

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. 1432, footnotes 25: Cf. *Ezek* 36:26-27; **26:** *Lam* 5:21; **27:** Cf.; *Jn* 19:37; *Zech* 12:10; **No.2677, footnote 38:** Cf. *Jn* 19:27.

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S.C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: Contrition and Gratitude* (Ft. Collins, CO: In the Arms of Mary Foundation, 2006). All rights reserved. – www.inthearmsofmary.org

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March 31, 2019 ~ Fourth Sunday of Lent ~ Year C Spiritual Reflection on Sunday's Readings

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**Families of Nazareth Movement USA
Communion of Life with Christ through Mary**

Opening Prayer
Read Decalogue
Read Scripture
Read Reflection

Reading I	Jos 5:9a, 10-12
Responsorial Psalm	Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
Reading II	2 Cor 5:17-21
Gospel	Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

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

*Families of Nazareth USA
Summer retreat 2008*

Spiritual Reflection

*“But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
He was lost and has been found.”*

Lk 15: 32

God would like to spare us from the defeats that are as painful as the wounds, rags, and waywardness of the prodigal son, or like the burning bitterness of the older son who was at odds with the father. All of these are human wounds and human woundedness from which God would like to spare us. However, we cannot avoid them if we allow the temptation of self-will to triumph within us. Yet, because we are wounded by such an attitude, we have the chance to encounter mercy in place of our woundedness and to discover in our woundedness the dimension of a gift, the dimension of grace. For the degree to which faith in ourselves disappears is the degree to which appears an even greater need for healing grace and the unceasing healing gift.

The phariseeism evident in the attitude of the older brother is not only a historical event, but it is also an attitude that will remain in us for a long time. We will have to struggle with this attitude for a long time because it will constantly reemerge just like human pride. As long as we do not allow Christ to live in us, both phariseeism and pride will constantly resurface. They reappear until we, who are following the Marian path, allow Mary to stand in her deep humility and become in us the way that opens us to God’s infinite mercy – she who is, according to the words of Christ’s servant Cardinal S. Wyszynski, the most direct action of God in us. If the spirit of phariseeism and fear of God’s justice continuously torment you, and if you are unyielding about wanting to mean something in God’s eyes and in your own, then do not forget that Our Lady of Guadalupe wants to embrace you, such a sinner, just as you are. She desires to take such a sinner as you into her arms and to say:

*Is the fact that I love you as you are not enough?
I love you with all of your baggage of limitations,
resistance, difficulties, and barriers that you erect
in order to shield yourself from My love.*

Perhaps you have never thought that prayer does not have to be verbal or expressed with words in your thoughts. Imagine that every form of contact with God is prayer. Imagine that a specific prayerful gesture exists, in which the Blessed Mother requires only that you stretch out your empty hand to her. This is the prayer of being in Mary’s arms. It is the prayer of contrition and gratitude of someone who, having been knocked down by his own evil, has nothing apart from her and her loving arms. The prayer of contrition and gratitude is essential because you can

cling to Mary’s arms only when you are contrite. And only gratitude can grasp the greatness of the gift of this prayer, which is the simplest and most accessible for those who see that they are incapable of even praying. Think about how Mary eagerly awaits this prayer permeated by contrition and gratitude – the prayer of remaining in Her arms. . .

Contrition and conversion are a long path. The length of this path is measured by the hardness, resistance, and stoniness of a field that continues to be uncleared. To God, the human heart is like this field. . .

A specific feature of the path of Christian life is that a person’s sensitivity to the demands of his conscience increases to the extent that he progresses on this path.

S.C. Biela, *The Two Pillars: Contrition and Gratitude*, pp.104-108

References from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

1432 The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart.²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"²⁶ God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.²⁷

2677 *Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death:* By asking Mary to pray for us, we acknowledge ourselves to be poor sinners and we address ourselves to the "Mother of Mercy," the All-Holy One. We give ourselves over to her now, in the Today of our lives. And our trust broadens further, already at the present moment, to surrender "the hour of our death" wholly to her care. May she be there as she was at her son's death on the cross. May she welcome us as our mother at the hour of our passing³⁸ to lead us to her son, Jesus, in paradise.

Questions for Reflection

1. At this point in my life, what is God revealing to me through the parable of the "two sons"?
2. In thinking of my past experiences of contrition, how does my reaction differ when I return to God in my helplessness and weakness with complete abandonment to his mercy?
3. After being far away from home, how do I want to return to my Father and how do I ask Blessed Mother to be "my contrition" so that I may have a child's amazement at the folly of God's love for me?

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.