

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 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. 545, footnotes 258: Mk 2:17; cf. 1 Tim. 1:15; 259: Lk 15:7; cf. 7:11-32; 260: Mt 26:28; No 546, footnotes 261: Cf. Mk 4:33-34; 262: Cf. Mt 13:44-45, 22:1-14; 263: Mt 21:28-32; 264: Cf. Mt 13:3-9; 265: Cf. Mt 25:14-30; 266: Mt 13:11; 267: Mk 4:11; cf. Mt 13:10-15; No. 2840, footnote 136: cf. 1 Jn 4:20. Mt 20:26. . <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/catechism>

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S. C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: gratitude and contrition* (Fort Collins, Co: In the Arms of Mary Foundation, 2006). All rights reserved.- www.inthearmsofmary.org
Families of Nazareth Movement – www.familiesofnazareth.us

JANUARY 28, 2024 ~ FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 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	Dt 18:15-20
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9
Reading II	1 Cor 7:32-35
Gospel	Mk 1:21-28

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

*If today you hear his voice
harden not your heart. Ps 95:8*

There exists a hardness of heart wherein one chooses the path of the older brother from the parable of the prodigal son. Yet, there also exists the hardness of heart wherein one chooses the path of the younger son who left his father and had not yet returned. Hardness of heart basically refers to the one barrier that separates us from God – the barrier of self-sufficiency that we erect when we think that we do not need God. Insofar as he tries to manage on his own, the prodigal son cannot be helped.

Naturally, each of us often experiences anxiety to varying degrees. We experience the feeling of being lost in the face of our helplessness that is more or less acutely revealed to us. Fleeing from helplessness can point you in the direction of the illusion that things are not that bad. You may also helplessly try to get by on your own, but do not be surprised when tension, anxiety, and stress overcome you. It is very important to want to accept helplessness because, it demolishes some of your hardness of heart. Additionally, you should accept helplessness because, in the midst of it, God waits for you, and He is happy that you finally need Him. Consenting to helplessness means that the barriers of your heart are demolished, at least for the time being. Thus, helplessness becomes the place where you encounter God's grace. Helplessness – whether in the face of fear, threats, loss of supports, trials or temptations – cast you off of your pedestal of faith in yourself. It allows you to live in the truth. Instead of fleeing from helplessness to illusions, you can be pushed by helplessness into the Father's loving arms.

You can plead for God's mercy only when you are helpless. Only when you are helpless can God bestow upon you, since grace acts amid a person's helplessness – since a heart crushed by helplessness is open to God's loving presence. The prodigal son's helplessness impelled him to return to his father. His helplessness became the instrument of his conversion in the sense of the biblical word *shub*. The Hebrew verb *shub* means to retrace one's steps – the process of conversion. The biblical word *shub* signifies a return. This return is the change of a contrite heart as it turns toward something different, toward Someone else.

Authentic contrition has a "painful" dimension. It should evoke pain as well as hate of the evil that I commit, which wounds the Only One who loves me. Authentic contrition should lead me to conversion, so that I will not wound God anymore." In this sense, contrition and conversion constitute a unity. . .

Conversion, or *shub*, means perpetually beginning anew this interior return. This return opens us to the merciful action of grace. Since it always begins anew, this return will never be fully completed. This return entails not only attraction by grace, but also, before all else, painful experiences of God's purifying action, because He intends to completely crush the barriers of our heart.

S. C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: gratitude and contrition*, pp.43-46

References from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

- 545** Jesus invites *sinners* to the table of the kingdom: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."²⁵⁸ He invites them to that conversion without which one cannot enter the kingdom, but shows them in word and deed his Father's boundless mercy for them and the vast "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents".²⁵⁹ The supreme proof of his love will be the sacrifice of his own life "for the forgiveness of sins".²⁶⁰
- 546** Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of *parables*, a characteristic feature of his teaching.²⁶¹ Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything.²⁶² Words are not enough, deeds are required.²⁶³ The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word?²⁶⁴ What use has he made of the talents he has received?²⁶⁵ Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven".²⁶⁶ For those who stay "outside", everything remains enigmatic.²⁶⁷
- 2840** Now - and this is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see.¹³⁶ In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what situations have I resisted "helplessness"?
2. In discovering this about myself, how can God bestow on me the grace of a change of heart and of a new beginning?
3. How can the example of Mary help and guide me toward God's loving mercy and a deeper desire for conversion?

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.