

# 5 Weeks with God's Word

## Practical Guidelines for Group Faith Sharing

Since the goal of your group time together is not “study” but sharing your faith experience, no one needs to be an expert on the Bible or on doctrine. We are each an expert on how we live our Christian faith. So we learn from one another as we share our own unique Christian journey and how our Christian beliefs and values influence our everyday lives. The point is not just to learn about our faith (the “what”) but to find ways to make that faith effective in our lives (the “so what”). All of our learning is ultimately for developing a better relationship with God through Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

### Sharing Our Discipleship Journey

A faith-sharing group provides a simple way to gather with others, read scripture, reflect on its meaning and share our insights with one another. One way that we grow as followers of Jesus is to read and pray the scriptures with others. To encourage you to get involved in sharing your faith with others this Lent, these 5 sessions encourage you to explore each Sunday's readings with a small group. Gathering a group for faith sharing does not require any special permission or elaborate materials. Your group can simply begin by gathering together for reading, reflection, discussion and prayer about the coming Sunday's readings.

### Using a Eucharistic Format

A good way to structure your time together is to follow the basic eucharistic format: **Take, Bless, Break, Share.**

**Take:** Each week, choose a convenient time and gather the group members, recalling that when we hear God's Word it is as if God were present talking directly to us.

**Bless:** After all are gathered, begin with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to guide your sharing or pray the Opening Prayer from the day's Mass or from the coming Sunday or another favorite prayer of your choosing.

**Break:** Read the lectionary readings from the Mass for the coming Sunday out loud (and if you have time, also read one or more of the other readings).

**Share:** After some time for quiet reflection, invite each member of the group to share their answers to questions for discussion. End with ideas about what you might do in the coming week as individuals and as a group to make this Gospel's message more applicable to your lives.

**Closing Prayer:** End the sharing time with an exchange of peace and praying the Lord's prayer together.

### The 10 Commandments of Faith Sharing

#### 1. Everyone shares in the wisdom.

Faith-sharing is not a class but a sharing of each person's experience of living in relation to God and with others—which no one knows better than that person. Each person's relation to God holds some truth about the variety of ways that God can work. The goal is always to grow in our relationship with God and one another.

#### 2. Everyone gets a chance to share.

Some people need encouragement to share and nothing helps this more than providing a respectful and supportive group atmosphere in which everyone is accepted.

#### 3. No one should dominate the dialog.

If one person's views or problems begin to take up too much time, the group needs to recognize and remedy this.

#### 4. Be open to new perspectives.

People in any group can see the same thing differently depending on their point of view. For life's challenges and human relationships there is seldom a single solution that suits everyone.

#### 5. If you disagree, do so with respect and care.

If you wish to disagree, make sure that you first affirm the other person, then understand what the other has said, and finally respectfully offer your own perspective.

#### 6. Welcome Jesus in your midst.

Faith sharing can also be a time to pause, relax, close the eyes and welcome the presence of Jesus. Invite Jesus to sit with you and hear your stories.

#### 7. Rely on feelings, images, scripture and tradition.

According to each person's own comfort level, share feelings and express them in image and metaphor. Perhaps a certain image will remind you of a favorite parable or scriptural passage. Maybe your images relate to the rich tradition of our Church's doctors and saints.

#### 8. Involve collective and individual voices.

Sometimes faith sharing is faithful praise as well. For inspiration, read a responsorial psalm as a group, but have one person alone read the repeated response.

#### 9. Focus on a problem.

Sometimes it helps to get problems out in the open. What problems do you all share? Family or health concerns? Fear of death? Loneliness or depression? Lack of faith? Focus on sin?

#### 10. Find a solution in Jesus.

Jesus' example will offer the best possible way to solve the problems you face. As you reread scripture, how did Jesus work to solve problems by bringing peace and blessings to others?

# 5 Weeks with God's Word

## First Sunday of Lent (February 18, 2018)

Lent is an opportunity to renew my commitment to my covenant relationship with God through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today's readings remind us of the first covenant that God made to be in a relationship with us. In Genesis, life begins anew after the flood, sealed by God's promise to all creatures and confirmed by the rainbow. The author of 1 Peter explains that we are saved through the cleansing water of baptism. In today's Gospel, Jesus' 40 days of temptation in the wilderness end with the proclamation of God's good news that God has now drawn near once again in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

### First Reading: Genesis 9:8-15

Both Jewish and Christian tradition attribute the writing of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible also called the *Torah*, to Moses. Modern scholars now recognize that the Pentateuch is composed of several strands of tradition preserved and edited over centuries of Jewish history. The story of the flood is itself an ancient one, shared by several Near Eastern cultures, but the biblical account has its own unique theological perspective.

Through Noah and his family, God makes the first covenant with all humans and all creation. The sign of the covenant, the rainbow, is a sign of peace, showing that God's wrath was over and the stability of the natural order was guaranteed. This first covenant demonstrates the eagerness of God to be in relationship with us and the trustworthiness of God who makes promises and keeps them.

### Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-9

This acrostic psalm, each verse beginning with a successive letter of the alphabet, is a personal lament that contains the usual cry for help (v. 1-3), plea for guidance (v. 4-5), expression of trust (v. 6-15) and presentation of the psalmist's plight (v. 17-19) in a prayer of vindication (v. 16-21).

The psalmist asks God to teach him truth (v. 4-5) and knows that his adversaries, both external (v. 2, 19) and internal (v. 7, 11, 17-18), are strong enough to triumph over him. His fear of the Lord compels him to acknowledge that God alone can make him into a person of true righteousness (v. 9) and enjoy "the friendship of the Lord" (v. 14).

### Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

For many scholars, the excellent Greek style of this letter, its use of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the lack of direct reference to Jesus' teaching suggest that the letter was not written directly by Peter, a Galilean fisherman, but perhaps by a companion, a

disciple or a scribe acting as secretary.

In today's reading, the author seems to have used parts of a hymn to frame statements about Jesus' authority and the meaning of baptism. Christ died "once," not only as a model to be followed but also to bring new access to God.

The author draws parallels between the destructive, but cleansing, waters of the flood and the cleansing, saving waters of baptism. Verse 21b is translated more literally, "a pledge to God from (or of) a good conscience." Thus, the believer's baptism is effective not as a physical washing, but as a sign of one's new life in Christ.

### Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

Today's Gospel recounts Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The event of empowerment by the Spirit at Jesus' baptism (1:9-11) immediately leads into a time of testing. The 40 days recall the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), the 40 days of Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:18; 34:28) and the 40 days of Elijah's journey (1 Kings 19:8). Exposure to temptation is a continuing theme of Jesus' ministry, in the desire of the crowds for a sign (8:11), in Peter's rebuke (8:32-33) and in the jeers of the crowds at his crucifixion (15:29-32).

Apparently Jesus was prompted by the end of John the Baptist's active ministry to begin his own public work. Jesus now proclaims that "the time is fulfilled." The work of the prophets, including John the Baptist, was to prepare for God's kingly rule—which Jesus declares is now here.

In Jesus, however, all God's prophetic words find their fulfillment. The prophets were called to speak God's message, while Jesus is God's message. "The kingdom of God has come near" (v. 15), that is, God's anticipated rule over the world and the eradication of evil is more than merely nearby, it is present in Jesus himself.

### Questions for Sharing

- What can you recall about your "call" or invitation to follow Jesus in a more adult way?
- What lured you or made you want to turn to Jesus?
- Where and to what degree has God been most present and active in your life?
- How did your baptism enter you into a covenant relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
- What obligations do you have toward God because of your baptismal covenant?
- What temptations most challenge you not to follow the ways of Jesus now? How can you resist them?