

Decalogue for the Sharing Group

1. Meetings are led by the Holy Spirit through Mary.
2. Purpose of the meeting:
 - To become aware of my weaknesses and the truth of being loved by God
 - To respond to the desire to deepen my faith
 - To be open to my brothers and sisters in the group
 - To share different experiences of my faith and how God is present in my life
3. When I go to the meeting, I will pray to God for others and myself.
 - Prayer of empty hands or that of the tax collector is recommended.
4. I will remember that I am God's child who has the right to trust and await miracles.
5. As a participant in our meeting I will:
 - Serve others and not count my own merits
 - Create the atmosphere of calm, focus/concentration and openness
 - Not impose on others my ways of thinking, reacting and perceiving
 - Avoid giving advice or solving others' problems
 - Speak from my personal "I" rather than use such terms as "you, we, us, people, we should, others do this."
 - Avoid discussion and criticism
6. By keeping what is shared in the meeting confidential, I will preserve each participant's freedom to share openly and protect their dignity as a child of God.
7. I will not be afraid of moments of silence, since I or somebody else may need time to reflect. Moments of silence provide us with unique opportunities for prayer and entrustment to God.
8. I will remember to attentively listen to what my brother or sister is saying in order to help them in the process of sharing.
9. When I give a witness talk or share my faith, God's grace is not only given to me but it is being multiplied and given to others.
10. Above all, God expects from me humility and openness. Even one person who is humble and open to God can create an appropriate climate during a given meeting that will spread to all participants. The most important and desirable goal is not the format of the meeting, but it is to be open to God's grace and presence.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. No. 1428, footnotes 18: *LG* 8 S3; **19:** *Ps* 51:17; cf. *Jn* 6:44; 12:32; *1 Jn* 4:10; **No. 1430, footnote 23:** Cf. *Joel* 2:12-13; *Isa* 1:16-17; *Mt* 6:1-6; 16-18. www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/catechism

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S.C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: Gratitude and Contrition* (Ft. Collins, CO: In the Arms of Mary Foundation, 2006). All rights reserved. – www.inthearmsofmary.org

Families of Nazareth Movement – www.familiesofnazareth.us

December 10, 2023 ~ Second Sunday of Advent ~ Year B Spiritual Reflection on Sunday's Readings

Prepared by:
Families of Nazareth Movement USA
Communion of Life with Christ through Mary

Opening Prayer
Read Decalogue
Read Scripture
Read Reflection

Reading I Is 40:1-5, 9-11

Responsorial Psalm Ps 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14

Reading II 2 Pt 3:8-14

Gospel Mk 1:1-8

Opening or Closing Prayer

Dearest Father, Your Son tells us, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." I long to be Your smallest child. Help me to rediscover You as the One Who delights in me, Who calls me as His own.

My Jesus, You say to us, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." You are the way to heaven. Thank You for saving me and giving me Yourself in the Holy Eucharist. Reactivate the call of my Baptism to serve the Church in childlike humility, "boasting only in God."

Holy Spirit, reveal to me my weaknesses that I may seek Jesus' strength. Reveal to me my nothingness, that I may await all things from Him. Convince me of Jesus' words, "What is impossible for human beings is possible for God."

Blessed Mother, I entrust my prideful doubt, fear, discouragement and ingratitude to your intercession so that I will believe, as God's beloved child and yours, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

Families of Nazareth USA
Summer Retreat 2010

Spiritual Reflection

"One mightier than I is coming after me.

I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals." Mk 1:7

In each person there is an astounding tendency to bask in God's gifts. We take advantage of the love that Christ shows us in order to bask in the happy feeling that we are loved rather than have the entire truth about God's love always before us – the truth that *Yes, I am loved but only because of my misery. Jesus, who sees me in the truth, or as I really am, died for me on the Cross. If it were not for His Redemptive Sacrifice, I would have no chance to be saved.*

Instead of striving to live according to this truth, I seek an untrue relationship with God. My relationship with God is untrue in the sense that I erase from my heart why I am redeemed and why I am loved in such an exceptional way. God loves me because He is true to Himself – He is purest Love. To the degree that I immerse myself in this type of thinking that that is separated from the truth about Redemption, I am more and more convinced that the only reason why God loves me is because I try, perhaps awkwardly, to be good, and I try to fulfill His will. I believe that God loves me only because I am worthy of His love...

Rather than being like the prodigal son who exposed the nakedness of his misery to his father and received generous and gratuitous forgiveness in return, I follow the path of the older son. The older son was convinced that his father loved him because "all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders" (Lk 15:29)....An attitude of entitlement is born within me... I am surprised when something does not go according to my own expectations. I become somewhat sad. I rebel a little, and I hold this against God. Well, because in the end, I think to myself: "But I have served Him for many years."...

We are constantly tempted to follow the path of the older son and create a false image of God's love...Initially I am submerged in the happy feeling of being loved by God. Later, I slowly begin to convince myself that I am loved, not as a sinner, but just loved for some reason. I plunge into the warmth of my illusions, and I am well because I feel loved. I already believe, even if just a little bit, that I am loved because of my perfection (also known as the pedestal), or at least some signs of it.

Barriers in the realm of the unconscious that close us off from the action of grace are the most dangerous. All defense mechanisms operate this area. ... Here, then, is where the unconscious resistance to grace is born in us, and we ask ourselves: "Why does God have to forgive me? I prefer to be perfect." This trap consists in the fact that our desire to be perfect causes us to think that we are self-sufficient....

God, the Merciful Father, who loves me as a sinner, slowly disappears from my life. In His place a false image of God, who loves me because of my deeds and merits, appears. I trudge further along the path of the older brother—the path that closes me to the truth about Redemption. The moment comes, however, when the Lord God will tear this growing falsehood asunder and place me on the foundation of truth. This fact, which as if wakes me, shows that I live as if God does not exist. In the face of my hidden resistance to grace, God can permit humiliating temptations to come my way. Or, He may shake me through someone, open my eyes, and show me that I am not as perfect as I think I am. The strength of my reaction will measure the height of the hidden pedestal from which He, who always fights for my salvation, has cast me down.

S.C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: Gratitude and Contrition*, pp.21-25

1428 Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal."¹⁸ This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.¹⁹

1430 Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the *conversion of the heart, interior conversion*. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²³

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways do I rely on my own strengths and achievements or feel loved just because of them?
2. What experience have I had in which I have acutely felt my misery and what was my reaction? How did I perceive God's love?
3. How can I demonstrate my readiness to entrust all my helplessness to Our Blessed Mother?

Prayer after Sharing

Thank you, God, for allowing me to see the truth about my weaknesses and how it calls upon the abyss of your merciful Love.