

January 23, 2017

**Encounter Lent, 2017**

Dear Leaders of Encounter Lent, 2017:

I am ever so grateful to you for undertaking leadership in your local community for Encounter Lent, 2017, Diocese of Des Moines.

Given the widespread predisposition during the season of Lent for religious activity, I encourage you to push diligently for participation. In so doing, you are performing a service for those who will get involved. Secondly, urge commitment to the entirety of the program.

The anticipated outcome is that those involved will grow in their relationship with Jesus. Highly instrumental in achieving this goal are the small faith sharing groups in which you are incorporated into each session as a facilitator. Be attentive to stimulating discussion, allot required time and make sure everyone shares. This gives way to the experience of Church – our engagement with the Body of Christ.

Encounter Lent, 2017, parallels a very significant effort of the Hispanic Catholic Church which is titled Encuentro V. To be completed in the fall of 2018, Encuentro V seeks to move forward the incorporation of Hispanic Catholics with their rich gifts with that of the Anglo component with its dynamic tradition into one Church. Down the line, in a decade or two there should emerge a hybrid faith community which will be abundantly enriching.

As I renew my thanks, I assure you of my prayerful support and my committed companionship with you on our faith journey in the Church of Des Moines.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates

Bishop of Des Moines

Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 1 – Called to a Loving Encounter with Jesus and the Church

Objectives:

* Share experiences of encounter with Jesus
* Deepen understanding of our baptismal call
* Prepare to give priority to those who need it most

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Blindfold

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song(s): *Eye Has Not Seen* or *Be Thou My Vision*

Introduction:

* Welcome to the first session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent*.
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church.
* Our first session today will focus on how Jesus reaches out to the disciples, taking the first step in coming forth to meet them.

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:13-16)

*“Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles**from Jerusalem called Emmaus,**and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.* *And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.”*

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Reflection:

In the biblical passage of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, Jesus comes forth to meet these two disciples who are returning from Jerusalem filled with fear, anxiety, and frustration. Jesus actively looks at the reality affecting his disciples and inserts himself in it. Jesus knows all his disciples have been traumatized by the death of their teacher, friend, and Lord. His death deeply disturbed them and filled them with fear. Their master had been arrested, tried, and found guilty of a crime deserving the death penalty, according to the laws of the time. The passage indicates that these two disciples remained three days in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus before deciding to leave town. It is possible that, during those days, they were in hiding out of fear of being recognized as disciples of the executed one, as Peter feared when three times he painfully denied knowing and even being a disciples of Jesus. They finally decide to leave the city, to get far away from that place of death, and return to their lives, to what they were doing before following Jesus.

The first action Jesus takes in this passage is to join the disciples in their walk. With this action, Jesus takes the first step. He gives priority to the disciples by reaching out to them and coming forth to meet them. Jesus approaches them with deep respect in order to listen to what they are saying, grasp their feelings, and perceive their reaction to the events. He reaches out to them, and listens to them, knowing their thoughts and feelings, and how much they have endured.

The biblical narrative indicates that the disciples did not recognize the stranger who joined them along the way because *something prevented their eyes from recognizing him (Luke 24:16)*. We do not know how close to the disciples Jesus was walking, or for how long. What we do know is that Jesus is listening to what they say, and he recognizes their gestures of discouragement and sadness. This action of anonymous accompaniment shows great respect to the mourning the disciples are experiencing due to the death of such a beloved person in whom they had placed all their hopes. Deep in their sorrows, the disciples also face the harsh temptation that they may have wasted their time by following someone who turned out not to be who they thought he was. It is very likely that it was precisely this pain and confusion that prevented them from recognizing Jesus.

**SEE**

* Have you felt a time in your life when Jesus took the initiative to reach out to you? If yes, please share that experience with the group. If no, what blindfolds prevented you from recognizing Jesus’ presence in significant moments in your life?
* In the story, Jesus joins the two already on a journey. From what we can tell, the two were open for someone else to join them. When did you last feel invited or welcomed? When did you last demonstrate hospitality for another? Why is hospitality essential for conversion of heart to occur in someone’s life?
* Jesus’ action of walking with the two disciples is labeled *accompaniment.* Jesus’ physical accompaniment gave way to spiritual accompaniment. How have you felt Jesus’ spiritual accompaniment in your life? How has your physical accompaniment with others been an opportunity for Jesus’ spiritual accompaniment to work through you?

**JUDGE**

God seeks us out first through the sacrament of Baptism and calls us to be missionary disciples of God’s love.

God is the Lord of History. We are called to God’s own life, and through the waters of Baptism we rose with Christ to a new life as sons and daughters of God.

Such splendid dignity makes us kings—children of a King; priests—participating in the priesthood of Christ and prophets—proclaimers and messengers of the Word of God in the world. Thus, our Baptism is an urgent call to participate in the life and mission of God. Pope Francis reminds us that, by virtue of our Baptism each member of the people of God becomes a missionary disciple (*Evangelii Gaudium, #120)*. In turn, the bishops of Latin America emphasize the urgency of a missionary discipleship *so that these peoples continue to grow and mature in their faith in order to be the light of the world and witness to Jesus Christ with their own lives* (*Aparecida Document, #16*).

Jesus invites all baptized to seek others out first and gives us the Holy Spirit to guide our joyful steps. **In the apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel,* Pope Francis tells us that reaching out first means taking the initiative without fear: be the first to greet, to forgive, to listen, to show mercy, because God loves us first. How do we reach out to others, invite the excluded, offer mercy, and experience the joy of being a blessing to others? (Invite sharing)**

This missionary image of reaching out first calls to mind the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila:

*God has no body on this earth but yours*

*No hands but yours*

*No feet but yours*

*Yours are the eyes with which he looks on the world with compassion*

*Yours the feet with which he walks doing good*

*Yours the hands he now has to bless us.*

**ACT**

What is the first best step to offer your hands, feet, eyes and ears God to be His presence in this world?

* What are the places where Jesus sends us today? Please share your experiences.
* Who are the people we need to reach out to urgently? Please share your experiences.
* What attitudes, gestures, and actions can help us encounter one another in daily life at work, school, our neighborhood, public transportation, the supermarket, our faith community? Please share your experiences.

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice

**Leader:**

Loving Lord, you have taken the first step and reached out to us. You have sought us out in so many ways, through so many events and people in our lives. Sometimes we have covered our eyes with blindfolds of our own making and have failed to see you. But, gently and lovingly, you have walked near us at all times. Allow us now to see and to have the courage to remove the blindfolds from our eyes so that we might see you in our daily life, in our pains and in our joys, in life around us, in our sisters and brothers, in the thirst for you that those around us experience. Lead us to recognize that your eyes, your feet, and your hands in this world are our eyes, our feet, and our hands stretched out for others. Others are waiting for us. Send us!

**All:**

* Take away, Lord, the blindness of our self-centeredness, which prevents us from seeing you.
* Take away Lord, the blindfold of our worries about the future, which fills us with fear and prevents us from reaching out to others.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of indifference, which prevents us from seeing the need to get out of our comfort zones.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our pain and disappointment, which prevents us from seeing you walking with us.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our obsession with possessions and control, which prevents us from seeing that we depend on you alone and that you are our light and all we need.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our doubt that prevents us from seeing you Risen, in all the life around us.

**Sacred Scripture:**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-[two] others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.* *He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.* *Go on your way…**The seventy-[two] returned rejoicing. (Luke 10:1-3, 17a)*

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**Leader:**

Now let us think of that person whom we need to reach out to. Let us write her or his name on a piece of paper. Let us all pray for her or him.

**All:**

Lord, here are the people you love as your children, and who are in pain, thirsting for you. You send us to them, even as they are weak as we are. The harvest is rich. There are many good people out there, people just longing to recognize themselves as your chosen ones, your possessions. Lead us to them, Lord, and come with us on this journey.

**Leader:**

Lord Jesus, you accompany us in all our journeys, make us now aware that we are your good news, your gospel for others. You send us forth, yet you come to us. Thank you, good and gracious Lord.

In the name of + the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reach out to someone** | **Reach out to the periphery (in pairs)** |
| 1 – Look for the best time to meet the person you have chosen to reach out to this week | 1 – Choose a place to go to actively observe that particular reality (for example, public transportation, an inner city park, a hospital waiting room, etc.) |
| 2 – Ask simple questions showing interest in the person. Do not start out by giving advice, talking about doctrine, but by listening intently. You want to join them on their journey and become attuned to their lives. | 2 – Find a place where you can observe without disturbing or annoying others |
| 3 – Create a safe place where the person feels confident expressing herself or himself without fear of being judged. | 3 – Use all your senses to perceive the reality of the place: the persons who are present, their ages, what they do, how they relate to one another, what type of place it is and how it is taken care of; notice if there are any authorities present, what moods people seem to have, how they are dressed, what type of music they listen to, in what language they communicate, what conversations you hear, what they talk about, what is in the air. |
| 4 – Provide hope or light. Share examples from your own experience. | 4 – Upon returning home, share with your missionary partner:   * What you observed, heard, perceived * What you felt and thought while you were actively observing reality * What new things you learned from this experience * How does it prepare you to interact with others in a second visit to this place? |
| 5 – If the person has expressed a need for some concrete help, try to find contacts or resources that will be useful. |  |
| 6 – It might be good to extend an invitation to a parish event or some celebration in order to get to know the person better. |  |
| 7 – Make sure to stay in touch. |  |

(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

– A USCCB Initiative)



Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 2 – With Words and Actions: Do it!

Objectives:

* Experience the power of active listening as a way to get involved
* Prepare ourselves for mission with people in the periphery
* Share the mission experience carried out during the 1st week

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Bottles of water

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song(s): *The Cry of the Poor* or *Come to the Water*

Introduction:

* Welcome to the second session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent.*
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church.
* Our session today will focus on the corporal works of Mercy: Feed the Hungry; Give Drink to the Thirsty; Shelter the Homeless; Visit the Sick; Visit the Prisoners; Bury the Dead; Give Alms to the Poor

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:17-20)

*He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast.* *One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?”* *And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,**how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him.*

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Reflection:

In the first session we saw how Jesus took the initiative toward his disciples by joining them along the way to Emmaus. In this second section, we focus on how Jesus gets involved in the life of the disciples asking them about their conversation. This action by Jesus is one of the most surprising in this passage. Jesus knows full well what happened in Jerusalem, and he is very much aware of the difficult situation afflicting his disciples. Why, then, does Jesus ask the disciples what they are talking about along the way, as if he himself did not know the answer? In fact, Jesus asks again, kindly and calmly, saying, *“What sort of things?”* when the disciples answered sadly and in an incredulous tone: *Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?*

This very surprising gesture by Jesus, asking first, and then asking again, is very important aspect of discipleship. The encounter with others, particularly with people who are going through difficult moments, must start by asking about their lives, concerns, hopes, ideas, needs, and dreams. This also allows them to speak about their reality from their own perspective, to share their experiences, their feelings, their ideas. To listen deeply creates a space of trust and safety that allows people to quench their thirst and unload their burdens.

Jesus is not interested in scolding the disciples for having abandoned him, or for not trusting in his promises. Nor is he interested in reproaching them for not having recognized him. He does not start the conversation by teaching them. Jesus’ questions reveal a great human sensitivity as well as his divine wisdom to listen to the suffering of his disciples and to allow them to express their pain, confusion, and astonishment about the events. Jesus knows that his disciples are extremely thirsty in their journey; they thirst for Jesus himself, his message of hope, justice and freedom rooted in the love of the living God who draws near to us, listens to our pains, and frees us from our sins; they thirst to be listened to in their pain.

The questions of the stranger invite the disciples to proclaim that Jesus was a powerful prophet in word and deed before God and before the people. But their own leaders had given him up to be condemned to death, and he was crucified. It is not difficult to imagine the great confusion and pain that the disciples must have felt seeing their priests and officials surrendering a prophet sent by God to his death. The disciples and all of the followers of Jesus expected him to liberate Israel from the Roman oppression and to restore the glory of the Kingdom of Judea. With the death of Jesus, those dreams are demolished and the disciples sink into hopelessness, the Kingdom of God Jesus had announced seemed lost. They are likely to wonder how much longer they will have to wait for the “true Messiah.” The disciples express disappointment and probably wonder if it was all worthwhile to follow Jesus all the time. The fact that they are returning to the way they lived before meeting Jesus is a sign of their defeated hopes, because the one who had offered to quench their thirst forever is no longer with them.

**SEE**

* In our own history what have been the challenges and difficulties that have questioned your dreams and aspirations? Have these experiences threatened to doubt your faith in Jesus? If yes, how did you overcome that doubt? If no, how did your faith overcome the difficulties and challenges?
* During difficulties in your life, who was by your side? Who knew how to listen? Who lent you a friendly hand without judging you? Who helped you quench your thirst?
* How has your faith community helped you through these times of difficulty and challenges?

**JUDGE**

Pope Francis tells us that the disciples of an evangelizing community must be involved with works and gestures in the daily lives of others, particularly of those in difficult situations. Getting involved means narrowing distances, building bridges; going beyond one’s own financial, cultural, educational, or migratory situation in order to reach out to the other. It means owning the suffering of others, taking on their difficulties, and even humbling ourselves, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Missionary disciples thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice (*Evangelii Gaudium,* #24).

This call to becoming involved with those who suffer poverty, dispossession, depression, or even discrimination comes from the very heart of the Church. The United States Bishops have articulated repeatedly that the Church’s Missionary Option shows a predilection for those who live in situations of poverty, sickness, discrimination, spiritual poverty and loneliness. Pope Francis speaks of a cultural and interior poverty so prevalent today, requiring an urgent response from the Church.

The mission of the Church to those who suffer demands these two things: works of mercy and a committed struggle against all forms of injustice. The bishops make an urgent call for us to get involved with those who live in the periphery, so that they can participate in the political, social, economic, and religious processes of their communities.

Personal and family situations can create hopelessness, confusion and suffering. Many people who live in these situations perhaps find themselves on the way back to their own Emmaus; that is to a way of living, thinking, and feeling removed from the Risen Christ, his love, and his promises of life lived to the fullest.

The encounter with the Samaritan woman is another example of how Jesus gets involved and involves a person in need with an entire community (John 4:4-42). Jesus sits by the well where the Samaritan goes to procure water. He sits at the place where the life of the Samaritan woman finds its origin (the well is an image of the source of life for the Samaritan). As he asks, *“Give me a drink,”* he identifies himself as the source of water of that well. Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman with familiarity, going far beyond social and cultural prejudices, and he gets involved in her life, quenching the thirst she feels even without knowing it. The text shows how Jesus awakens the interest of the Samaritan woman, helping her to make a transition from everyday concerns to personal ones, and from personal concerns to spiritual ones. In this process, the Samaritan woman experiences her own conversion and becomes a disciple. She cannot contain the joy of *“knowing herself loved”* and *“knowing herself accepted”* and she goes to announce to others that she has met someone special. Then she says, *“Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty.*

* **How have we listened to Pope Francis’ call to have compassion for the homeless, addicts, and outcasts?**
* **Do we care for those in physical poverty?**
* **How can we respond to the needs of those living in cultural poverty or interior emptiness – an emptiness that can only be filled with Christ?**

**ACT**

What is the first best step to be involved in the lives of others in your communities and remain respectful of people’s privacy?

* How have you engaged others in sharing deeply about difficulties and challenges in their lives?
* What speaks to you as you actively listen to this passage in sacred scripture? How do you actively listen to the moments in which to engage the Corporal Works of Mercy?
* How are you encountering the call to this mission and those souls who affected?

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice
* A transparent receptacle of water is a wonderful symbol for the prayer service. People can pour their individual water bottles into the receptacle symbolizing their experiences being offered to God in this prayer.

**Leader:**

I invite all of you to look at the water. Saint Francis of Assisi called it sister water. The water represents our thirst as it refreshes us, energizes us, cleanses us and heals us. Lord, you said you are the spring of living water. Whoever drinks the water you give will never thirst. Allow us to be your vehicle to help quench the thirst of others and help them be refreshed in your friendship.

**All:**

* Lord, give us always of your life-giving water. Lord, you said that no one can go to you unless the Father calls her or him. Cleanse us with your life-giving water and free us from all forms of slavery and guilt.
* Lord, give us always of your life-giving water. Lord, who in your passion experienced thirst, free those who in their thirst drank water from false wells, and return them to your fold through the missionary action of your faithful.
* Lord, give us always of your life-giving water. Lord, you said that no one took life from you because you surrendered it freely. We want to drink from your open side and take that living water to our sisters and brothers who remain in the periphery, and to those whose strength is spent in the ways of the world.
* Lord, give us always of your life-giving water.

**Sacred Scripture:**

*He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,**how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. (Luke 24:17-20)*

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In the name of + the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries.

|  |
| --- |
| **Reach out to someone** |
| 1 – Perform one corporal or spiritual work of mercy this week. |
| **Corporal Works of Mercy**  Feed the hungry  Give drink to the thirsty  Clothe the naked  Welcome the stranger  Visit the sick  Visit the imprisoned  Bury the dead |
| **Spiritual Works of Mercy**  Counsel the doubtful  Instruct the ignorant  Admonish sinners  Comfort the afflicted  Forgive offences  Bear patiently those who do us ill  Pray for the living and the dead |
| 2 – Near the end of the week ponder these questions   * What is most important in your life? * What are your concerns? * What makes you happy? * What are your dreams? * What do you expect from God? * What do you expect from the Catholic Church? * What do you offer to others, to society? |
| 3 – How do you think those in the periphery would answer the questions found above? |
| 4 – If you know someone in the periphery and feel comfortable, please ask them the questions above? |

(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

– A USCCB Initiative)



Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 3 – Walking Together with Jesus



Objectives:

* Share about the missionary experience following the previous session
* Use Scripture to interpret life and inspire hope
* Learn about the spirituality of accompaniment
* Prepare for missionary action with emphasis on the proclamation of God’s continuous love for us (kerygma)

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Bible

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song(s): *O Breathe on Me O Breath of God* or *Come, Holy Ghost* or *We Walk by Faith*

Introduction:

* Welcome to the third session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent*.
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church.
* This third session helps us to more deeply understand the concept of accompaniment. This includes both the fact that Christ accompanies us in all our circumstances, and that we are called to accompany others.

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:25-29)

*“And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!* *Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer****[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/24" \l "50024026-1)****these things and enter into his glory?”* *Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.* *As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther.* *But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.”*

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Reflection:

*Accompanying, walking together with Jesus…*

What does it mean to be accompanied by Jesus? The disciple’s encounter with Christ begin with him tending to the disciples’ experiences, their own desires, fears, and disappointments. Even as he knew that they had misinterpreted events, he asks that they share from their perspectives. Even as he knew everything that was on their hearts, he lovingly asks that they reveal their own longings. What an act of humility that our all-knowing, all-powerful God, who needs nothing from us, would still ask that we share ourselves with him. Accompaniment begins when we’re attentive to the other person’s heart, and not just interested in sharing our own perspective.

It is only after hearing the disciples’ perspective that Christ begins to teach them. His openness has allowed the disciples’ to become open, and he directs them back to their own experiences, but from a new perspective. *“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”* Christ gave the disciples new lenses through which they could understand their experiences and the world. How often do we misinterpret events, most of the time because we expect something less than what God wants to offer? As Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote, “Man draws a blueprint and hopes that God in some way will rubber-stamp it; disappointment is often due to the triviality of human hopes. Original drawings now have to be torn up—not because they are too great, but because in the eyes of God they are too little.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is through the stories of scripture that Christ corrects their misunderstanding, *“beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.”* Just as it did then, the scriptures provide a script for us, the lens through which we allow God’s understanding of reality to inform our own. Just as the scriptures spoke of a living word to the disciples on the road to Emmaus they speak a living word to us today; relevant in our hopes, struggles, joys and disappointments.

After unpacking the scriptures for the disciples Christ leaves them free to either accept or reject the vision he has just offered. *“He gave the impression that he was going on farther.”* God will never impose himself upon us, but he always invites us into communion with him freely. And the disciples, moved by the greatness of God’s plan, urge Christ to *“stay with us.”* They have now begun to walk with Christ, not just learning from him or believing in him, but they can now see with his eyes. They have entered into the most profound accompaniment of living in communion with God. As Romano Guardini wrote in his 1954 book *The Lord,* “*Christ in man draws man into himself. In the Holy Spirit, man shares in Christ’s existence, which is the life of his life… This does not mean that man merely thinks of Christ or lovingly cherishes his image; what exists in him is the living reality of Jesus.”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

**SEE**

* Have you had an experience of being accompanied by a loved one in your own life? Who has best accompanied you? What attitudes or actions helped you to trust this person in their accompaniment?
* Has there been a time where God’s plans for you have exceeded your own plans? Do you ever make plans and then hope that God will simply confirm them, instead of being open to his will?
* When do you spend time with God’s Word? (Examples, Mass, personal prayer, devotionals, etc.) Do you seek out scripture as a source that can help you understand your experiences? Do you believe that God’s Word has something to say to you personally, and in the present moment?

**JUDGE**

One of the deepest convictions we hold as Christians is that God accompanies us. God walks with us every day, in joyful moments and in difficult ones. It is possible to imagine, as many people do, that God created the world and left it to its own devices. When we experience suffering, violence, difficulties, rejection, abandonment, misunderstanding, and even the harsh reality of death, it is tempting to think that God is not with us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, however, clearly revealed to us that it is especially during those difficult moments that God is with us. God does not abandon the poor, the immigrant, the sick, the imprisoned, the person who feels lonely, nor does he abandon one who struggles with serious sin. God accompanies us with the power of the Word, sustaining us. God accompanies us in the sacraments, strengthening us with his divine grace. And it is in the Eucharist most of all that we discover that the Lord is with us, closer than anyone else could be. In the sacrament of Reconciliation we are truly forgiven by God.

“In the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel,* Pope Francis offers Mary to us as a model of accompaniment:

*‘Mary is able to recognize the traces of God’s Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town ‘with haste’ (Lk 1:39) to be of service to others.”*

Mary’s attentiveness to God inspires her to accompany others, to go out and serve those around us. Since Christ lives within us his mission lives within us, to go out to the marginalized and vulnerable and share the awesomeness of God’s divine plan.

**ACT**

***Accompanying all***

How can we become more attentive to God’s accompaniment today, and to our call to accompany others?

* When do you find it most obvious that God is acting in your life? When do you find it most difficult to recognize God’s action?
* How can we become more attentive to scripture, which can help us recognize and respond to God’s presence in our lives?
* Who do you think is most in need of accompaniment today? How can we better accompany this person/these people?

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice

**Leader:**

The Word of God comes to us, and to our community, meeting us where we are, in order to lead us to the Lord. This is why we are a pilgrim people, being led by the Word. This message is the same that the patriarchs, kings, and prophets heard in old times. This message was heard by the early Christians, the desert fathers, the holy men and women of our Church. This message was known by our grandmothers and grandfathers who taught us how to pray.

**All:**

* Give us, Lord, a vision which can help us see your accompaniment in our lives today.
* Give us, Lord, a vision which can comfort us in our affliction, and strengthen us when we waver.
* Give us, Lord, a vision which help us see scripture as your living Word, given to us personally.
* Give us, Lord, a vision to recognize those who are most in need of accompaniment today.

**Leader:**

Let us always remember that Christ accompanies us, and that as he lives within us we are called to accompany others.

**Closing Prayer:**

God of life and wisdom, you are always faithful to your promises and bring your plans to fulfillment. Walk with us today so that at each step we may find your message of love and tenderness. We ask you this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the living face of your mercy and has given us your Holy Spirit to keep us faithful to you, and lives and reigns with you forever and ever.

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries.

|  |
| --- |
| **Reach out to someone** |
| 1 – Invite one person from your group to join you in missionary action this week. |
| 2 – Decide which family living in the periphery you plan to visit. |
| 3 – Start with dialogue by introducing yourselves, offering a greeting of welcome and peace, and identifying the parish, ecclesial movement, or Catholic organization to which you belong. |
| 4 – Get to know the family a little better by using last week’s questions proposed for the missionary action to get involved. |
| 5 – Share your testimony of how God accompanies you in your own life. |

(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

– A USCCB Initiative)

Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 4 – Bearing Fruits of New Life

Objectives:

* Share the personal and communal fruits gathered during the past three weeks.
* Identify fruits that remain to be cultivated in your parish community or your larger community.
* Reflect about the fruits of the Holy Spirit and their transformational power

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Candle (light), Bread (shared)

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song(s): *Our God is Here* or *Christ, Be Our Light*

Introduction:

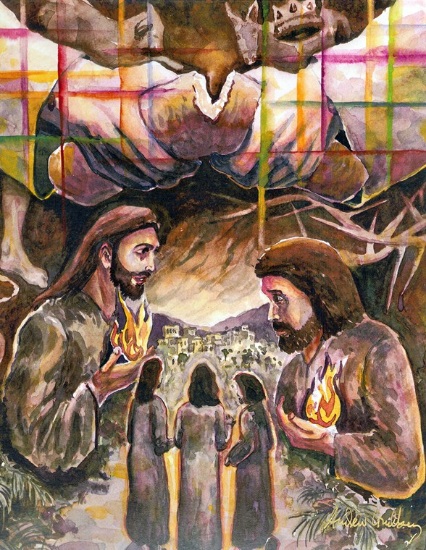
* Welcome to the fourth session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent*.
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church.
* In this fourth session we will share about the fruits that our missionary action has produced since we started this Lenten process.

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:29-33a)

*“But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them**. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them**. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.* *Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”* *So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem.”*

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Reflection:

In this biblical passage the disciples make a decision—they invite a stranger that they had gotten to know as trustworthy in the course of their journey. We all know from experience that as human beings we feel more comfortable with people who are from our community, share our beliefs, customs, traditions, and values. It is also very human to feel suspicious or to assume a defensive attitude when we find ourselves facing someone from a different culture or nationality. This lack of trust and even fear of a stranger was even greater for the Jewish people, who had suffered so much at the hands of other nations, including the Romans, who had dominated their lives with taxes and unjust burdens. Mindful about our human nature, the Scriptures offer many references about treating the stranger well, being hospitable, and not harming others. After all, the Hebrew people were strangers in Egypt.

There is no doubt that the disciples on the way to Emmaus saw something in that stranger that inspired trust. Perhaps it was the way this stranger walks near them; the way he asks about their conversation; the way he kindly, yet directly, addresses their misreading of the events; the way he interprets the Scriptures; the way he signals that he is continuing on. Perhaps it was all these gestures of intimacy and tenderness that created trust between the stranger and the disciples that generated a familiarity that would conclude in the breaking of the bread while sitting at table.

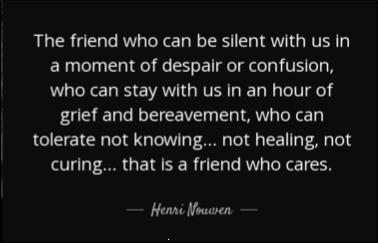
The fact that Jesus accepts the invitation to stay with the disciples, even when they do not recognize him, teaches us to gratefully welcome the trust and care that people extend to us when they invite us into their homes to eat with them, to continue the conversation that began during a catechetical session, the celebration of a sacrament, or the particular instance when we met them. Such encounters are invitations to have a more intimate experience of faith, sharing bread and building a friendship in his name, so that the Risen Jesus can become present through us.

This is the moment that Jesus most likely anticipated when he came to his disciples and joined them along the way to Emmaus. Jesus is finally with his disciples in a safe space, a place of trust around a table and ready to share. It has been a long and intense day, but they are now more relaxed and ready to quench their thirst and eat something before going to sleep. The disciples expected to continue the conversation with the stranger. It is in the gesture of breaking and sharing the bread that the grace of Jesus' walking with them comes to fruition. The eyes of the disciples are opened and they recognize the Risen Jesus. Now, the "confused travelers on the road to Emmaus" are filled with joy and hope and are re-commissioned as disciples and missionaries. They immediately return to Jerusalem to share the good news of the Gospel of the Risen Jesus.

Our pastoral work gives us many opportunities to accompany so many people in our community of faith and in the periphery. This accompaniment is a work of the Lord's grace prompting us and which generates fruits of friendship, joy, hospitality, solidarity and hope. The grace of the Risen One accompanies us as we accompany others, and leads to personal and pastoral conversion, as we have seen in the passage of Emmaus

**SEE**

* What do you think is the most notable contribution of Catholics like you (Irish, Italian, Hispanic, Asian, over 60, under 45, women, men, rural, urban) to the Church in the United States?
* In what areas do you think that the faith of Iowa Catholics have most influence in the U.S. society?
* What challenges do Catholics face, particularly young people, in order to preserve their religious and cultural identity in the United States?



**JUDGE**

We were created for the glory of God. And the nature of God is love, relationship. It is when we place ourselves at the service of others that these gifts become fruitful and begin to affect others. In this way we give witness as disciples of Jesus Christ in our lives. The Word of Jesus frees us and guides us with his life and presence among us, through the Holy Spirit, in order for us to know and liberate the love of God to be given to another. In this way, we know God's love for us while loving our neighbors with freedom. God nourishes the Church and the world with the gifts he has entrusted us with. When we allow these gifts to be used for others, through our attitudes and behaviors, our words and actions, then we can actually see how Jesus is present in our own lives

We Christians share in the conviction that the presence of the Holy Spirit produces fruits in our lives. We frequently speak of twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

A missionary disciple of Jesus, Pope Francis reminds us, *"finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear. The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God's word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed."* (Evangelii Gaudium, # 24).

A tree is known by its fruit! If Christ is in the midst of our communities, we will be a reflection and continuation of his saving work and his healing presence. As he did back then with the disciples of Emmaus, he breaks the Eucharistic bread with us. At the same time, as he did with the hungry crowds gathered around him (John 6:5-13), he breaks with the poor the bread that nourishes the body. Our encounter with Christ at the table of the Word and at the table of the Eucharist becomes real as we open ourselves to the encounter with Christ in those who are poor and most in need among us, and those who live in the peripheries of society.

God accompanies us throughout our lives. We experience God's presence visibly and unmistakably through our Baptism and through the other sacraments and the many expressions of popular Catholicism of our people. We feel God's presence when we generously share our time, our talents, our treasure, and our love with others. When we forgive and are reconciled with someone who has trespassed against us. When we feel and practice mercy and compassion toward those who need our presence, help, and words of encouragement. When we share our material goods, open the doors of our homes, visit the sick and the imprisoned, are present and console those who suffer, share with words and actions the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who need to hear them the most.

* What fruits have grown in me as a result of my relationship with Jesus?
* With whom do I share those fruits?
* What fruits am I bearing in my ordinary life as a missionary disciple in my family, in the parish community and in society?
* God works in the community through each one of us: how am I allowing the Good News of Jesus Christ to become part of me and how do I share it with others?

**ACT**

Return to the person you, or you and a member of your group, reached out to after session 1. Invite her or him to join you to:

* Celebrate the Eucharist in your parish or local community.
* Observe how your parish or community serves those who are poor or most vulnerable.
* Consider the possibility to join a parish or community group.
* Be a prophetic voice and to act concretely to bear fruit.
* Go to a periphery where there are people who are far away from the Church or are experiencing a major need for someone to listen to them, to get involved in their lives and accompany them.

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice
* A candle is placed high and should visibly light the room. Below is a basket with enough bread for all the participants in the group.

**Leader:**

The first Christians gathered on the eve of Sunday, the day of the Lord. The leader of the community would light a candle remembering Christ, who is the Light of the world, and sing hymns. Each baptized member of the community took their light from that candle. This celebration was called the *Lucernarium*. Let us also recall the evening meal at the home of the disciples in Emmaus and begin our prayer saying:

**All:**

* Stay with us, Lord; it is getting dark and we cannot see. (The candle is lit.)

**Leader:**

Darkness has no power. If we lose electricity at night, we worry that we might be disoriented, fall, or may break something. A small light is enough to restore our trust. Thousands of our sisters and brothers, and sometimes we too, are in darkness and need light. A glimpse of the light of Christ in their hearts would be enough to restore courage and life. We must say over and over: darkness need not have power, neither do the works of darkness. Injustice need not have power. We just need the courage to defeat them. Lies have no power. We just need a spark of truth to conquer them. Let us pray for all who live away from the light.

**All:**

* God of light, bring closer those who do not experience love: may they have the courage to cross their own boundaries and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, instruct us when we are in error: may we recognize the way of truth and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, raise us whenever we fall into vice: may our health be restored and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, free the prisoners: so they may return to life and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, strengthen us when we are weak and lack courage: may we be nourished by the Gospel and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, affirm anyone who feels rejected and misunderstood: restoring their dignity and may the light of Christ shine.
* God of light, rekindle the fire when we are lukewarm: to bear abundant fruit through our works and may the light of Christ shine.

**Sacred Scripture:**

*“But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:29-33a)*

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**Leader:**

On the day of my baptism Lord, you gave us the gift of your wonderful light; you led us out of the darkness and called us by name to be a light to the world.

**All:**

Here we are, gathered in your name. We are your missionary disciples, Send us to be your light. (Participants come forward to light their individual candles.)

**Leader:**

Jesus, we know by faith that you walk with us. You do not need our hospitality, and yet you give us your friendship when we invite you into our humble homes.

**All:**

Stay with us, Lord, and bless our table.

**Leader:**

Lord Jesus, we walk with you without knowing you are the Bread of Life come down from heaven, the bread that nourishes and restores the strength of those who are overwhelmed by the journey of life. You are Bread that gives itself, bread broken as an offering of solidarity, and bread shared in sincere hope.

**All:**

Lord, give us of your bread to work together for the fruits of light: peace, justice, and truth.

**Leader:**

As a community of faith, we celebrate the Mass which brings to us the real presence of Christ as the Bread of Life. In our daily lives, we share another type of bread, the bread of solidarity and hospitality, and the bread broken with the poor. That reminds us we are part of a community. We are not celebrating the Eucharist here, but sharing bread as a symbol of our union. [The bread is broken and shared among all present.]

**Leader:**

Christ, perfect image of God the Father, just as your disciples recognized you in the breaking of the bread, you recognize us whenever we are able to share our bread with the hungry, our clothes with the naked, our home with the stranger, or our presence with the sick and the imprisoned. May we one day we hear our names being called as you welcome us into your presence: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The deepest yearning of our hearts is that you find abundant fruits in our lives and that this harvest be celebrated in union with the Father and your Holy Spirit forever and ever.

In the name of + the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries of our local or global society.

|  |
| --- |
| **Reach out to someone** |
| During this week let us make a missionary commitment to go to the peripheries of our local or global society. What can we do to make our missionary action real? Here are some practical suggestions: |
| 1. Visit a nursing home or a prison, a hospital, someone who is sick and homebound, a family of farm workers, a young person or a child who is alone. |
| 1. Give food to someone who is hungry. Offer your time to help at your local soup kitchen or food pantry; Volunteer or make a donation to Catholic Charities of Des Moines, make a donation to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society or join as a volunteer; join the Rice Bowl campaign of Catholic Relief Services. |
| 1. Explore in more detail some of the efforts related to social services that the Catholic Church provides:  * Catholic Charities: [www.catholiccharitiesdm.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesdm.org) * Catholic Relief Services [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org) * Justice for Immigrants [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org) * Catholic Climate Covenant: [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org) * Mary’s Meals [www.facebook.com/mmheartland/](http://www.facebook.com/mmheartland/) or Ellen Miller at [ecosomo@mchsi.com](mailto:ecosomo@mchsi.com) * St. Vincent DePaul- Des Moines [www.svdpdsm.org](http://www.svdpdsm.org) * St. Vincent DePaul-Omaha [www.svdpomaha.com](http://www.svdpomaha.com) * United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) in order to learn about projects at the local and national level to protect life, fight poverty, educate new generations, confront human trafficking, etc |
| 1. Make sure to write in your Mission and Consultation Journals what you heard and saw during your missionary action and how the experience made a difference for those you visited and for you as well. |

(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

– A USCCB Initiative)

Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 5 – Celebrating the Joy of Being Missionary Disciples

Objectives:

* Share the wisdom learned from the missionary experience during the previous week.
* Celebrate an important event in the life of each member of the small group.
* Reflect on the importance of celebrating great and small events in life with gratitude and joy.
* Prepare for missionary action with emphasis on celebrating Holy Week and Easter

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Large Crucifix

Preparing the Session:

* Before the start of the session, prepare the place where the group will meet. Arrange chairs in a circle and place on a table a crucifix and near it a candle and open Bible. Also have on hand small paper crosses and pens, one for each participant.

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song: *Servant Song* or *In the Breaking of the Bread* or *The Eyes and Hands of Christ*

Introduction:

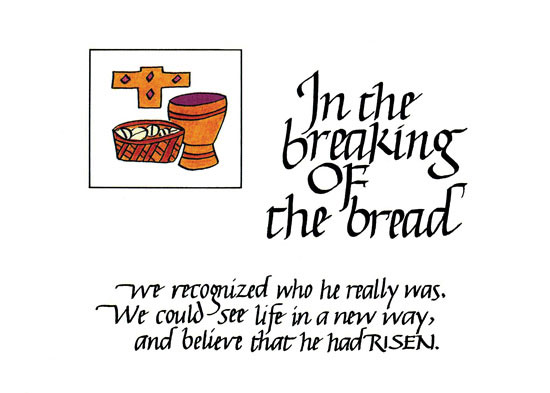
* Welcome to this 5th and final session as we journey with Jesus this Lent and prepare to celebrate Holy Week and Easter.
* We have walked together as a small group and now have become a small missionary community.
* Our focus today is to celebrate with gratitude and joy the achievements and worthy moments of our lives, big and small.
* In this session, we are sent once again to reach out to those who are most in need.

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:32-35)

*“Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, ‘The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!’ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”*

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**After a few moments of reflection in silence, a person from the group shares the following reflection on the reading:**

The last thing Jesus does in this passage is to vanish from the sight of the disciples shortly after they recognized him. However, the passage shows the disciples excited and ready to be missionary disciples once again. The disciples are full of joy because they recognize Jesus. Their eyes and hearts are open to the truth of the Resurrection. The certainty that Jesus is alive leads them to realize that Jesus has been with them practically the entire day, and they are not surprised or disturbed when he vanishes. On the contrary, the disciples remain joyful and share with one another how they felt along the way while the stranger was interpreting the Scriptures. With astonishment, they exclaim: ‘*Were not our hearts burning*…?’ This confirms that their faith was rekindled by first hearing the Word of God. This experience of conversion touches the minds and hearts of the disciples and prepares them to recognize the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It especially prepares them to understand that they, with the entire community of disciples, constitute, from this moment, the Body of Christ, the Church in the world.

Jesus has been with them practically the entire afternoon. It took about two or three hours to walk the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus. What else could Jesus do to give example and to teach his disciples everything they need to know and do in order to carry out their mission? Jesus vanishes from their sight at the exact moment when his disciples no longer need to see him to believe that he is risen. He does not need to explain the Scriptures again or tell them how to resume their mission of announcing the Good News, or what to do at that moment. By the enduring grace of the presence of the Risen Christ in their midst, they are entrusted with making decisions in the future, starting with their immediate return to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that this encounter, this intimate moment in which they recognize him, will lead them to conversion, to build the community of disciples, to live in solidarity with one another, and to embrace permanently the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all nations, moved by their burning hearts.

This urgent call to be missionaries is what leads the disciples to immediately rise from table and set out on their journey back to Jerusalem. Imagine the difficulties of walking for several hours in the darkness of night on a solitary and potentially dangerous road. The urgency to meet the rest of the disciples to share with them the great news about the Risen Jesus cannot wait until the following day. Their burning hearts light up the road from within them and their faith in Jesus frees them from fear and any fatigue they may have felt. Any dangers they may face, including the possibility of dying on the way, are now perceived from a very different perspective in light of the promise of the Resurrection.

The lives of these disciples have acquired a new meaning in light of the recent events. The fear, disbelief, doubt, and sadness with which they left Jerusalem only a few hours before have now completely disappeared from their minds and hearts. As they return to Jerusalem, they see with their eyes wide open and are moved by joy (what a great joy!) and hope, overflowing with faith and love for Jesus, for the other disciples, and for the life that has conquered death. The disciples know that they are now the eyes, the feet, and the hands of Jesus in the world. They are now the strangers reaching out to those without hope on the journey of life, whom they must accompany with closeness and tenderness, sharing the Scriptures with them, accepting their invitation to stay with them, and sharing the bread of love in the Risen Christ.

The return of the disciples to Jerusalem is a great inspiration for our missionary commitment. At the end of the celebration of the Eucharist, we are sent to encounter others on their own life journeys to accompany them. We do this just as Jesus did it with the disciples of Emmaus and countless Christian disciples have been doing from generation to generation for nearly two thousand years. The missionary activity implies making a decision to go forth and reach out to others, to accompany them as the missionary disciples of today. It implies to live and understand the mission of the Church as a community that goes forth inspired by the pastoral commitment to encounter and accompany. This is the vision of Church that Pope Francis lives and proposes to us in each action, gesture, and message of his life. His secret consists in the deep and free conviction that he, and all the baptized, are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

The last scene in this passage shows the disciples of Emmaus sharing with other disciples in Jerusalem the Good News that they have seen the Risen Jesus. Other disciples have also seen Jesus, and there is great joy among all of them. It is important to highlight that the disciples who just arrived from Emmaus, most likely exhausted after a long journey, share specifically that Jesus interpreted the Scriptures for them and that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. These two realities, Word and Sacrament, are inseparable in the encounter with the Living Jesus Christ that leads to conversation, communion, and solidarity within the community of missionary disciples gathered in Jerusalem.

**SEE**

**Facilitator invites sharing in pairs, and begins with this or another introduction:** As missionary disciples, we recognize that we have received many blessings and now are called to share about these with others through our witness. Let us share with enthusiasm the importance of celebrating the wonders that God has done in our lives.

* Share one or two reasons that you are grateful to God at this moment in your life?
* How do you celebrate important moments with your family and friends?
* How would you describe the joy you feel when you celebrate an important moment in your life or in the life of someone you love?
* What elements of our Christian faith invite us to celebrate?
* Do you know someone who is experiencing difficulties or sadness? What can you do to share the joy that God has brought to your life with that person and thus to accompany him or her?

**JUDGE**

To participate in a celebration is a profoundly human expression that demands that we be present to one another. It is interesting that the first miraculous sign in Jesus’ public ministry took place at a wedding, an event that normally involves music, food and drink, dancing, and much joy. Pope Francis affirms that *“an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving”* (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 24).

Our liturgy, as well as the rituals of popular Catholic devotion, recognize the Risen Christ. They also affirm the new life we have received through his death and resurrection. Along with the celebration of the Eucharist, Baptism, Matrimony, and the rest of the sacraments, there are many other religious expressions that help us celebrate that God walks with us and has done great things in our lives. These include religious images of Jesus, Mary and the saints, special celebrations within the liturgical year, such as Advent, Christmas, All Saints, All Souls Day, Epiphany, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Lent, Easter, etc.

A Christian disciple is grateful for all the good that comes from God, and he or she celebrates. Today we are invited in a special way to be grateful for creation. To celebrate is to recognize that we need God and that we need to give thanks through our encounter with others in a festive way, in our achievements as well as in our failures. God walks with us. A Church that goes forth is a Church that celebrates that the Lord accompanies it, and because of that presence, it yields many fruits.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus received grace and strength from the mysterious gifts of the Risen Christ among them, and he manifested himself fully at the breaking of the bread. The parish Sunday Eucharist is exactly where we as disciples from many cultures and backgrounds receive the grace and strength to go forth to be missionary disciples. In the Sunday Eucharist Jesus the Lord himself teaches us the Scriptures, enlightens us to recognize his presence, nourishes us by his sacrifice, and sends us forth. It is at the Eucharist that we are formed into the gift we receive, the Body of Christ. The mission he gives us depends at every turn on his grace accompanying us as we move forward.

* When you celebrate a special occasion or person, is Christ at the center?
* When you celebrate, do you remember those who are poor or most in need?
* Do you seek reconciliation with someone with whom you’ve had difficulty before your celebrate?
* How do you celebrate the most important event for us as Catholics – the Sunday Mass?

**ACT**

In this last session, we reflect on our experience as missionary disciples reaching out to our brothers and sisters. We ask the Holy Spirit to inscribe the Word of God in our minds, our hearts, and our whole being. We also ask to be deeply rooted in the Church, walking in faith, love, and hope with our Holy Father, our bishops, our pastors, and all the saints as we take to heart the great command: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”* (Mt 28: 18-20).

We are never alone as we go forth into the mission as a community! Christ is always present in an evangelizing community. He does not say *“Go”* individually, but *“Go as a community!”* Go without fear and without doubts for Christ will be with us until the end of time!

Doubts may linger in the heart of some lay leaders: Do I have the talents and the capacity to carry out the mission? Should this not be something I need to leave in the hands of people better prepared than me? Should I just share my faith with people from my own parish or family? No! This is the vocation of everyone who is part of the Church of Christ!

The Spirit moves us to be protagonists in the work of the Church in the United States and beyond. All Catholics have a responsibility to know and sustain, to the best of our ability, the local faith community: parish, movement, etc. At the same time, we are all called to live in solidarity making a preferential option for the poor and most vulnerable in the world and to support the evangelizing mission of the Church in all nations.

One way to bring our lives into action is by celebrating in simple ways, in the rhythm of our daily routines, the fact that God calls us to be missionary disciples. This week…

* + Plan a special celebration with your family by preparing a special dinner, going out together, or toasting with your loved ones to acknowledge the blessings from God during the past year.
  + Have an Agape Meal (a Love Feast, as the early Christians called it, where the love of God which dwells in each of us is recognized and celebrated).
  + Invite your relatives to go to Holy Week or Easter Liturgy together.
  + Invite the individual or the group of people in the periphery with whom you shared in your missionary action the past four weeks out for coffee, tea or snacks, or to share a meal. Invite them to an activity or a celebration in the parish – it could be Holy Week or Easter Liturgy.
  + Offer to help in the preparation and celebration of the Holy Week or Easter Liturgies.
  + Use some of the missionary actions proposed in Session 4 that you might not have taken yet.
  + Discern, list, and prioritize the things that we can do as a parish to grow in being missionary disciples and identify areas of priority that need to be addressed at the diocesan level.

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice.

**In advance of the session, two leaders are chosen from the group. Leader 1 takes the crucifix from the center of the room, while Leader 2 shares one smaller, paper crosses and a pen with each participant.**

**Leader 1: Holding up the crucifix, states,**

Brothers and sisters: As we conclude our 5th session together in this Lenten journey, we are called to contemplate the cross. The Church invites us to venerate the cross not as an object or as a decoration, but as a symbol of life. The cross is the greatest proof of Jesus’ love, his ultimate ‘yes’ to the Father, his seal of love for his people. The crucified Jesus is a bridge between God and humanity that invites us to follow the true way. The Cross leads to life.

**Leader 2:**

We all participate in the mystery of Jesus Christ’s Death and Resurrection. Saint Paul repeatedly taught that the Cross sums up the saving work of Christ. The Cross is the Tree of Life that bears fruit of new life through the Resurrection.

Let us write some of the signs of life and resurrection we have discovered as part of our journey together during the past five weeks.

**Brief silence to write on the paper crosses.**

Let us now place our crosses on the Cross of Jesus to share in its mystery.

**Pieces of tape are provided, and participants tape their cross to the larger crucifix.**

**Leader 1:**

The first Christian communities reflected on the Cross as the Tree of Life. Adam had lost God’s friendship because of the fruit of a tree, but Jesus restores that friendship, bringing us salvation by the forgiveness of our sins through the tree of the Cross. One of the most ancient Christian hymns invites us to contemplate the tree of the cross as the best tree, a tree for which the nails and blood of our Savior were its leaves, flowers, and fruit: *‘Sweet tree where life begins!’*

I invite you to turn your eyes toward this tree in awe. The Cross must fill us with awe. The tenderness and love of God for us was so great. Let us contemplate also the fruits of the efforts of those who have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Good News. Their prophetic voices and commitments are a true sign that the Cross of Christ continues to give life.

Let us pray, together!

**Leader 2: “Please respond to each with – ‘Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.’”**

* Lord, we bring to you the life of our families, communities, and friends; let us share with them the fruits of your Cross.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light*.

* Lord, we have shared along the way the fire in our hearts with those we have met. May we continue to be witnesses of the mystery of your Cross.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.*

* Lord, you saved us by giving your life for us; by uniting our lives to your Cross, may we be instruments of your salvation in the world.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.*

* Lord, you broke open Scriptures for the disciples on the road to Emmaus to explain the mystery of your Passion; may your Word be our light on the journey.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.*

* Lord, walking with you has filled our hearts with joy; may your Cross give us the determination to share that joy with others.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.*

* Lord, you turn death and suffering into victory and life; may we be filled with hope and strength as we go into the world to announce the Good News.

*Stay with us Lord, and fill us with your light.*

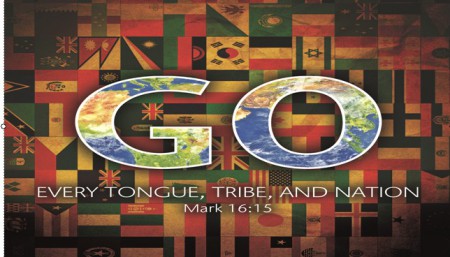
**Leader 1**

Brothers and sisters, before we conclude, let us make the Sign of the Cross on one another’s foreheads, as many generations of Catholics have done, wishing for all the blessings of God.

*Participants make the Sign of the Cross on each other’s forehead.*

We ask you, God, to strengthen us as we go forward. Grant that we may grow in your friendship to be true missionary disciples and thus proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ with the fire of the Spirit in our hearts. May our commitments reflect the fruits of the Cross and the Resurrection, and may each of our missionary actions glorify you. Listen to our prayer and the prayer of your Church, through Jesus Christ, your Son, through whom you sent the Holy Spirit to guide our way to you, and who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen.

Concluding Song: *Go Forth* or another song of your choice



(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

– A USCCB Initiative)

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries with special emphasis on Holy Week and Easter.

 1— Plan a special celebration with your family by preparing a special dinner, going out together, toasting with your loved ones to acknowledge the blessings from God during the past year, or have an Agape Meal (a Love Feast, as the early Christians called it, where the love of God which dwells in each of us is recognized and celebrated.)

2— Invite your relatives to go to Holy Week or Easter Liturgy together.

3— Invite the individual or the group of people in the periphery with whom you shared in your missionary action the past 4 weeks out for coffee, tea or snacks, or to share a meal. Invite them to an activity or a celebration in the parish – it could be Holy Week or Easter Liturgy.

4— Offer to help in the preparation and celebration of the Holy Week or Easter Liturgies.

5— Use some of the missionary actions proposed in Session 4 that you might not have taken yet.

6— Discern, list, and prioritize the things that we can do as a parish to grow in being missionary disciples and identify areas of priority that need to be addressed at the diocesan level.

1. Sheen, Fulton (Life of Christ 412). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Guardini, Romano (The Lord 431). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)