with Your power to
evangelize those whom they serve.*

*Fill all consecrated men and women and all lay people with the grace
to become and make disciples of Jesus through
prayer, work, and daily living.
May the holy fire of Your love transform our society according to the Gospel.*

*Come Holy Spirit! With the Father and the Son,
You are worshiped and glorified forever and ever. Amen.*

EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those whose lives may need the hope of the Resurrection to attend God's banquet. Place the cards on "Jesus" dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God through Him.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Reflect on each question below in turn or use your own questions. Allow group members, if they wish, to answer that question before the group moves on to the next question.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Sirach 27:30-28:7

2nd Reading: Romans 14:7-9

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel begins with a question put to Jesus by Peter, "How often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus' response was a much higher number, 77 times. In the narrative, Jesus went on to teach a parable about the central role of forgiveness in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the story, mercy was given to a servant in debt, who failed to forgive a fellow servant. The parable ends with a stern warning of the consequences of not forgiving others.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: What is my demeanor when I approach God when I need forgiveness?

Share: What is my demeanor toward forgiving others who have wronged me?

Transform: What effects do my willingness to forgive others and be forgiven have on more loving relationships in my family, workplace, friendships, parish and community?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: During prayer, seek forgiveness from God for any sinful acts, thoughts or decisions you have made.

Share/Meal: Make a commitment to forgive someone who has betrayed or hurt you. Offer a prayer of blessing for him/her every day this week.

Transform/Sacrifice: On this fourth anniversary of 9/11/2001, do something transformative to reverse the unforgiveness of terrorism and bring about greater peace and justice in your community.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 1:20c-24, 27a
- Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In this account from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reveals another perspective on the Kingdom of Heaven; he tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The owner of the vineyard needs workers and hires laborers at dawn, nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock and five o'clock. At the end of the day, the foreman paid the usual daily wage to everyone. Those hired at dawn grumbled that their reward was no greater than those who worked for a very short time. The landowner justified his actions through his fairness and generosity. Jesus ended the parable with reversal, "the last will be first and the first will be last."

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* How do I feel toward God's generosity toward me for the many gifts I have received?
- Share:* How do I feel, and how do I respond, when others are rewarded out of generosity of others?
- Transform:* How does the generosity of God compare with the reward systems in my family, parish, workplace or community? How different would those be if God's generosity was the norm?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Each day this week, thank God for something different that is a result of His generosity toward you.
- Share/Meal:** Be sincerely and abundantly generous in kind words and deeds to a member of your family this week.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Pick a stranger, a newcomer or someone often neglected in your parish, neighborhood or workplace this week and extend generous hospitality to him or her.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 2:1-11
- Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus challenged the Jewish religious authorities with a parable about a father and two sons. After telling his sons to work in the vineyard, the first son refused but later changed his mind and did go to work. The second son promised to work but failed to show up. When asked which did the father’s will, the chief priests and elders admitted the son who took action. Jesus then applied the parable to them, who had refused to listen to John the Baptizer while the bottom of society, tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* When do I resist listening and following the Holy Spirit’s guidance? When do I accept them? What differences have I noticed?
- Share:* How do I feel about sharing my faith with “undesirable” people? Who falls into that category?
- Transform:* How would our society be a different place if we took action to implement today’s Gospel?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Each day, set aside 10 minutes to listen to God and ask what vineyard God wants you to work in that day.
- Share/Meal:** Ask God to lead you to an “undesirable” person this week. Go out to encounter that person with a blessing of faith, kind words and actions.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Volunteer a couple of hours to work at a soup kitchen, food pantry, shelter or PADS this week.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

2nd Reading: Phillipians 4:6-9

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43 (Note: *The Year of the Eucharist ends this October.*)

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Similar to the last two weeks in passages from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells another parable of a vineyard to the religious authorities of Israel. Note the symbolism; the vineyard symbolized the Kingdom of Heaven. In the story, the landowner built a vineyard and leased it to tenants. When harvest time came, the tenants refused to act justly to give the produce to its rightful owner. They even killed the landowner's servants and son in order to unlawfully acquire the vineyard. Jesus challenged the chief priests and elders about a coming reversal, the Kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to those who are just.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: In what ways does this Gospel challenge me to give my personal stewardship to God? How does that make me feel?

Share: What common themes of stewardship from the Gospel are present in our parish?

Transform: What common themes of stewardship from the Gospel are present or missing in our society? How would things be different if all people 'produced their fruit?'

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: Talk with God about what fruits you are not sharing with God or others. Do what God says about it.

Share/Meal: Invite someone who is lonely, bereaved, a stranger or not popular over to dinner and share the fruit of your friendship.

Transform/Sacrifice: Choose an area of "squatter's rights" that provoke a racial or ethnic prejudice. Do something to bring about greater contact and understanding.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 4:12-14, 19-20
- Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew presents a paradox. Jesus addressed the religious authorities of his time in a parable likening the Kingdom of Heaven to a king's banquet given for his son's wedding. All those invited to the banquet were guests, including those known and unknown, the good and bad alike. At the banquet, a man not properly dressed was expelled from the party and even bound hand-and-foot. Jesus concluded the parable with a sobering observation, "Many are invited, but few are chosen."

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* How do I respond to God's invitation to dine with Him in the Eucharist?
- Share:* How does dinner time at my home reflect the eternal banquet our family hopes to share with God in heaven?
- Transform:* Compare the Gospel passage to the issues of world hunger or nation-to-nation relationships. Share your insights with your group.

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** In prayer, listen for Jesus knocking on the door of your heart; open the door and dine with God.
- Share/Meal:** Set an extra plate at the table and invite God to "sit" there. Then, talk with your family or friends about how God was there during your day.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Contribute prayer, time, talent or treasure to a charitable organization that feeds the hungry.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b
- Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel passage, the Pharisees and the Herodians attempted to trick Jesus in His speech and discredit Him in public. They asked a trick question - whether it was lawful for a Jew to pay tax to Caesar or not. Jesus saw through the deception, asked for a coin and asked whose image was on it. When they replied, "Caesar's", Jesus uttered a statement often quoted, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* Of who I am and what I have, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?
- Share:* In my relationships with those who do not share my Catholic faith, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?
- Transform:* In my relationships with those who oppose Right to Life, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Review your current stewardship of your gifts and talents and choose one to actively honor and give glory to God.
- Share/Meal:** Share the gift or talent that you chose above and put it to work this week.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Participate in a prayer vigil, donate time or treasure at a women's shelter, explore or advocate adoption for unwanted children.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Exodus 22:20-26

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Like last week, today's Gospel presents another scene where Jesus was tested by the Jewish religious leaders of His day. A scholar of the Law asked Jesus which of the commandments was the greatest. Jesus responded that the love of God was the greatest and first of commandments and the second was love of neighbor as oneself. All of the commandments and the prophets were based on these two commandments. (Remember, one of Matthew's themes was to depict Jesus as the "new Moses." Moses received 10 Commandments which formed the basis of Jewish Law. Jesus reinterpreted and fulfilled the Law with greater clarity and wisdom.)

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* What exactly does keeping the Greatest Commandment involve in living out my Catholic faith?
- Share:* How does the Second Commandment direct and influence the manner in which I share my faith?
- Transform:* Pick some difficult situation in the world today. How would that issue be resolved if the Greatest and Second Commandments were followed?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Spend time reflecting on the Two Commandments this week. Ask the Holy Spirit for illumination when, where and how you may apply them in a more significant way.
- Share/Meal:** Make a conscious choice and deliberately do something that you don't normally do to follow the Second Commandment this week.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Pick some difficult situation in the world today. Follow the Greatest and Second Commandment to do some small thing to bring about reconciliation with God and humanity.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13
- Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In the passage from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus alerted His disciples, and the crowds, to the extreme disparity between the teaching and the actions of Israel’s religious leaders. Jesus compared the showy, external signs of piety with internal attitudes of self-seeking rather than devotion to serving others. Then, Jesus taught His disciples attitudes and dispositions proper to the Reign of God: dependence upon God for teaching, direction and allegiance, living as a community of equals, and serving each other with humility.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* How does my service to others reflect what I believe about God?
- Share:* How have I grown in my attitude and ability to joyfully serve others?
- Transform:* In what ways would applying today’s Gospel lessons transform society?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** As you pray during the week, ask the Holy Spirit for a deeper personal awareness of Jesus as Teacher, God as Father and Jesus as Master.
- Share/Meal:** This Sunday, visit and worship at an ethnic Catholic parish different from your own.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Do some charitable act anonymously this week.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The Gospels in November wrap up the liturgical year and point to the goal of our faith: eternal life with God in heaven. In today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about being prepared to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The story involved ten bridesmaids: five wise and five foolish, who wait to meet the bridegroom. The wise anticipated taking precautions to stay ready to meet the bridegroom should he be delayed, the foolish did not. As it turned out, the bridegroom was delayed and the wise women had oil for their lamps; the foolish ones did not. While the foolish went to buy oil for their lamps, the bridegroom came, took those who were ready and then locked the door to the feast. Jesus warned His listeners to stay awake, since they knew neither the day nor hour.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* Am I prepared to meet God in eternity? How do I feel thinking about this reality?
- Share:* How do I share my readiness to meet God with my family and friends?
- Transform:* How does Jesus appear suddenly in the events happening our world to enter God’s eternal feast?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion: Spend time in prayer asking God to make you ready to be with Him forever.
- Share/Meal: Prepare a lunch and share it with a homeless person.
- Transform/Sacrifice: Identify one “folly” of violence in the world and keep vigil for its transformation by God’s grace and power.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The reading from today's Gospel tells Jesus' parable of the talents taught to His disciples. In the story, a man on a journey entrusted possessions to his servants in various amounts. Two servants invested the talents and made more; the third servant buried the talent. When the master returned, he demanded an accounting. The two who invested and made more, were praised and given greater responsibilities. The one who buried the talent had it taken from him and he was cast out. Jesus' somber warning was that those who use what they have will grow; those who don't share will lose what they have.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: What talents do I freely give and share? What talents am I holding back?

Share: How I regard my faith: as a "talent" to be shared or a gift to be buried? What are the consequences of either action?

Transform: How would society be different if talents were invested and shared rather than buried and hidden?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: In prayer, thank God for the talents you have been given and used. Ask God to remove any blocks from sharing the talents you have hidden.

Share/Meal: Take a hidden talent and share it for the benefit of praising God and serving others this week.

Transform/Sacrifice: Have a talent show. Encourage those in your family, parish, workplace and neighborhood by complimenting them on their talents and urging them to continue building up positive relationships.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17
- 2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28
- Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The final Gospel of Cycle A of the 2004-2005 Liturgical Year is about the end of time. Jesus taught his disciples about His role to judge all humanity. At the end, Jesus will reward those who acted justly in loving God and serving others and condemn those who ignored God and others. Jesus gave the criteria of justice: serving Him in the least of humanity by giving food, drink, friendship, clothing, care and companionship to those without these things. They are to inherit what God had planned since the beginning of creation: communion with God in eternal life. Those who did the opposite would be punished - separated from God forever.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* *What does today's Gospel speak to me about the end of time?*

- Share:* *In light of today's Gospel, how significant is it to share my faith with others?*

- Transform:* *Of the many challenges in the world, which distracts me the most from serving others as this Gospel passage suggests?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Imagine the end of your life and your final encounter with Jesus before His Throne. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you.

- Share/Meal:** Celebrate a Thanksgiving meal with someone who has no home, money or friends. Hold the image of seeing these people with you at God's eternal banquet.

- Transform/Sacrifice:** Slowly and deliberately pray the Our Father often for our world. Give special reflection and intention to the phrase "Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

Afterword

Renewal of Baptismal Vows/ Profession of Faith

I reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children.

I reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin.

I reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead and is now seated with the Father.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Comments are Welcome

Thank you for participating in these small faith-sharing group sessions, reflecting on Scripture in the light of evangelization. By virtue of baptism, everyone is called to evangelize. If you are interested in working in evangelization in a greater way, ask your pastor about joining a Parish Evangelization Team or participating in an outreach ministry at your parish.

The Office for Evangelization would appreciate your comments, experiences, thoughts and ideas on what you or your group has learned through the small-faith sharing process. You may write, call, fax or e-mail comments to:

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‡ For further reading, please confer:

Apostolic Letter, *In Novo Millenio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II, January 6, 2001

Angelus, Pope John Paul II, June 13, 2004

Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II, April 17, 2004

Fr. Donald Senior, C.P., "Biblical Foundations of the Eucharist", Chicago Catechetical Conference, Rosemont, IL, September 25, 2004

About the Author

Dave Pipitone is an active Roman Catholic who is husband to Cheryl, father to Emily, parishioner of St. Marcelline's parish in Schaumburg, IL. He has participated in and led small-faith sharing groups, authored faith-sharing materials for the Archdiocese of Chicago, wrote the reflection questions for *Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago* and has contributed to *Disciples in Prayer* (Oregon Catholic Press.) Dave serves as a member of the Advisory Committee for the Office for Evangelization of the Archdiocese. He is a 2003 graduate of the Chicago Catholic Scripture School offered through the Office of Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

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Introduction

This Reflection Guide is prepared for small faith-sharing group members in Catholic parishes and communities. These pages combine Cycle A readings of the Sunday Lectionary with meditations, reflection questions and the Objectives from the Personal Mandate of Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago to create an evangelizing perspective to our faith.

Autumn is an excellent time to reflect on the harvest and how God is bringing about a harvest of love and justice in and through us: personal conversion, sharing the Good News with others, and acting to transform society through just actions. During Autumn, we anticipate the time when we are called to share God's eternal banquet.

Each week we gather with other disciples of Christ. As we encounter Jesus in a new way, we grow to *believe* more deeply in Him. Our shared experience and belief empower us to *share* our faith with others. Together, we take our deepened belief into personal relationships with family, friends, the workplace, our parish, neighborhoods and nation to *transform* the world into God's Reign: a kinder, more loving and just place to live. Believe, share, transform: this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, to be a Catholic, and to evangelize.

As a member of a small faith-sharing group, you will gather weekly with others to grow in faith. Be open to the process of growth that comes from sharing. Be open to receiving the gift of holiness. Take responsibility to participate and encourage others to take part. The entire group benefits and grows together. As a small group member, please follow these guidelines:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Prepare | Get ready for the meetings by reading the Scriptures and reflection material before the meeting. |
| Participate | Pray. Read the Scriptures when asked. Respond aloud to the reflection questions. However, you may choose to "pass" at any time without explanation. |
| Pray | Between meeting times, pray for the group leader, the other members of the group and for yourself. |
| Be Present | Commit to attend all meetings unless pressing circumstances prevent it. |
| Be Personal | Talk about your own experience and share your own thoughts about how God speaks to you through the Scripture. Listen to the stories of others in the group and refrain from giving advice. |
| Be Confidential | What is shared in the group stays in the group. Realize that some areas may be too sensitive for people to respond to the faith-sharing questions or share an insight. |
| Be Gentle | If differences of opinion arise, respect those differences. There are as many ways to experience God's presence as there are people. We are all growing and on the journey together. Make the effort to understand another's viewpoint by being tender and kind. (Ephesians 4:15). |

May this Season be a rich experience of God's love that leads you to share that love with others.

Cycle A

The Gospel of Matthew

Insights on Evangelization

The Scripture readings for the 2004-2005 Liturgical Year are from Cycle A of the Sunday Lectionary. In Cycle A, Sunday liturgies draw their Gospel readings from Matthew. While each Gospel proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ, each of the four evangelists has a different perspective depending on the author's background, intention, audience, message and theme.

Author/Audience

Many scripture scholars believe that Matthew was of Jewish heritage and wrote to the Jewish community. The Gospel contains many allusions to people and events in the Jewish Scriptures found in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Throughout the text, Matthew shows Jesus giving new meaning to the beautiful traditions of Judaism. Scholars' estimate that the Gospel of Matthew was written about 70 AD. Matthew's Gospel is an unfolding story of the fulfillment of the promise of God's salvation through the teaching of Jesus and the events in His life.

Message and Themes

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is the new Moses, who reveals who God is and what God's will is. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - his name given before He was born and reflected in His final promise to His disciples at the Gospel's end. (Matt. 28:20ff)

By reaching out in mercy to the unjust and the "enemy," Jesus revealed that God is close and compassionate to all humanity. God wants a direct, loving relationship with everyone. It is God Who will bring about salvation and justice in the world.

Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews and of the entire world. Jesus broke through the boundaries of Judaism to include the Gentiles in God's story of salvation. Mercy and compassion are the tools that Jesus uses to build the Kingdom of Heaven. Divine power works through Jesus to heal people. Jesus' words and works embody God's command to love. The many parables of Jesus point to the Kingdom of Heaven, Its presence and triumph in human history. The cross showed Jesus' death is a once-for-all sign of His love and fidelity to God; His resurrection began a new day and age to respond to God's grace by believing in Jesus.

How the Gospel of Matthew Relates to Evangelizing

All who profess to be Catholic Christians are called to be active disciples of Jesus.

Commit: Just as Matthew's Gospel is a narrative, an unfolding story of Jesus' commitment to do God's will, so are our lives a "gospel" and unfolding story of our commitment to follow Jesus and do God's will.

Believe: Jesus is the Messiah of every Christian, who is called to have an ever-deepening trust, and participate in a community of love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Share: As disciples, we learn from Jesus, imitate Him and commit to the mission to "go and make disciples" of all humanity, believing that Jesus is with us always.

Transform: As disciples, we are charged to endure and do good works, not just use words. We will be judged on our love of God and neighbor by our works of love and service.

Source: Fr. Donald Senior, C.P. and PHEME PERKINS, *Gospel of Matthew, Reading Guide, The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible, Oxford Press, pages RG388-RG405*. Please review the article for more detail on this Gospel.

“All around us, people are starving for faith and love, meaning and hope. More urgently than ever, we are called to evangelize.” *Francis Cardinal George, Introduction, Spreading the Holy Fire*

The Eucharist, Jesus, is the food for humanity that fills the starving and hungry with good things – the very life of God. On the Feast of Corpus Christi, Pope John Paul II decreed The Year of the Eucharist to celebrate “*The Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church*”.

The Year of the Eucharist began in October 2004 at the International Eucharistic Congress in Guadalajara Mexico and will end with the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist this October. This Year encourages all Catholics to deepen their prayer life and develop a higher standard of Christian living. Two distinct ways include active celebration of the Eucharist at Mass and Eucharistic Adoration within the Church. To effectively evangelize, Catholics must give an authentic witness to Christ through their lives. The Eucharist is necessary for this to happen.

During the Year of the Eucharist, small faith-sharing communities have a unique opportunity to reflect upon the Word of God from the Sunday Lectionary.

At the 2004 Chicago Catechetical Conference, Fr. Donald Senior, C.P., President of Catholic Theological Union and a member of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, delivered a talk “Biblical Foundations of the Eucharist.” Fr. Senior presented three images found in the Gospels that are central to a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist: Communion, Meal and Sacrifice. *Communion* is that movement of belief in God that involves listening to others, appreciating diversity, with the end of achieving union with God. *Meal* is that movement of sharing in the life of God with others and inviting them to the table of the Eucharist. *Sacrifice* is that movement of self-emptying, giving of oneself out of love for others. As Eucharist, Jesus unites these movements.

Communion, Meal and Sacrifice are closely related to the goals of evangelizing: Believe, Share and Transform. Communion is built and builds upon belief through union with Christ. Meal presupposes a community who shares the Bread of Life with others and is always inviting and welcoming newcomers to God’s table. Sacrifice is based upon the intention, words and actions to bring about transformation of society and the world into God’s Reign.

By participating in the Year of the Eucharist, we should expect that the Holy Spirit will help us to grow deeper in our belief, instill in us a greater urgency to share our faith with others, and impel us to transform life into God’s Reign of love, justice and peace. Be prepared for this to happen.

This Liturgical Year’s series of Small Faith-Sharing Group reflection guides will offer materials through a progressive sequence through the Liturgical Calendar, outlined below.

Advent:	Preparing the table
Christmastide:	Preparing the meal; welcoming the Bread of Life
Winter Ordinary Time:	Inviting the guests
Lent:	Getting dressed for God’s feast
Easteride:	Dining together with God
Summer Ordinary Time:	After-dinner talk: Building God’s community of love
Autumn Ordinary Time:	Preparing for God’s meal to come (harvest)

May the Year of the Eucharist renew our faith, hope and love to live and share the Good News.

Introduction to All Small Faith Sharing Sessions

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, set up two place settings with dishes, silverware, napkins and glasses. Put a small cornucopia or other fall harvest centerpiece on the table. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes celebrating God's harvest at the eternal banquet of heaven.

BECOME ACQUAINTED

Go around the group with each person sharing his or her hopes for the meeting.

GATHER TOGETHER IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Leader: As we gather together, we recall how God has come into our lives this past week and how God is present in our midst now.

After a moment of silence, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and the group:

*Come Holy Spirit,
Fill the hearts of all people with the fire of Your Love.
May all accept Your invitation to know and love Jesus as Lord and Savior.*

*Fill this Archdiocese with people who welcome
and invite others to share in the Catholic faith.
Fill our Cardinal, our bishops and priests, deacons and lay ministers
with wisdom and courage to live and
preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
Fill all parish and agency staff with Your power to
evangelize those whom they serve.*

*Fill all consecrated men and women and all lay people with the grace
to become and make disciples of Jesus through
prayer, work, and daily living.
May the holy fire of Your love transform our society according to the Gospel.*

*Come Holy Spirit! With the Father and the Son,
You are worshiped and glorified forever and ever. Amen.*

EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those whose lives may need the hope of the Resurrection to attend God's banquet. Place the cards on "Jesus" dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God through Him.

REFLECT AND SHARE

Reflect on each question below in turn or use your own questions. Allow group members, if they wish, to answer that question before the group moves on to the next question.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Sirach 27:30-28:7
2nd Reading: Romans 14:7-9
Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel begins with a question put to Jesus by Peter, "How often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus' response was a much higher number, 77 times. In the narrative, Jesus went on to teach a parable about the central role of forgiveness in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the story, mercy was given to a servant in debt, who failed to forgive a fellow servant. The parable ends with a stern warning of the consequences of not forgiving others.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe: What is my demeanor when I approach God when I need forgiveness?*
- Share: What is my demeanor toward forgiving others who have wronged me?*
- Transform: What effects do my willingness to forgive others and be forgiven have on more loving relationships in my family, workplace, friendships, parish and community?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** During prayer, seek forgiveness from God for any sinful acts, thoughts or decisions you have made.
- Share/Meal:** Make a commitment to forgive someone who has betrayed or hurt you. Offer a prayer of blessing for him/her every day this week.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** On this fourth anniversary of 9/11/2001, do something transformative to reverse the unforgiveness of terrorism and bring about greater peace and justice in your community.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 1:20c-24, 27a
- Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In this account from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus reveals another perspective on the Kingdom of Heaven; he tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The owner of the vineyard needs workers and hires laborers at dawn, nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock and five o'clock. At the end of the day, the foreman paid the usual daily wage to everyone. Those hired at dawn grumbled that their reward was no greater than those who worked for a very short time. The landowner justified his actions through his fairness and generosity. Jesus ended the parable with reversal, "the last will be first and the first will be last."

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* How do I feel toward God's generosity toward me for the many gifts I have received?

- Share:* How do I feel, and how do I respond, when others are rewarded out of generosity of others?

- Transform:* How does the generosity of God compare with the reward systems in my family, parish, workplace or community? How different would those be if God's generosity was the norm?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Each day this week, thank God for something different that is a result of His generosity toward you.

- Share/Meal:** Be sincerely and abundantly generous in kind words and deeds to a member of your family this week.

- Transform/Sacrifice:** Pick a stranger, a newcomer or someone often neglected in your parish, neighborhood or workplace this week and extend generous hospitality to him or her.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 2:1-11
- Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus challenged the Jewish religious authorities with a parable about a father and two sons. After telling his sons to work in the vineyard, the first son refused but later changed his mind and did go to work. The second son promised to work but failed to show up. When asked which did the father's will, the chief priests and elders admitted the son who took action. Jesus then applied the parable to them, who had refused to listen to John the Baptizer while the bottom of society, tax collectors and prostitutes did.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* When do I resist listening and following the Holy Spirit's guidance? When do I accept them? What differences have I noticed?
- Share:* How do I feel about sharing my faith with "undesirable" people? Who falls into that category?
- Transform:* How would our society be a different place if we took action to implement today's Gospel?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Each day, set aside 10 minutes to listen to God and ask what vineyard God wants you to work in that day.
- Share/Meal:** Ask God to lead you to an "undesirable" person this week. Go out to encounter that person with a blessing of faith, kind words and actions.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Volunteer a couple of hours to work at a soup kitchen, food pantry, shelter or PADS this week.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

2nd Reading: Phillipians 4:6-9

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43 (Note: The Year of the Eucharist ends this October.)

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Similar to the last two weeks in passages from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells another parable of a vineyard to the religious authorities of Israel. Note the symbolism; the vineyard symbolized the Kingdom of Heaven. In the story, the landowner built a vineyard and leased it to tenants. When harvest time came, the tenants refused to act justly to give the produce to its rightful owner. They even killed the landowner’s servants and son in order to unlawfully acquire the vineyard. Jesus challenged the chief priests and elders about a coming reversal, the Kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to those who are just.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: In what ways does this Gospel challenge me to give my personal stewardship to God? How does that make me feel?

Share: What common themes of stewardship from the Gospel are present in our parish?

Transform: What common themes of stewardship from the Gospel are present or missing in our society? How would things be different if all people ‘produced their fruit?’

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: Talk with God about what fruits you are not sharing with God or others. Do what God says about it.

Share/Meal: Invite someone who is lonely, bereaved, a stranger or not popular over to dinner and share the fruit of your friendship.

Transform/Sacrifice: Choose an area of “squatter’s rights” that provoke a racial or ethnic prejudice. Do something to bring about greater contact and understanding.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a
- 2nd Reading: Phillipians 4:12-14, 19-20
- Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Today’s passage from the Gospel of Matthew presents a paradox. Jesus addressed the religious authorities of his time in a parable likening the Kingdom of Heaven to a king’s banquet given for his son’s wedding. All those invited to the banquet were guests, including those known and unknown, the good and bad alike. At the banquet, a man not properly dressed was expelled from the party and even bound hand-and-foot. Jesus concluded the parable with a sobering observation, “Many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* How do I respond to God’s invitation to dine with Him in the Eucharist?
- Share:* How does dinner time at my home reflect the eternal banquet our family hopes to share with God in heaven?
- Transform:* Compare the Gospel passage to the issues of world hunger or nation-to-nation relationships. Share your insights with your group.

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** In prayer, listen for Jesus knocking on the door of your heart; open the door and dine with God.
- Share/Meal:** Set an extra plate at the table and invite God to “sit” there. Then, talk with your family or friends about how God was there during your day.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Contribute prayer, time, talent or treasure to a charitable organization that feeds the hungry.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b
- Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In today's Gospel passage, the Pharisees and the Herodians attempted to trick Jesus in His speech and discredit Him in public. They asked a trick question - whether it was lawful for a Jew to pay tax to Caesar or not. Jesus saw through the deception, asked for a coin and asked whose image was on it. When they replied, "Caesar's", Jesus uttered a statement often quoted, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* *Of who I am and what I have, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?*

- Share:* *In my relationships with those who do not share my Catholic faith, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?*

- Transform:* *In my relationships with those who oppose Right to Life, what belongs to God that I must repay to God?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Review your current stewardship of your gifts and talents and choose one to actively honor and give glory to God.

- Share/Meal:** Share the gift or talent that you chose above and put it to work this week.

- Transform/Sacrifice:** Participate in a prayer vigil, donate time or treasure at a women's shelter, explore or advocate adoption for unwanted children.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Exodus 22:20-26
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10
- Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

Like last week, today's Gospel presents another scene where Jesus was tested by the Jewish religious leaders of His day. A scholar of the Law asked Jesus which of the commandments was the greatest. Jesus responded that the love of God was the greatest and first of commandments and the second was love of neighbor as oneself. All of the commandments and the prophets were based on these two commandments. (Remember, one of Matthew's themes was to depict Jesus as the "new Moses." Moses received 10 Commandments which formed the basis of Jewish Law. Jesus reinterpreted and fulfilled the Law with greater clarity and wisdom.)

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* What exactly does keeping the Greatest Commandment involve in living out my Catholic faith?
- Share:* How does the Second Commandment direct and influence the manner in which I share my faith?
- Transform:* Pick some difficult situation in the world today. How would that issue be resolved if the Greatest and Second Commandments were followed?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Spend time reflecting on the Two Commandments this week. Ask the Holy Spirit for illumination when, where and how you may apply them in a more significant way.
- Share/Meal:** Make a conscious choice and deliberately do something that you don't normally do to follow the Second Commandment this week.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Pick some difficult situation in the world today. Follow the Greatest and Second Commandment to do some small thing to bring about reconciliation with God and humanity.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13

Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

In the passage from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus alerted His disciples, and the crowds, to the extreme disparity between the teaching and the actions of Israel's religious leaders. Jesus compared the showy, external signs of piety with internal attitudes of self-seeking rather than devotion to serving others. Then, Jesus taught His disciples attitudes and dispositions proper to the Reign of God: dependence upon God for teaching, direction and allegiance, living as a community of equals, and serving each other with humility.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: How does my service to others reflect what I believe about God?

Share: How have I grown in my attitude and ability to joyfully serve others?

Transform: In what ways would applying today's Gospel lessons transform society?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: As you pray during the week, ask the Holy Spirit for a deeper personal awareness of Jesus as Teacher, God as Father and Jesus as Master.

Share/Meal: This Sunday, visit and worship at an ethnic Catholic parish different from your own.

Transform/Sacrifice: Do some charitable act anonymously this week.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16
- 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The Gospels in November wrap up the liturgical year and point to the goal of our faith: eternal life with God in heaven. In today’s reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about being prepared to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The story involved ten bridesmaids: five wise and five foolish, who wait to meet the bridegroom. The wise anticipated taking precautions to stay ready to meet the bridegroom should he be delayed, the foolish did not. As it turned out, the bridegroom was delayed and the wise women had oil for their lamps; the foolish ones did not. While the foolish went to buy oil for their lamps, the bridegroom came, took those who were ready and then locked the door to the feast. Jesus warned His listeners to stay awake, since they knew neither the day nor hour.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* *Am I prepared to meet God in eternity? How do I feel thinking about this reality?*
- Share:* *How do I share my readiness to meet God with my family and friends?*
- Transform:* *How does Jesus appear suddenly in the events happening in our world that speak to God’s eternal feast?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Spend time in prayer asking God to make you ready to be with Him forever.
- Share/Meal:** Prepare a lunch and share it with a homeless person.
- Transform/Sacrifice:** Identify one “folly” of violence in the world and keep vigil for its transformation by God’s grace and power.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

1st Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The reading from today's Gospel tells Jesus' parable of the talents taught to His disciples. In the story, a man on a journey entrusted possessions to his servants in various amounts. Two servants invested the talents and made more; the third servant buried the talent. When the master returned, he demanded an accounting. The two who invested and made more, were praised and given greater responsibilities. The one who buried the talent had it taken from him and he was cast out. Jesus' somber warning was that those who use what they have will grow; those who don't share will lose what they have.

Reflection Questions:

Believe: What talents do I freely give and share? What talents am I holding back?

Share: How I regard my faith: as a "talent" to be shared or a gift to be buried? What are the consequences of either action?

Transform: How would society be different if talents were invested and shared rather than buried and hidden?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: In prayer, thank God for the talents you have been given and used. Ask God to remove any blocks from sharing the talents you have hidden.

Share/Meal: Take a hidden talent and share it for the benefit of praising God and serving others this week.

Transform/Sacrifice: Have a talent show. Encourage those in your family, parish, workplace and neighborhood by complimenting them on their talents and urging them to continue building up positive relationships.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Sunday Scriptures out loud together. Afterward, mention which Scripture passage touched you and why. What does the passage mean to you in your own life at this stage of your personal spiritual journey?

- 1st Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17
- 2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28
- Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Reflection on the Gospel Reading

The final Gospel of Cycle A of the 2004-2005 Liturgical Year is about the end of time. Jesus taught his disciples about His role to judge all humanity. At the end, Jesus will reward those who acted justly in loving God and serving others and condemn those who ignored God and others. Jesus gave the criteria of justice: serving Him in the least of humanity by giving food, drink, friendship, clothing, care and companionship to those without these things. They are to inherit what God had planned since the beginning of creation: communion with God in eternal life. Those who did the opposite would be punished - separated from God forever.

Reflection Questions:

- Believe:* *What does today's Gospel speak to me about the end of time?*

- Share:* *In light of today's Gospel, how significant is it to share my faith with others?*

- Transform:* *Of the many challenges in the world, which distracts me the most from serving others as this Gospel passage suggests?*

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

Pray together for any petitions and any needs that you might have. Stand in a circle together and say the Our Father. Pray daily this week for the person on your right.

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

Reflect on your mission to grow deeper in your relationship with God. Be welcoming, offer hospitality and work for transformation in your daily life.

This coming week:

- Believe/Communion:** Imagine the end of your life and your final encounter with Jesus before His Throne. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you.

- Share/Meal:** Celebrate a Thanksgiving meal with someone who has no home, money or friends. Hold the image of seeing these people with you at God's eternal banquet.

- Transform/Sacrifice:** Slowly and deliberately pray the Our Father often for our world. Give special reflection and intention to the phrase "Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

Afterword

Renewal of Baptismal Vows/ Profession of Faith

I reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children.

I reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin.

I reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead and is now seated with the Father.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting.

Comments are Welcome

Thank you for participating in these small faith-sharing group sessions, reflecting on Scripture in the light of evangelization. By virtue of baptism, everyone is called to evangelize. If you are interested in working in evangelization in a greater way, ask your pastor about joining a Parish Evangelization Team or participating in an outreach ministry at your parish.

The Office for Evangelization would appreciate your comments, experiences, thoughts and ideas on what you or your group has learned through the small-faith sharing process. You may write, call, fax or e-mail comments to:

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‡ For further reading, please confer:

Apostolic Letter, *In Novo Millenio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II, January 6, 2001

Angelus, Pope John Paul II, June 13, 2004

Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II, April 17, 2004

Fr. Donald Senior, C.P., "Biblical Foundations of the Eucharist", Chicago Catechetical Conference, Rosemont, IL, September 25, 2004

About the Author

Dave Pipitone is an active Roman Catholic who is husband to Cheryl, father to Emily, parishioner of St. Marcelline's parish in Schaumburg, IL. He has participated in and led small-faith sharing groups, authored faith-sharing materials for the Archdiocese of Chicago, wrote the reflection questions for *Spreading the Holy Fire: A Plan for Catholics Evangelizing in the Archdiocese of Chicago* and has contributed to *Disciples in Prayer* (Oregon Catholic Press.) Dave serves as a member of the Advisory Committee for the Office for Evangelization of the Archdiocese. He is a 2003 graduate of the Chicago Catholic Scripture School offered through the Office of Catechesis of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

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