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:

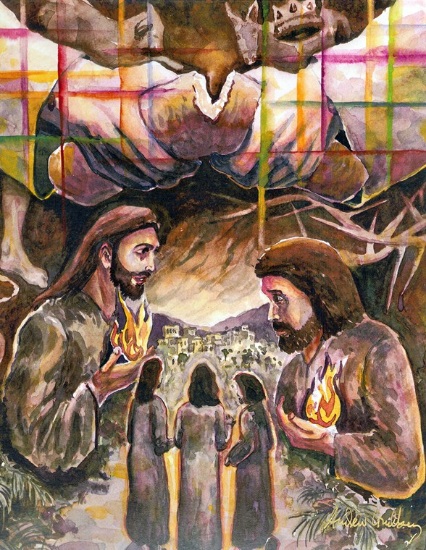
* Welcome to the fourth session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent*.
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most 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: 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.

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| **Reach out to someone** |
| 1 – 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: |
| 2 – 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. |
| 3 – 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. |
| 4 – 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 |
| 5 – 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. |

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