

Lent 2005



Small Faith Sharing Group
Reflection Guide
Cycle A



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.*

This Season of Lent is a time of repentance - changing our lives in the light of the Gospel. Lent prepares us for Holy Week and Easter - when the Church recalls the saving action of God through Jesus to share in eternal life with God. At Easter, we celebrate sharing the banquet with God. During Lent, we get dressed for that meal by taking off sin and putting on garments of righteousness. In a sense, we are getting ready to dine more fully at God's table.

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, better, more loving place. 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.

October 2004 - 2005

The Year of the Eucharist

Insights on Evangelization[†]

“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 in October, 2005. 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 share 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.

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

BECOME ACQUAINTED

Go around the table or circle with each person sharing his or her name. Mention one thing you hope to receive from meeting with your small group.

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 who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

2nd Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

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?

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.

First Reading

The Genesis reading tells the story of Adam & Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden. Through Adam and Eve, humanity is presented with a choice – to believe in and rely totally on God, or to choose to believe in themselves and their own sufficiency. Adam and Eve chose their own way and the consequences were disastrous.

Reflection Question: How or when am I tempted to believe in someone or something else other than God?

Second Reading

The reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans contrasts human sin and God's gift of redemption given through the death of Jesus. Jesus' obedience to God was a gift, which brought salvation to humanity and forgiveness of sin. Paul, a self-proclaimed sinner and persecutor of Christians, experienced God's forgiveness, was changed and converted. He chose to dedicate his life to sharing the Good News with others.

Reflection Question: How do I share my conviction of God's presence working in my life with others?

Gospel

The Gospel reading from St. Matthew depicts the testing of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was tempted to misuse creation, power and His relationship with God for His own ends. Jesus rejected all three temptations, trusting in God's presence and action to bring about salvation in human history. Jesus chose to seek, know and obey God's Will throughout His life.

Reflection Question: How do I seek, know and obey with God's Will to transform my family, friendships, workplace, parish, neighborhood, nation or world?

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: Make an examination of conscience to see what behaviors need to be changed. Make the appropriate changes that you find.

Share/Meal: Seek out someone who has become inactive in their faith and ask them to share their story with you. Listen and accept their story.

Transform/Sacrifice: Do something to help the homeless this week.

February 20 The Second Sunday of Lent

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

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,
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EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8b-10

Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

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?

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.

First Reading

The Genesis reading tells the story of God's call to Abram to leave his place of origin and to travel to a foreign land. God made great promises: to make of Abram "a great nation," to bless Abram, to make Abram's name great, to make Abram a blessing to others, even to the entire world. Abram "went as the Lord directed him." Abram *believed* God and trusted in God's promise.

Reflection Question : *What places of comfort am I called to leave and journey where God might lead me?*

Second Reading

In his second letter to Timothy, St. Paul urged him to continue the faith journey in difficult times, especially when sharing the Gospel resulted in hardship. Sharing faith with others can cause rejection, insults, being excluded, and even physical harm. St. Paul reminded Timothy that God gives the strength to deal with hardships. Paul encouraged Timothy by again sharing the Good News: God's grace is manifested through Jesus who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to those who believe in Christ.

Reflection Question: *How do I deal with the resistance that I sometimes encounter when sharing my faith with others?*

Gospel

The Gospel reading from St. Matthew recounts the story of Jesus' transfiguration on a mountaintop, witnessed by Peter, James and John. The disciples saw a vision of Jesus appearing in dazzling glory and in the company of two of Israel's greatest leaders – Moses and Elijah. The disciples also heard a voice from the cloud, personified as God's voice, saying "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." The disciples became prostrate with fear. Jesus touched them; when they raised their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus.

Reflection Question: How do I see 'no one but Jesus' in my family, friendships, workplace, parish, neighborhood, nation or world?

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: On a piece of paper, draw a map of your life, from birth to death, and then eternal life. Put an "X" on where you are now. Then, ask God to journey with you as the future unfolds.

Share/Meal: Wear a cross and share your faith as conversations develop.

Transform/Sacrifice: Envision how a small act of charity can witness to God's love. Do it.

February 27, 2005 The Third Sunday of Lent

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

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:

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EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: Exodus 17:3-7

2nd Reading: Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

Gospel: John 4:5-42

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?

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.

First Reading

The reading from Exodus recalls a time when water was scarce during Israel's journey through the desert. Despite God's earlier promise to be with them, the people grumbled against Moses and God for failing to provide water. Upon Moses' intercession and God's intervention, water flowed from a rock to meet the people's need. The name of the place, Massah and Meribah, became infamous because the people expressed great doubt that God would help them in their need.

Reflection Question: How willing am I to trust that God will provide what I need in God's own time and in God's own way?

Second Reading

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul listed many gifts that God provides to those who believe in Christ: justified by faith, peace with God, access to God through Jesus, grace, hope, participation in God's glory and the Holy Spirit. Paul described the fullness of God's greatest gift – God's love: "But God proved his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Through his writing and exhortation, Paul shared the Good News of God's love, providence and presence.

Reflection Question: What gifts of faith has God given me to share with others?

Gospel

The Gospel reading from St. John tells the story of Jesus' journey to Sychar, a town in Samaria where he met a woman at Jacob's well. At that time, Jews and Samaritans were arch-enemies. Neither did men did not talk to women in public. In this story, Jesus talked with a Samaritan woman and even asked her for a drink of water. As the conversation unfolded, Jesus revealed the woman's history and his own identity as the Messiah. The woman not only believed in Jesus, but went off to tell the town about Him. Many Samaritans of the town returned and came to believe in Jesus, initially because of the woman's testimony, and finally because of their own personal encounter with Him.

Reflection Question: How do the conversations and encounters that I have with others lead to new life for them?

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: Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance this week.

Share/Meal: Reflect on your gift of hospitality and use it to welcome someone.

Transform/Sacrifice: Have a conversation on Gospel values with a neighbor.

March 6, 2005

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

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.

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EXTEND GOD'S INVITATION

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

2nd Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel: John 9:1-41

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?

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.

First Reading

The reading from the first Book of Samuel tells the story of David's anointing to be the King of Israel. God instructed Samuel which son of Jesse to anoint, and shattered Samuel's preconceived ideas about who would make the best king. A mere youth, David was called from tending the sheep. The Lord instructed Samuel to anoint David when he appeared. David later united Israel as a nation.

Reflection Question: How has God anointed me with the Holy Spirit to do good things?

Second Reading

In this passage, St. Paul contrasted light with darkness in the lives of the disciples in Ephesus. Paul exhorted the community to witness to Christ by living as "children of light" who would shine in good works, righteousness and truth. Paul called the disciples to expose the darkness of sin in their midst by living a different type of life: letting the light of Christ shine through them and their works.

Reflection Question: Where do I need to awake from my sleep so that Christ may give light to others through me?

Gospel

In this account from the Gospel of John, Jesus healed a man blind from birth. A fascinating series of dialogues unfolded between Jesus and his disciples, the blind man and the Pharisees, the Pharisees and Jesus, and, finally, Jesus and the blind man. Each conversation challenged the conventional notion about what caused the man's blindness and what leads to real seeing. At the end of the story, the man once blind became the evangelizer who worships Jesus, while the leaders of the day became blind to who Jesus is.

Reflection Question: What experiences have I had when others, whom I never expected, had a transforming effect on me or others?

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: Reflect on one experience where you felt the Holy Spirit inspiring you.

Share/M meal: Share that experience with someone else.

Transform/Sacrifice: Identify difficult area that needs transformation and do something unexpected, something you might not normally do to address it.

March 13, 2005

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

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
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Fill all parish and agency staff with Your power to
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*Fill all consecrated men and women and all lay people with the grace
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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 who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: Ezekiel 37:12-14

2nd Reading: Romans 8:8-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

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?

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.

First Reading

In the first reading, Ezekiel uttered a prophecy to the people of Israel who were despairing in their exile. In the prophecy, Ezekiel spoke the Word of God to open people's graves, restore them back to life and bring them back to the land of Israel. The Lord addressed the Israelites endearingly, "Oh, my people." From all of these saving actions, the people will know that God is the Lord. There will be no doubt as to who God is and what God can do.

Reflection Question: When I am buried under sin, problems and concerns, how do I experience God opening my grave and raising me to new life?

Second Reading

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul shared the reason for new life: the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers. Those without the Spirit can never belong to God. Paul revealed his hope in God's saving action. As the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead to new life, so too will the Holy Spirit raise Jesus' disciples to new life.

Reflection Question: Where do I need to grow in order to share the news of God's promise of eternal life with others?

Gospel

The Gospel reading from St. John tells the story of Jesus' raising of his friend Lazarus from the dead. In the story, Jesus arrived late in Bethany, four days after Lazarus had died. Jesus encountered those mourning Lazarus, especially Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha. In these encounters, Jesus revealed Himself as the resurrection and the life, wept with them, went to Lazarus' grave, prayed and called him forth. Lazarus came out of the tomb and was set free at Jesus' command.

Reflection Question: How can God work through me to unbind and set free those who are captive?

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: Ask God to bring new life to one "grave" that reoccurs in your life.

Share/Meal: Share your belief in God's promise of eternal life with someone who doesn't know it.

Transform/Sacrifice: Do a kind act that takes away the "stone" from someone's grave of sorrow or poverty.

March 20, 2005 Palm Sunday

PREPARE THE ENVIRONMENT

Optional: Prepare a small table, containing an cross, a dinner plate and a small purple cloth. Cover half of the plate with the purple cloth and place the cross on the other half of the dinner plate. You may choose another symbol and enthrone a Bible. Have small note cards and pens available. Use this or another centerpiece that symbolizes getting dressed for God's banquet during the Season of Lent.

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.*

RECALL GOD'S BLESSINGS

On a notecard, write the name(s) of those who need "dress clothes" (repentance) to attend God's banquet. Place the card on the dinner plate and lift all up in prayer to come to know and love God.

READ THE SCRIPTURES

1st Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7
2nd Reading: Phillipians 2:6-11
Gospel: Matthew 26:14-27:66

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?

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.

First Reading

In this passage, the Servant of Yahweh speaks. The Servant placed full trust in God, hearing and proclaiming words of God's consolation to the weary and yielding his life to humiliation. Every day, the Servant was open to God's saving action. The Servant expressed his resolve to face disgrace and shame without fear or reproach, with God's help.

Reflection Question: Do I believe that God will be my help in all events of life?

Second Reading

In his Letter to the Phillipians, St. Paul shared deep insights into the person and mission of Jesus. Jesus came as the perfect servant of God, humbling himself to become a slave in all of human weakness. Jesus was obedient to God, even in his suffering and death on a cross. Death was not the end for Jesus, rather a glorious beginning. God raised Jesus above everything and every name, so that all would worship Him to God's glory. Paul called disciples in Phillipi and everywhere to become selfless, humble and dependent upon God for the final victory.

Reflection Question: Where do or how do I need to grow to share the news that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father?

Gospel

The Passion according to Matthew tells the story of the final Passover of Jesus, his arrest, trial, betrayal, suffering and death. The drama of Jesus' Passion swirled among the contradictions found in the words and actions of the surrounding characters. The disciples shared an intimate meal with Jesus, yet slept through Gethsemane and abandoned Him. Peter followed and denied Jesus. Judas betrayed and regretted betraying Jesus. The Roman soldiers tortured Jesus, yet their centurion claimed Him as the Son of God. Pilate longed to free Jesus, yet washed his hands of Jesus' blood. The Jewish leaders rejoiced in Jesus' death, but feared reports of His resurrection. Through the death of Jesus, God began an era of new life for all of creation.

Reflection Question: In following Jesus' call for transformation, what contradictions do I find in my own life?

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER

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

LEAVE TO EVANGELIZE YOUR WORLD

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

This coming week:

Believe/Communion: Listen to God calling you to new life in current circumstances.

Share/Meal: Invite a family to attend Holy Week or Easter services at your parish.

Transform/Sacrifice: Which area of society that you feel called to transform? Get started.

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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