

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 others (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. 2547, footnotes 341: Lk 6:24; 342: St. Augustine, De serm, Dom, in monte 1, 1, 3: PL. 34, 1232; 343: Cf. Mt 6:25-34.
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S.C. Biela, *Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock*. (Ft. Collins, CO: In the Arms of Mary Foundation, 2005). All rights reserved. – www.inthearmsofmary.org
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December 15, 2019 ~ 3rd Sunday of Advent ~ 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 Is 35:1-6a, 10

Responsorial Psalm Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Reading II Jas 5:7-10

Gospel Mt 11:2-11

Opening or Closing Prayer

Dearest Father, Your Son tells us, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." I long to be Your smallest child. Help me to rediscover You as the One Who delights in me, Who calls me as His own.

My Jesus, You say to us, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." You are the way to heaven. Thank You for saving me and giving me Yourself in the Holy Eucharist. Reactivate the call of my Baptism to serve the Church in childlike humility, "boasting only in God."

Holy Spirit, reveal to me my weaknesses that I may seek Jesus' strength. Reveal to me my nothingness, that I may await all things from Him. Convince me of Jesus' words, "What is impossible for human beings is possible for God."

Blessed Mother, I entrust my prideful doubt, fear, discouragement and ingratitude to your intercession so that I will believe, as God's beloved child and yours, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

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

Families of Nazareth USA
Summer Retreat 2010

Spiritual Reflection

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." Matthew 11: 2-11

He Must Increase; I Must Decrease

By lowering himself, John the Baptist was not limited only to making room for the coming Messiah and giving up his public activities. Thanks to Jesus' surprising attitude toward John – surprising from a human point of view – this great prophet progressed in lowering himself. When John the Baptist found himself in prison, he was humbled not only by his lack of personal freedom but also by his lack of understanding regarding what was happening to him and around him.

When John the Baptist was told that, "the one...to whom you testified...is baptizing and everyone is coming to him" (Jn 3:26), he answered and said, "He must increase; I must decrease" (Jn 3:30)...

The words of John the Baptist indicate the way by which we can lead others to open the door to Christ. We have to lower ourselves and disappear, to become small like children of the Gospel, in order to make room for the Lord.

It is unusual that, regarding the necessity to *lower one's self*, Christ emphasizes the one whom He Himself called great: "Among those born of women, no one is greater than John" (Lk 7:28)...

Jesus did not visibly demonstrate any gratitude or special interest in John. He did not call John to follow Him. On the contrary, he left His most faithful herald in loneliness and uncertainty.

As the Gospel recounts, when John the Baptist was in prison, Jesus withdrew to Galilee. During this period, John the Baptist's uncertainty deepened even more because he did not understand the meaning of Jesus' deeds, about which others relayed to him in jail...

From where did John's doubts come?...

...This great, ascetic prophet expected Jesus to begin His mission with a baptism of fire, which means, with a very severe judgment and punishment of sinners, or those who were against making the path of the Lord straight. That which was reported to John about Jesus' deeds did not conform to this image. John also needed to become like a child and therefore, the messianic mystery was partially hidden from him.

How great John's loneliness must have been in prison. Despite this loneliness, however, the entire time he lived in the spirit of his own words: "He must increase; I must decrease." John the Baptist wanted to decrease on behalf of Christ, even though **he understood Him less and less...**

Apostolic work...does not shield us from striving to attain the recognition of others. Do you not catch yourself sometimes wanting to impress others or win their esteem? Or, are you indifferent to the fact that your words and behavior evoke others' sympathy, respect or gratitude?

In each one of us there is a very strong desire to gain the approval of others, to be noticed by them, and to be held in their high esteem. The human *I* demands that it be in first place. It continuously wants to reflect its own ideal image in the eyes of others, and it does not want to be small like a child. If you do not oppose these aspirations, then you are taking the place that belongs to Christ; **you conceal Him within yourself...**

It is not easy to decrease and disappear in such a way that nobody will remember or miss you. St. John the Baptist spoke about rejoicing greatly when his disciples and the multitude of his flock abandoned him to follow Jesus. However, the opposite aspirations are within each person.

Our apostolate, nevertheless, becomes authentic and fruitful only to the degree to which we do not allow our *I* to occupy the place belonging only to Christ.

S. C. Biela, *Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock*, pp. 103-108

References from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

2547 The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods.³⁴¹ "Let the proud seek and love earthly kingdoms, but blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."³⁴² Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow.³⁴³ Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God.

Questions for Reflection

1. In my daily life, what is my reaction to the experience of being left out?
2. Do I consider a lack of notice or approval from others a stepping stone or stumbling block in becoming an instrument of God's work? Why?
3. Pondering the life of Mary, how can her example be a role model for me so that Christ may increase and I may decrease?

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.