

Decalogue for the Sharing Group

1. Meetings are led by the Holy Spirit through Mary.
2. Purpose of the meeting:
 - To become aware of my weaknesses and the truth of being loved by God
 - To respond to the desire to deepen my faith
 - To be open to my brothers and sisters in the group
 - To share different experiences of my faith and how God is present in my life
3. When I go to the meeting, I will pray to God for others and myself.
 - Prayer of empty hands or that of the tax collector is recommended.
4. I will remember that I am God's child who has the right to trust and await miracles.
5. As a participant in our meeting I will:
 - Serve others and not count my own merits
 - Create the atmosphere of calm, focus/concentration and openness
 - Not impose on others my ways of thinking, reacting and perceiving
 - Avoid giving advice or solving others' problems
 - Speak from my personal "I" rather than use such terms as "you, we, us, people, we should, others do this."
 - Avoid discussion and criticism
6. By keeping what is shared in the meeting confidential, I will preserve each participant's freedom to share openly and protect their dignity as a child of God.
7. I will not be afraid of moments of silence, since I or somebody else may need time to reflect. Moments of silence provide us with unique opportunities for prayer and entrustment to God.
8. I will remember to attentively listen to what my brother or sister is saying in order to help them in the process of sharing.
9. When I give a witness talk or share my faith, God's grace is not only given to me but it is being multiplied and given to others.
10. Above all, God expects from me humility and openness. Even one person who is humble and open to God can create an appropriate climate during a given meeting that will spread to all participants. The most important and desirable goal is not the format of the meeting, but it is to be open to God's grace and presence.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 636, No. 675, footnotes 574: Cf. *Lk* 18:8; *Mat* 24:12; **575:** Cf. *Lk* 21:12; *Jn* 15:19-20; **576:** Cf. *2 Thess* 2:4-12; *1 Thess* 5:2-3; *2 Jn* 7; *1 Jn* 2:18, 22.

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March 8, 2020 ~ 2nd Sunday of Lent ~ Year A Spiritual Reflection on Sunday's Readings

Prepared by:
Families of Nazareth Movement USA
Communion of Life with Christ through Mary

Opening Prayer
Read Decalogue
Read Scripture
Read Reflection

Reading I	Gn 12:1-4a
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22
Reading II	2 Tim 1:8b-10
Gospel	Mt 17:1-9

Opening or Closing Prayer

Father of Mercy and of Love,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summer Retreat 2008
Families of Nazareth USA

Spiritual Reflection

"Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Mt 17:9

The ladder of holiness is reverse, turned toward the bottom, and descends always deeper into the abyss of smallness and nothingness. We have perhaps imagined perfection in the form of progression or ascent, which is the fruit of self-will. This is precisely the contrary of Christian holiness, because, in a subtle way, it could become *our ascent*. We could falsely believe that our generosity and goodwill would render us capable of becoming saints and could forget the "without me, you can do nothing" of Jesus.

We tend to ignore the extent of our self-sufficiency and how, in a subtle way, spiritual pride brings us to desire the building of our own holiness.

We must *descend* into the night of our nothingness, empty and impoverished, in order to begin crying out like the poor one. We must take the way of descent. On our spiritual path, it is a blessed hour when our human reliances crumble one after the other.

"We are never deep enough," as Father Molinié has said. "Our prayer must surge from the depth of our distress."

What is the way taken by Jesus? Is it not the way of *descent*? He always descends. He descends from heaven into the cave of Bethlehem. The Gospel says that, after being found in the Temple of Jerusalem Jesus *descended* with Mary and Joseph into silence and obscurity. Speaking of the *descent* of Jesus, Charles de Foucauld cries out:

All His life, He only descended: descending in His incarnation, descending in becoming a small child, descending in obedience, descending in becoming poor, abandoned, persecuted, tortured, descending in reaching the last place.

Saint Augustine comments that, in desiring to obtain the first place in the Kingdom, the apostles wanted to participate in the exaltation of Christ without participating in his *abasement* through humility. The trap of the Evil One, according to Saint John of the Cross, is the desire to climb and exalt oneself instead of taking the path of humility...

The real spiritual masters speak to us of humility and abasement. The true path of holiness resides in humility and poverty in climbing down the ladder and not climbing up.

Jesus has said, "No one has gone up to heaven except the one who *has come down*" (Jn 3:13). To enter the Kingdom one must therefore *descend* more and more...

The *Ascent of Mount Carmel* of John of the Cross is a *descent* into the night before the climb back to the light. In the depths of the long dark tunnel of descent, there remains only the cry of those shipwrecked at the bottom of the abyss...

In putting himself beside the criminals, in dying outside the walls as one *excluded*, in making himself the slave of slaves and hanging on the Cross, Jesus joins the *lowest*, the poorest, the most excluded, the weakest, and the most abandoned of his brothers and sisters...

After this, how can we look for admiration in desiring to be elevated in others' esteem? "Do you want to be like me" Jesus asks?

André Daigneault, *The Way of Imperfection*, pp.26-29

References from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

- 636** By the expression "He descended into hell", the Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus did really die and through his death for us conquered death and the devil "who has the power of death" (*Heb 2:14*).
- 675** Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers.⁵⁷⁴ The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth⁵⁷⁵ will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in **the flesh**.⁵⁷⁶

Questions for Reflection

1. Christ's crucifixion was a descent into hell itself. How far am I ready to descend?
2. There is an old saying: "you can't take it with you." How is this saying disturbing for me?
3. Reflecting on the life of Mary, what can particularly help me understand the meaning of doing everything in terms of heaven, including following Christ by descending?

Prayer after Sharing

Thank you, God, for allowing me to see the truth about my weaknesses and how it calls upon the abyss of your merciful Love.