

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 others (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. 900**, footnote **433**: Cf. LG 33; **No 901**, footnote **434**: LG 34; cf. LG 10, I Pet 2:5: **No. 913** footnote **452**: LG 33 § 2; cf. Eph 4:7.

. www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/catechism

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S.C. Biela, *Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock* (Ft. Collins, CO: In the Arms of Mary Foundation, 2005). All rights reserved. – www.inthearmsofmary.org

Families of Nazareth Movement – www.familiesofnazareth.us

DECEMBER 17, 2023 ~ THE 3RD 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

Reading I Is 61:1-2a, 10-11

Responsorial Psalm Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

Reading II 1 Thes 5:16-24

Gospel Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

Opening or Closing Prayer

Father of Mercy and of Love,

Thank you for the gift of reconciliation through the Redemptive Sacrifice of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your love is more powerful than my sin. There is no evil that surpasses Your infinite mercy.

Send your Holy Spirit to convince me of my weakness so that I may live with a truth of conscience and a certainty of redemption.

Open me, Gracious Father, to the graces of being personally responsible for my sins, longing for forgiveness, and of being obedient to the call to conversion.

When I seek forgiveness, give me the courage to reveal the abyss of my misery and to accept my sins as "happy faults" so that, as Your child, I may run to Your loving embrace.

Through the help and intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, may I learn true contrition for the wounds I have caused Her Son.

And may my continual renewal, through the grace of Your sacraments, work to revitalize the Church, so that, as One Body in Christ, we may proclaim Your dominion over all the earth.

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

*Families of Nazareth USA
Summer Retreat 2008*

Spiritual Reflection

*A man named John was sent from God.
He came for testimony, to testify to the light
so that all might believe through him. He was not the light,
but came to testify to the light. Jn 1:6*

Apostolic work does not prevent us from contemplating ourselves in the pool of the pride of human regard. It does not shield us from striving to obtain the recognition of others. Do you not catch yourself sometimes wanting to impress others or win their esteem? Or are you indifferent to the fact that your words and behavior evoke others' sympathy, respect or gratitude?

In each one of us there is a very strong desire to gain the approval of others, to be noticed by them, and to be held in their high esteem. The human *I* demands that it be in first place. It continuously wants to reflect its own ideal image in the eyes of others and it does not want to be small like a child. If you do not oppose these aspirations, then you are taking the place that belongs to Christ; **you conceal Him within yourself.**

Meanwhile, John the Baptist teaches that the greatest joy for an apostle is to see that Christ increases while he or she decreases on behalf of Him.

It is not easy to decrease and disappear in such a way that nobody will remember or miss you. St. John the Baptist spoke about rejoicing greatly when his disciples and the multitude of his flock abandoned him to follow Jesus. However, the opposite aspirations are within each person.

Our apostolate, nevertheless, becomes authentic and fruitful only to the degree to which we do not allow our *I* to occupy the place belonging only to Christ.

If you want your human heart to open up before the One Who is knocking, then you cannot occupy His place. You must decrease. You must convert and become like a child (cf. Mt. 18:3). Only then will Christ increase in you and in the persons to whom you want to give Him.

If you try to become a mere **instrument** in His hands and **less and less visible**, then Jesus Himself will begin to carry out His work through you in the world.

The instrument must disappear in order for God to shine.

S.C. Biela, *Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock*, pp.106-108

References from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

900 Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it.⁴³³

901 "Hence the laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit maybe produced in them. For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives."⁴³⁴

913 "Thus, every person, through these gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself 'according to the measure of Christ's bestowal.'"⁴⁵²

Questions for Reflection

1. What does the "pool of pride of human regard" mean to me?
2. Where in my life do I try to attain recognition of others? Or try to evoke other's sympathy, respect, or gratitude?
3. In what situation do I see have I concealed Christ within myself by taking the place that belongs to Him and how can Mary then be my rescue?

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.