



Saint Mary  
of the  
Assumption  
Parish  
Manayunk

# Connections

## An Experience of Catholic Spiritual Growth

Week 12 of Ordinary Time

Liturgical Year C

Luke 9: 18 – 24

Catechetical Topic: Overview of the Catholic Church

### Part I: We Gather

(Approximately 20 Minutes)

#### A\*. Gathering with Questions and Activities

- 1\*. Spend some time getting caught up with each other since the group's last meeting.
2. Share with the group an experience you have had of putting your faith into action since the last meeting. Feel free to share with one another any of the "Activities for Serving" that you may have completed since your last meeting.
3. As a group, develop a list of the top ten causes of suffering in the world.

#### B. Introduction to this Session

The leader will give a brief overview of this session.

#### C\*. Opening Prayer

A member of the group leads the group in an opening prayer.

### Part II: We Learn

(Approximately 60 Minutes)

#### A\*. The Gospel with Questions and Activities

The Gospel can be read in a variety of ways and several times: by one person, by the whole group, in parts or silently.

**Luke 9: 18 – 24**

Narrator: Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them:

Jesus: Who do the crowds say that I am?

Narrator: They said in reply:

Disciples: John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'

Narrator: Then he said to them:

Jesus: But who do you say that I am?

Narrator: Peter said in reply:

Peter: The Christ of God.

Narrator: He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said:

Jesus: The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Narrator: Then he said to all:

Jesus: If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

1\*. Take several minutes to reflect on the Gospel in silence. After this period of silence, freely discuss the Gospel among yourselves. Share with one another your first impressions, insights, feelings, questions, etc. that you have about the Gospel.

2. Why is it so important that Peter identifies Jesus as “the Christ of God” in this passage?

## **B\*. Commentary on the Gospel with Questions and Activities**

### **Explanation Point**

Jesus reveals that he will suffer and be rejected. The same will happen to his disciples.

In this week’s Gospel passage, Luke presents us with an important moment in the ministry of Jesus. He signals this by starting the story with Jesus in prayer. Jesus always prays at the most important moments of his life. Jesus then asks his disciples who the people say he is. Since the beginning of the Gospel, everyone has been asking this question. The disciples offer the standard answers: Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah or some other ancient prophet. Now Jesus asks the more important question: who do the disciples believe he is. This is much more personal. Every disciple of Jesus in every age must answer this question. Each one of us must answer it. Peter speaks for the others and declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God’s special agent in the world. Jesus’ response is somewhat confusing. Peter has given the right answer but Jesus rebukes him and forbids the disciples to tell others this information about his identity. Peter has the right answer, but his understanding of the role of the Messiah is wrong. Jesus must teach about the role of the Messiah before they can tell other people about him. Peter thinks the Messiah will be a glorious king but Jesus teaches that the Messiah will suffer and be rejected. This is the first of three times that Jesus predicts his rejection, suffering and death. This is a statement of tremendous weight that will change the lives of Jesus’ disciples. The idea of a suffering Messiah is shocking and will have important implications. Jesus tells them that they too must carry their own crosses – that they must embrace suffering in their own lives. These crosses and sufferings must be born daily if they are going to follow Jesus. This is what the disciples will learn as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem to offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

- 1\*. Imagine that you are one of Jesus' twelve disciples. How would you feel after hearing Jesus' prediction of his Passion and his teaching on embracing the crosses of life?

### **Application Point**

Accept the daily crosses in your life and allow them to help you to grow.

Suffering, disappointment, failure and sorrow are a part of human life. Jesus promised that these would come to his disciples. People suffer because of health issues, marital difficulties, the choices of their children, careers and the church. All these and more can cause us pain, sorrow and suffering. This passage teaches us to accept these daily crosses in our lives and allow them to help us to grow. We can start by developing a proper understanding of suffering. Suffering is bad and painful – God does not want people to suffer. We should not seek out suffering. In fact, we should try to reduce and avoid suffering in our own lives and we are called to try to alleviate suffering in the lives of others. Despite our best efforts, we live in a fallen world and cannot eliminate suffering. We must accept the sufferings that life brings us with the right attitude. We are called to unite our sufferings with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and offer them to God for the redemption of the world. Suffering is bad but it can serve a good purpose if we make it redemptive. The sufferings that we experience can also help us grow to spiritual maturity. These sufferings teach us to depend more on God and his grace. They point us to a deeper and more intense prayer life. Our own sufferings make us more compassionate for others. When we see others suffering our hearts will go out to them and we will be able to empathize with their experience of suffering. The crosses that we carry should motivate us to go out and help others to carry their own crosses. We can come alongside others and support them in times of suffering. God does not will suffering but he allows us to suffer so that we can grow, help others and participate with Jesus in the redemption of the world.

2. Share with the group something in your life that causes you to suffer. Allow your fellow group members to come alongside you and offer you support in this area.

### **C. Catechetical Theme with Questions and Activities**

#### **Transition Point**

Religious life is intentionally structured to embrace the cross.

Throughout the history of the Church, individuals and groups have always responded to Jesus' call to discipleship. Following Jesus has always had a sacrificial dimension. In order to imitate the life of Jesus, his followers knew that they should embrace their own crosses, their own personal sufferings in order to unite them with the suffering of Jesus. In this way, they were participating with Jesus in the redemption of the world. Some people wanted to completely dedicate their lives to the imitation of Jesus. They went beyond accepting the particular sufferings that life brought them as crosses and developed a lifestyle that was intentionally sacrificial. By embracing voluntary poverty, celibacy and obedience, these people deliberately structured their life as a sacrificial offering to God. They embraced poverty because they wanted to sacrifice material goods. They embraced celibacy because by sacrificing the great good of marriage, they could channel their emotional energy to God alone. They embraced obedience to sacrifice freedom of will. They wanted in every aspect of life to embrace the cross daily and deliberately. Communities of like-minded men and woman were formed in order to live this sacrificial lifestyle. This way of life came to be known as religious life and the people who lived it were monks and nuns. Today, many people continue to live this life of sacrifice. Today's reading teaches us that we are all called to embrace our daily crosses. Sacrifice and suffering are not simply for people in religious orders. They are for all followers of Jesus. Religious men and women provide models for how to do this but they cannot do it for us. By following their lead, we too can embrace the sufferings and sacrifices of our own lives and unite them with Jesus on the cross. In this way, we become true followers of Jesus Christ.

1. What do you think inspires people to live a sacrificial lifestyle as a disciple of Jesus?

#### **Catechetical Point**

Religious communities of men and women emerged in the early Church.

One of the distinctive features of the Catholic Church is the emergence of communities of men and women who have been so inspired by the life of Jesus Christ that they withdrew from society. Together they lived a communal life dedicated to the worship of God through prayer and sacrifice. Initially these people were mostly hermits who chose to live a life of solitude in a loose community of other hermits. This development began in the deserts of Egypt and spread across the Near East and Europe. These people took vows including celibacy and radical poverty. After Christianity became an approved religion in the Roman Empire, there were fewer opportunities to imitate Jesus by becoming a martyr. These individuals found another way to imitate Jesus by living a sacrificial life of penance and prayer. All Christians are called to holiness but these people wanted to live out their commitment to Christ in a more intense way. This was not a matter of spiritual pride but rather a deeply personal calling to pursue holiness. They did not feel that their way of life was superior to that of others but rather that this was what God was calling them to do. They lived ascetic lives – lives of self-denial and the deliberate foregoing of pleasures. The Scriptures portray Jesus as emptying himself for the sake of others. These early Christians wanted to do the same, emptying themselves of even legitimate pleasures. They lived disciplined, simple and deeply spiritual lives. These men and women were the precursors to present day religious orders. The spirituality, lifestyle and vision that motivated these communities survives today in religious communities like the Franciscans, Dominicans, Salesians, Jesuits and many others. They imitate Jesus in the same radical way.



## **Part IV: We Serve**

**(Approximately 10 Minutes)**

### **A\*. Activities for Serving**

The following are activities you can do to respond to this session and put your faith into action. Please try to complete at least one of these activities before the next session.

1. Accept the daily crosses in your life and allow them to help you to grow.
2. This week, deliberately give up something you enjoy doing and offer it to God as a sacrifice.
3. Do something to support someone who you know is suffering.

### **B. Summary and Brief Evaluation of this Session**

The members of the group offer a short summary of the session. They share with each other any final feelings, thoughts, comments or announcements.

### **C\*. Closing Prayer**

#### **1\*. Final Prayer**

A member of the group leads the group in a closing prayer.

#### **2\*. Our Father**

---

### **For More Activities During the Week**

#### **1. Other Readings from Week 12 of Ordinary Time**

Here are the other Scripture passages for this week's Mass.

Zechariah 12: 10 – 11; 13: 1

Galatians 2: 26 – 29

#### **2. *Catechism Of The Catholic Church (CCC)***

Here are some passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that are relevant to this week's Gospel passage and catechetical topic.

CCC 1434 – 1439

This section focuses on the many forms of penance.

CCC 2599 – 1606

This section focuses on the prayer of Jesus.

CCC 914–924

This section focuses on the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

CCC 925–933

This section focuses on aspects of religious life.

#### **3. Prayer**

Continue to use Taizé prayer during the week.

#### **4. Liturgy of the Hours**

The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of the Church and it consecrates the different parts of the day to God. You might use evening prayer or morning prayer as these are considered the most significant hours of the day.

#### **5. Other Resources**

Check out [www.connectionsresource.com](http://www.connectionsresource.com) for more activities and reflections pertaining to this week's session.

### **Personal Notes**