



**SAINT PAUL
THE APOSTLE**

A MINISTRY OF THE PAULIST FATHERS

JOURNEYING TOGETHER TO BETHLEHEM

REFLECTING ON THE INSIGHTS FROM OUR PARISH SYNODAL PROCESS




Advent Small Groups 2022

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community

Los Angeles

sp-apostle.org



This Christmas season comes at the culmination of a unique year in our parish. Last spring, we accepted Pope Francis' extraordinary invitation to the worldwide Catholic Church to enter into a global listening process. This represents the longest and broadest consultation of all the faithful ever undertaken in the history of the Catholic Church.

Our Synod Committee wanted to take advantage of this moment in the Church's history to learn as much as we could about the thoughts and beliefs of our faith community as well as other practicing Catholics, and those who have left the Church. After months of parsing through over one hundred pages of comments, the Synod committee presented its report, *Alive In The Spirit: Insights from Our Synodal Process*, to the parish in early November. It will take time for our community to process and act on what we have learned about each other and about our Church.

These four weeks of Advent provide us with an opportunity to continue listening and learning from one another. This booklet is meant as a companion piece to the full report. In this booklet you will find the readings and faith sharing questions for Weeks 1 and 4 of Advent. Weeks 2 and 3 are contained inside the Report. If you have not yet received a copy of the report, please contact the parish office.

As we approach the birth of Christ you are invited to discern, pray and share with the others in your faith sharing group how the Holy Spirit might be inviting us all to become Church together in a new way.

Before Each Meeting Review Sharing Guidelines

1. Please show up on time.
2. What is shared in the group stays in the group.
3. Everyone's input is valuable. At the same time, no one is required to speak.
4. Please only share on the level at which you are comfortable.
5. Please limit your sharing to a few minutes and wait until everyone has had the opportunity to share before you share again.
6. Only one person speaks at a time.
7. Please, no cross talking, which means no commenting on another person's share. "I" statements are better than "you" statements.
8. Please, no side conversations. Value one another by listening.
9. Please silence your cell phone and put it away. If you need to make a call or text, please take it outside or mute your speaker.

Opening Prayer

We bless you Lord for our calling, for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart.
A heart that rejoices in your coming, a heart sustained by your Spirit, a heart encouraged by fellow disciples.
May there grow in each of our hearts the disciple's willingness to learn, and the disciple's joy in becoming a
medium of your grace. **AMEN**

From "Prayers for Parish Groups," Harrington and Kavanagh

At the End of Each Meeting

Closing Prayer

In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in unity,
that our praise and worship might echo in our individual lives
and through our community.

In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in mission,
that the hope and renewal we discover together
deepens our call to discipleship in new and invigorating ways.

In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in service,
that the path we follow might lead us from the stable
to the mission and ministry of Jesus. **AMEN**



Journeying Together to Bethlehem

The Call to Journey

First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2022
Week One Meetings (November 21-26)

Provisions for the Journey

Second Sunday of Advent, December 4, 2022
Week Two Meetings (November 28-December 3)

Fellow Travelers on the Journey

Third Sunday of Advent, December 11, 2022
Week Three Meetings (December 5 – 10)

At the Stable

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18, 2022
Week Four Meetings (December 12 – 17)

ADVENT WEEK ONE

The Call to Journey

I rejoiced because they said to me
We will go up to the house of the Lord
Psalm 122

Opening Prayer (p.3)

Reading 1

Is 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come,
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest mountain
and raised above the hills.

All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths."

For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.

O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord!

The Word of the Lord

Responsorial Psalm


Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."

And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.



Jerusalem, built as a city
with compact unity.
To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.


Reflection

On June 7, 2013, Pope Francis addressed students of Jesuit schools in Italy and Albania. In the general audience hall, looking out at 9,000 students, alumni, parents and teachers, Francis held up his prepared speech and said: I'm supposed to read this to you, but that could be "a tad boring." Let me give you just the highlights and then take some questions from you, he said.

Accounts of the encounter report that the event's presenters seemed hesitant about the Pope's request, saying that no questions had been prepared in advance. Francis waved them away and took 10 unscripted questions from students in the hall.

A teenage boy told the Pope that he was trying hard to believe in God and be faithful, but that he often struggled with doubt. "What can you say to help me and others like me?" he asked the Pope.

The life of faith is a journey, Francis answered.



“Journeying is an art because if we’re always in a hurry, we get tired and don’t arrive at our journey’s goal,” he said. “If we stop, we don’t go forward, and we also miss the goal. Journeying is precisely the art of looking toward the horizon, thinking where I want to go but also enduring the fatigue of the journey, which is sometimes difficult. . . . There are dark days, even days when we fail, even days when we fall . . . but always think of this: Don’t be afraid of failures. Don’t be afraid of falling. What matters in the art of journeying isn’t not falling but not staying down. Get up right away and continue going forward. This is what’s beautiful: This is working every day, this is journeying as humans. But also, it’s bad walking alone: It’s bad and boring. Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us, that helps us. It helps us to arrive precisely at that goal, that ‘there’ where we’re supposed to arrive.”

Dennis Coday, National Catholic Reporter, October 22, 2012

Take a moment for silent reflection on the readings before sharing begins. If appropriate, consider inviting the group to share in two’s before sharing with the whole group.

Faith Sharing Questions

1. In the reflection above, the Pope mentions that journeying is the art of looking toward the horizon and thinking about where you want to go. Where do you want to journey in your Christian faith this Advent?
2. Pope Francis also says above that “Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us, helps us. It helps us to arrive precisely at that goal, that ‘there’ where we’re supposed to arrive.” How has community been a positive force in your personal faith journey?
3. Where do you currently see our parish community on its journey of faith? What faith horizon would you like to point our community towards?
4. How has your faith “moved” over the past few years? How has the Church “moved” over the past few years?
5. In the first reading God’s mediation between the many peoples leads them to beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. In an age of religious and secular polarization such as ours, how can we, the Body of Christ, lead our world in ways of peace, listening and negotiation?

Closing Prayer, (p.3)

Note for Next Week’s Faith Sharing

Please remember to bring your copy of **Alive in the Spirit: Insights from our Synodal Process** to next week’s meeting. Please read the chapter on Belief and Faith Practices (p.15-29) before next week’s meeting.
Thank you.



ADVENT WEEK TWO
Provisions for the Journey
Beliefs and Faith Practices

Opening Prayer (p.3)

We invite you to use the faith sharing questions on page 30 of the Synod Report.

Closing Prayer, (p.3)

Note for Next Week's Faith Sharing

Please remember to bring your copy of **Alive in the Spirit: Insights from our Synodal Process** to next week's meeting. Please read the chapter on our St. Paul's Community (p.33-57) before next week's meeting. Thank you.



ADVENT WEEK THREE
Fellow Travelers on the Journey
Our Community

Opening Prayer (p.3)

We invite you to use the faith sharing questions on page 30 of the Synod Report.

Closing Prayer, (p.3)



ADVENT WEEK FOUR

At the Stable

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Rom 1:7*

Reading 1

Is 7:10-14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying:
Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God;
let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky!
But Ahaz answered,
“I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!”
Then Isaiah said:
Listen, O house of David!
Is it not enough for you to weary people,
must you also weary my God?
Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign:
the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall name him Emmanuel.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6.

R. (7c and 10b) Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness;
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD?
or who may stand in his holy place?
One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean,
who desires not what is vain.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD,
a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks for him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.



Reading 2

Rom 1:1-7

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God,
which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,
the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh,
but established as Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness
through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Through him we have received the grace of apostleship,
to bring about the obedience of faith,
for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles,
among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;
to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy.
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ

Alleluia


Mt 1:23


R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mt 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.
When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,
but before they lived together,
she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.
Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly.
Such was his intention when, behold,
the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,
“Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.”





All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means “God is with us.”
When Joseph awoke,
he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him
and took his wife into his home.

**Take a moment for silent reflection on the readings before sharing begins.
If appropriate, consider inviting the group to share in two’s before sharing with
the whole group.**

Faith Sharing Questions

1. In our first reading God sent Isaiah to Ahaz, the king of Judah, to offer him a message of comfort, suggesting that Ahaz ask God for any sign he might choose. Ahaz refuses out of misplaced fear, yet God sends Ahaz a sign anyway. What image of God does this story reveal to you? How does it relate to the Christmas story?
2. Are your outward Christmas preparations helping or impeding your inner preparations?
3. In the second reading St. Paul says that we have received the grace of apostleship. What does that mean to you?
4. What is your favorite part of the Christmas story? Why?
5. How has this Advent faith sharing experience been for you? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about our community?

Closing Prayer, (p.3)

Arise,
Shine,
for your light has come!
Is 60:1

May the grace and peace of Emmanuel,
God With Us,
Bless your Christmas and New Year

