



Parish Discernment Session #5

The Sacrifice of Christ and Suffering in the Pursuit of Holiness

Focusing Question: How can we more fruitfully help our elderly, sick, and homebound be supported and contribute to the mission of the parish?

I. Opening Prayer (20 minutes)

Lectio divina with Luke 4:38-39

After he left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them.

Was there a word or phrase or image that stood out to you?

What insights did you have during your meditation?

What graces did you receive during your meditation (for example: joy, hope, longing, contrition, etc.)?

II. Introductory Comments (10 minutes)

A Message from Bishop Berg

In approaching the Eucharistic topic of the sacrifice of Christ and the question of how to minister to the elderly, the sick, and the homebound, we come face to face with the mystery of suffering, and when we engage the topic of suffering we enter upon sacred ground. As we acquire the discipline to take responsibility for our spiritual lives,

learning how to stop, be silent and detached, let God be God, listen, watch and pray, and as our daily lives become a spiritual exercise, we appear to others to be securely centered and well grounded. And then something happens. We encounter a form of suffering that is so intense it shakes us to the core. This happens to us personally, through our family, and within our community. Our spiritual balance seems to have been shattered, and at this stage we realize that, ultimately, no matter how committed to the spiritual journey, we are still beginners. According to an honored dictum, no one can become holy without being plunged into the mystery of suffering, a mystery that cannot be rationally explained.

The attempts to find rational explanations for suffering are not the purpose of this exercise. We shall begin by reflecting on our own experiences in suffering, and then see how we may truly and humbly be present to others in theirs. In my experience and training, being in the presence of sufferers, it is not helpful to try to “fix the problem” or come up with answers at the time (although, later, some quiet follow-up or referral may be appropriate). Invoking God’s will to the sufferer may bring on additional heartbreak, as may other well-intentioned anodynes. In the words of CS Lewis, the image of God is His image (not ours) and the process of suffering is His process (not ours), whereby our image of Him must be shattered and rebuilt, time after time. This process is not rational to the human mind. As Lewis discovered through the loss of his beloved wife Joy, the problem of suffering becomes the mystery of suffering. And in this mystery, God alone brings meaning. And the meaning, in faith, is abundant.

So now the question: How to prepare for this event, and how to approach it when called to be present with others in their time of need? We are in fact blessed with a spiritual gift, the human heart, upon which the weight of suffering always falls but which is also the source of our joy. The human heart is the place where God reveals Himself, fully and completely, as Jesus in the Eucharist. Few people have ever spent more time with appalling suffering than Saint Mother Theresa, yet we know, her strength and joy was found in the Eucharist, the place which became her heart.

It is against the background of Jesus’ suffering on the cross that we find the joy of His communion in the Holy Spirit. When we engage suffering we enter upon sacred ground. Whether suffering is from personal sin, or innocent (see the Book of Job), or original sin overall, suffering is necessary for holiness. And it is our privilege to be called to be so called into its communion.

Suffering freely chosen for the good of another becomes sacrifice and can become redemptive when united to the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. Some of those most acutely aware of this fact are those members of our parish who are elderly, sick, or homebound. While they may not have chosen their particular sufferings, many of them freely choose to unite those sufferings to the suffering of Christ. Their lives and their sacrifice become sources of grace for the Body of Christ and for the world.

Besides this, Christ sends us to them in their suffering, to make His love present to them. The river of life flows from the side of Christ on the Cross and flows into us in the Eucharist. This river of life wells up in us and overflows to those who need it. Let it flow from each of us and from our parish to our elderly, sick, and homebound.

I pray that these Parish Discernment Sessions will help you to consider the

questions:

- How can we more fruitfully help our elderly, sick, and homebound be supported and contribute to the mission of the parish?
- Have we forgotten them or neglected them?
- Have we reached out in love to them in their loneliness and suffering?
- Have we been there with them, letting them know that the rest of the Body of Christ remembers them and cherishes them?
- Have we included them in the mission of the Church in ways that let them know that they can still contribute and that their contributions have value?

May God guide you in your discernment of how to reach out in love to the elderly, sick, and homebound. Come Holy Spirit!

Points to Remember

- No one of us has all the answers.
- God has the answers.
- God speaks through His people.
- Discussion based in prayer is a means of hearing God's will.
- Do not be attached to your own opinion.
- Look with charity on the thoughts and opinions of others and assume that we are all wanting something good.

Prayer for Openness to the Lord's Will

Lord Jesus, we come together as Your Body to submit to You as the Head of the Body. Send Your Holy Spirit to soften our hearts, to detach us from our own opinions, to help us to encounter You in prayer, to inspire our conversations, to help us to hear Your will for Your Body, and to guide us into deeper communion in You through our time together. Remove any obstacles or barriers that stand in the way of these things, and send Your holy angels to protect us during our time together.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, pray for us!

St. Thérèse, pray for us!

(patron of our parish), pray for us! (or "have mercy on us!" if it is Sacred Heart)

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

Come, Holy Spirit!

III. Ask the Lord (30 minutes)

A. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and silent prayer (5 minutes)

B. Guided Meditation (10 minutes)

- Jesus freely sacrificed Himself for me, that I may be healed of my wounds and, through them, be free to serve Him and others.
- I need to be healed and to serve.
- The Eucharist continues to make present to me the healing powers which come through Jesus.
- **Pray in these or your own words:** "Jesus, send the grace of Your sacrifice into my heart and into my life for healing and service."

C. Ask the Lord these questions: (15 minutes)

1. Where/how do the elderly, sick, and homebound in my parish need Your grace?

2. How could I help bring You to fill these needs of the elderly, sick, and homebound?

3. In keeping with the Little Way (doing little things with great love), what one action are You prompting *me* to do that will help our elderly, sick, and homebound be supported and contribute to the mission of the parish?

D. Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament

IV. Discussion and Conclusions (60 minutes)

A. Small Group Discussion (20 minutes)

1. Where/how do the elderly, sick, and homebound in my parish need Jesus' grace?

2. How could I help bring Jesus to fill these needs of the elderly, sick, and homebound?

3. In keeping with the Little Way (doing little things with great love), what one action is the Lord prompting me to do that will help our elderly, sick, and homebound be supported and contribute to the mission of the parish?

B. Large Group Synthesis (40 minutes)

1. What holy desires can we see in these responses?

- 2.. What one step will we take to support our elderly, sick, and homebound and help them to contribute to the mission of the parish?

V. Follow-up plan (20 minutes)

- A. This is how we will be sorting through this information:

B. This is how and when you can expect to hear more from us in response to what is in your input:

C. Who is in charge of inviting others into this discussion?

D. How will others be invited into this discussion?

VI. Praise and Thanksgiving

A. Divine Mercy Chaplet

Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet as normal but with the following prayers preceding the appropriate decade.

1. First Decade: Heavenly Father, through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we ask for Your mercy upon our clergy, *(name your pastor, other priests, and deacons)*.

For each decade:

V. Eternal Father, we offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ

R. in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

(x10) V. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion

R. have mercy on us and on the whole world.

2. Second Decade: Heavenly Father, through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we ask for Your mercy upon all the parishioners of our parish, *(name your parish)*.

3. Third Decade: Heavenly Father, through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we ask for Your mercy upon those in our parish who have fallen away from the practice of their Faith.

4. Fourth Decade: Heavenly Father, through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we ask for Your mercy upon all who live within our parish boundaries.

5. Fifth Decade: Heavenly Father, through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, we ask for the mercy of the elderly, sick, and homebound receiving the loving care that they need and contributing to the mission of the parish.

B. “Conversational” style prayer of thanksgiving for one another

Those who are prompted may offer aloud a prayer of thanksgiving for others.

C. A Prayer for Eucharistic Revival

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who promised to stay with us always, until the end of the age. Reawaken our wonder at His presence in the Most Holy Eucharist. May our hearts burn within us as He opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread. Give us the eyes of faith to recognize His presence in our brothers and sisters, especially in the face of the poor and the suffering. Nourished by the Eucharist, send us forth to walk faithfully as missionary disciples, proclaiming the Gospel to every heart and extending Your kingdom to every land. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eucharistic Revival Parish Discernment Sessions Overview

Session #1

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Communion
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we enhance communion between pastor and parishioners in our parish?
- This session to be facilitated by representatives from the diocesan team. Subsequent sessions to be facilitated at the local level.

Session #2

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Thanksgiving
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we thankfully move forward as a parish in the gifts we have instead of focusing most of our attention on what we lack?

Session #3

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** The Real Presence of Christ
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we create a culture of encounter with Jesus in our parish?

Session #4

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Food for the Journey
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we help the young adults in our community find the food they need for their journey in Christ and the Church?

Session #5

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** The Sacrifice of Christ
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we more fruitfully help our elderly, sick, and homebound be supported and contribute to the mission of the parish?

Session #6

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Transformation in Christ
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** What can we do to help our children be transformed by their preparation for and reception of the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation so that they want to continue to grow in their Faith?

Session #7

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Conversion
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we support each other in growing in holiness through authentic spiritual friendships?

Session #8

- **Eucharistic Revival Theme:** Sent Forth
- **Main Topic for Discussion:** How can we help those we love come back to the Church, and how can we reach out in love to the marginalized?

The session handouts for these sessions will be made available approximately every two months, beginning in January, 2023.