Small Group Participant Booklet
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Welcome to Living the Eucharist

Congratulations! You have decided to join a Living the Eucharist small group during Lent. Your participation can enrich your life in ways both subtle and amazing. During the next six weeks you can expect to grow in your understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist, participate more fully in Sunday Mass, and leave Mass with a renewed zeal to let the light of Christ shine.

FORMAT OF THE MEETINGS

Your small group meetings will take around 90 minutes:

8 MIN.   Welcome and opening prayer
10 MIN.  Response to the Opening Questions for the topic
10 MIN.  Presentation of the topic
30 MIN.  Discussion of the topic
25 MIN.  Praying with the Sunday Mass readings using the lectio divina method
5 MIN.   Closing prayers
2 MIN.   Announcements

Refreshments and social time after the meeting

THE TOPICS FOR EACH WEEK

You will nourish your spiritual life by focusing on six topics during your meetings.

MEETING 1: I Give You My Word
PREPARING FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

MEETING 2: The Art of Listening
PREPARING FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

MEETING 3: Affirming What We Believe
PREPARING FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

MEETING 4: The Joyful Homecoming
PREPARING FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

MEETING 5: Be Reconciled With God!
PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

MEETING 6: The Eucharist: Pathway to a Holy and Virtuous Life
PREPARING FOR PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD
Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.

FROM THE CONCLUDING RITES OF THE MASS

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE

As you enter into the holy season of Lent, consider the following suggestions as ways to participate fully in your small group meetings.

Before the Meeting

Schedule some personal prayer time in order to read and reflect on the materials before you go to the meeting. Try the four-step sequence below and see if you find it helpful. Or find a sequence that works best for you.

First, read the Collect prayer for next Sunday’s Mass, found on the first page of each session. Use this prayer to place your mind and heart in the presence of God.

Second, read the opening introductory paragraph for the session and the Opening Questions. What is your response to these questions? Next, read the presentation and reflect on the questions at the end of the presentation. What is your response to these questions?

Third, prepare for lectio divina. Read the Scripture passage on the last page of each session, titled For Lectio Divina. This passage is taken from one of the readings for next Sunday’s Mass. Next, read the section titled “Lectio Divina: A Way to Pray with the Scriptures,” found on pages 29–33 of this booklet. Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, an insightful and knowledgeable teacher, will be your guide as you discover the treasure of the lectio divina method. Return to this section whenever you need to until you become comfortable with this method of prayer.

Finally, grow in your knowledge and appreciation of the Mass by reading all or part of the section titled “Growing in Holiness Through the Eucharist” on pages 34–42 of this booklet. Rita Ferrone, an award-winning writer with expertise in liturgy and catechesis, will open your mind to new insights about the Mass as a pathway to a holy, virtuous, and joy-filled life. Go back to this section when needed, as you participate in the discussions week by week.
**During the Meeting**

Enter fully into the conversation. Contribute to the extent that you are comfortable and have something to say. You can enrich the experience of other group members by your participation; you also can benefit from listening attentively when others speak. Be yourself, participate in a way that is right for you, and enjoy the experience.

Keep the focus on faith sharing. Think of your group as a community of disciples growing in the love of Christ. Faith sharing is not an academic discussion or a test of how much each person knows about the topic. Rather, it invites each participant to consider the question: “What does this mean to me as a follower of Jesus Christ?” Each person will express his or her faith differently, and all will be enlightened through the sharing.

**After the Meeting**

Be attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Lent is a period of illumination and enlightenment, during which the Spirit leads us to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. The insights from the group meetings on the Eucharist can be a pathway to conversion, an invitation to new life in Jesus Christ. What the Spirit teaches you through the meetings will enable you to celebrate Easter with a renewed mind and heart.

Look for ways to live the Eucharist. During the dismissal rite at Mass, the priest or deacon says one of four things: “Go forth, the Mass is ended,” or “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life,” or “Go in peace.” As you participate in your small group and learn more about the Mass, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in bringing Christ to your family, your work place…wherever the light of Christ needs to shine. You can count on Christ’s presence in the Eucharist to give you the power, strength, and wisdom you need to live and share your faith with joy and confidence during the week.
I Give You My Word

The Word of God is food for the soul, and delight for the heart and mind. Its grandeur and beauty are incomparable. The Word of God is more than mere words on a page, printed in a book. Jesus himself is the Word of God. In the Liturgy of the Word, Jesus Christ continues to proclaim Good News to us, affirming God’s covenant and calling us to conversion.

COLLECT
FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

OPENING QUESTIONS

1 ▲ What is your favorite setting for hearing or reading the Scriptures? Why?

2 ▲ Consider the following expressions: “I’ll take his word for it.” “She was as good as her word.” “My word is my bond.” What do they suggest about the power of words?

3 ▲ Has the Word of God ever challenged you to change? Give an example.

PRESENTATION

Human words are used for many different purposes. They pass along information, ask questions, and probe for understanding. Words forge contracts, give expression to laws, and formalize commitments. Our words express feelings, reveal emotions, and articulate our passions. They can spark imagination and delight the senses, as in poetry and oratory. These are our words: sturdy, useful, and, yes, even beautiful.
But do our words inspire trust? Are they spoken with power? Are they just and true? Well… sometimes.

Because we are human, our words are like we are: wonderful yet also fallible. Sometimes they reflect our virtues. At other times, however, they are marred by our sins. Our words can lie and betray, mislead and disappoint. They speak truth, but in a human way. They are shaped by our situation.

**The Word of God**

God’s Word, however, is not like our words. It is like God is: faithful, true, powerful, and trustworthy. It reveals God’s will, and puts into effect what it reveals.

Salvation history is full of witnesses to the power of God’s Word. When God “speaks,” things happen. In creation, God called forth the universe and brought to birth its wonders through his Word. “For he spoke, and it came to be, / commanded, and it stood in place” the psalmist says (Psalm 33:9). When God told Moses to split the sea in two, his Word was filled with power, and thus the people were saved. God’s Word, spoken through the prophets, is sent on mission. As Isaiah wrote: “So shall my word be / that goes forth from my mouth; / It shall not return to me empty, / but shall do what pleases me, / achieving the end for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Finally, when God’s Word expresses love and mercy, it is a joyful, healing balm. Its goodness and fruitfulness are enduring.

God, the covenant-maker, enters into relationship with people by giving them his Word. Human beings can “go back on their word” and break a covenant or a promise. But God is faithful. When God commits, he will be there. God’s Word is to be trusted.

**Jesus, The Word of God**

The New Testament reveals that Jesus himself is the Word of God. He is the incarnate revelation of God. Jesus is faithful and true, powerful and trustworthy. The Word that God has “spoken” through the Incarnation can be meditated upon day and night without ever exhausting its richness. Jesus is that joyful, healing balm sent by God, consoling those who suffer and bringing delight to his people.

John the Evangelist begins his gospel account with a soaring description of the Word, the Son of God who existed before all time. He then announces this great marvel: that we have seen the Word made flesh in Christ Jesus.

> And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Jesus is God’s faithful Word. Once spoken, this Word will never be undone.

**The Liturgy of the Word**

When the Scriptures are proclaimed and preached within a community of believers, they are the living Word of God. Christ is truly present in the Liturgy of the Word, as the Second Vatican Council asserted, “since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 7). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council went on to say: “[I]n the liturgy… Christ is still proclaiming His gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer” (CSL 33).
The texts of Sacred Scripture are printed on paper and bound in a book. This book is treated with respect and reverence. Nevertheless, it is not the book but the Word that grips us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word has the potential to change our lives (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 108).

What a high calling! It matters, therefore, how the readings are proclaimed. They should always be spoken with understanding, expression, and reverence. This can be a challenge because the literature of the Bible is so varied. There are stories, poetry, exhortations, laws, history, wise sayings, and more. The person who reads Scripture in the liturgy is charged with a great responsibility to capture the right tone and style, so as to bring each of these texts to life.

Some parts of the Liturgy of the Word, especially the psalm and the gospel acclamation, are best when sung. Music heightens their solemnity and carries their mood. The cantor and choir, as well as the priest or deacon, sing not for show but as an act of service. Their singing moves the celebration forward and deepens the community’s prayer. The people sing, in turn, to participate more fully in the celebration and to offer their own prayerful response to God.

Posture, gestures, and responses during the Liturgy of the Word all proclaim that we are actively engaged and ready to receive God’s Word in faith. The gospel book is carried in procession, with all honor, sometimes accompanied by incense and candles. The ritual expresses the great value we assign to the Gospel—the reading of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word.

Preaching, which follows the gospel reading, will often explore the Scripture passages just heard. The preacher helps the assembly to hear what God is saying through these readings to this community, in this day and time. Preaching may also focus on the meaning of the sacraments, the prayers or parts of the Mass, or the day of the church year, interpreting the liturgical signs so as to build up the faith of God’s people. Through preaching, God’s revelation is brought near, and seen with new eyes.

**Divine Revelation**

In the Catholic understanding of divine revelation, Sacred Scripture has a crucial role to play. Catholics believe that both the Old and the New Testaments are the Word of God, passed on lovingly by the Church. As the Fathers of Vatican II wrote in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit” (no. 9). Sacred Scripture teaches, strengthens, and builds up the Church. As St. Paul wrote: “[W]hatsoever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

The Scriptures reveal God and God’s plan for the whole human race. They were written by human authors who were divinely inspired. Catholics do not read the Scriptures as biblical literalists or fundamentalists do. Rather, they seek to understand the historical times in which the biblical texts were written, the literary forms the sacred writers used to communicate the message, and the meaning God intends us to receive through them. Interpretation of the Word is essential.

Catholics affirm the truth of Sacred Scripture. Compiled over the course of centuries, these ancient texts do not reflect the historical or scientific insights of today.
The truth of Scripture is religious truth concerning our relationship with God and God’s relationship with the world. When properly understood, the texts of Sacred Scripture teach the truth needed for our salvation (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 107).

This truth is not bare, stripped-down, or minimal. Revelation received through the Word is as rich and nourishing as a banquet. This is why our church documents refer to the Liturgy of the Word as a “table” at which we are fed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1  ■ What caught your attention in this presentation? What thoughts or feelings did this stir up for you?

2  ■ How does the proclamation of the Word at Sunday Mass influence us to live by faith each day? Give an example.

3  ■ Jesus is the Word made flesh. How did Jesus “live the Word” or “embody the Word,” as you see it? What implications does this have for believers?

4  ■ When have you felt that the Scriptures are nourishment for your life, a “table” at which you are fed? Have you ever been “hungry” for the Word?

READINGS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

PSALM RESPONSE: Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

FOR LECTIO DIVINA

ROMANS 10:8-13

Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart—that is, the word of faith that we preach—for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the Scripture says, No one who believes in him will be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Renewed now with heavenly bread, by which faith is nourished, hope increased, and charity strengthened, we pray, O Lord, that we may learn to hunger for Christ, the true and living Bread, and strive to live by every word which proceeds from your mouth. Through Christ our Lord.
Lectio Divina: A Way to Pray with the Scriptures

Deepening communion with God is the invitation and adventure of our lives. We want it, and we are looking for methods that will help us realize it. We must have an experience of God if we are to pursue God with our whole heart, mind, and soul. Intellectual knowledge about God will not be enough to feed us and hold us. Lectio divina is an accessible way to have such an encounter.

The method is time-tested. The ecclesiastical writer Origen of Alexandria (185–254) and the monk John Cassian (360–435) trace out the method in their writings on prayer. The twelfth-century Carthusian monk Guido gave it sharper definition as a stairway of four spiritual steps—reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation—that came to be known as lectio divina (literally, “divine reading”). This process is a slow, contemplative way of praying with the Scriptures that enables the Word of God to become a means of union with God. The four steps, with their classical Latin titles, are:

**STEP ONE:**
Lectio – Listening to God’s Word

**STEP TWO:**
Meditatio – Reflecting and pondering on God’s Word

**STEP THREE:**
Oratio – Praying from the heart in response to what God asks of me

**STEP FOUR:**
Contemplatio – Resting in God’s presence

Lectio divina has no other goal than spending time with God through the medium of God’s Word. In doing this, there will be a gentle oscillation between the inner, spiritual activity of, on the one hand, reading, reflecting, and praying, and on the other, of receptivity. The spiritual activity is not outward, but inward, taking us down into the depths of the soul, where the Holy Spirit is transforming our hearts to that of Christ.

And in the receptivity phase—contemplation—we cease from interior spiritual doing and learn simply to be, to rest in God’s loving presence. Just as we constantly move back and forth in our public lives between speaking and listening, questioning and reflecting, so in our spiritual lives we must learn to move back and forth gracefully between spiritual practice and the refreshment of simply being in God’s presence. Lectio divina teaches us to delight in the different modalities—active and receptive—of experiencing God. In the gentle back-and-forth between spiritual activity and receptivity embodied in the lectio divina process, we are united ever more closely to God.
Growing in Holiness
Through the Eucharist

"I want to love and be loved." "I want to provide for my family." "I want to use my gifts and talents." "I want to make the world a better place." Hopes and dreams, our deep desires, are an essential part of human life. They hold life together as the years unfold. They help to tell us who we are and where we are going. What is your hope? What is your dream?

Do you ever say to yourself, “I want to be holy”? Maybe not in so many words. But the longing for holiness is a very true and human longing. The desire to live the Christian life—fully and splendidly, not just a little bit—is a longing for holiness. The desire to imitate God, and to walk in love as Christ loved us (Ephesians 5:1–2), is the desire for holiness. The hope that repentance, forgiveness, and renewal is truly possible for me—no matter what my circumstances or how tarnished my past may be—is a hope for holiness.

The Eucharist can help you to grow in holiness day by day. The following reflection is intended to help you renew your own desire for holiness, and to show how God can satisfy that desire through the Eucharist.

THE CHURCH: CALLED TO HOLINESS

God alone is holy. Yet God has willed to share his very life with us. Through the grace of the sacraments and by the exercise of Christian virtue, we gradually come to share in the holiness of God. We become like him by living the Christian life.

The Church is holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church. Jesus promised he would send the Holy Spirit to remain with us always, and we believe in his promise. At the same time we know that the Church includes people with many rough edges, sinners as well as saints. The Church, by her very nature, embraces sinners and calls them to conversion. Because the Church is a