

Small community Advent 2013... week 7

Dec. 16 to 22

(maximum 2 hours... but it can be less)

1. Greeting..... Play three minutes of quiet and light the last purple. Think of the joy of the whole Church who celebrate the presence of the Lord, amongst us, in the flesh!

2. To start: Christmas is here. Joseph and Mary will be looking for a place to rest and deliver their child. Is your home ready? Perhaps share with the group how this year you may feel more prepared to receive the Christ child in the home of your heart! How have you grown in your faith, the last while? What sign may you have received, as a star, pointing to His presence?

3. Lectio Divina: a) Matthew 1: 18 - 24
b) Psalm 24

The gospel today, is no doubt a very early Christian memory of the wonderful events around the birth of Jesus. There were no video cameras to film all of this. There was no skype system to announce all of this. This gospel is without doubt a personal testimony coming from Joseph and Mary, which was communicated to the Christian community. How would we know about Joseph's dream, except that he told someone. How would we know about the difficulties this young couple ran into, except that they spoke about it to their friends who asked them personal questions about Jesus. These memories of the early life of Jesus, come to us from mouth to ear, from one generation of Christians to another, and finally put on paper by Matthew. A lovely story based upon what Joseph told his friends. This is one of the rare things we know of this wonderful man.

What would all of this been like for Joseph and Mary ? It must have been quite frightening!

The psalm speaks to us of "righteous people" who seek the Lord with clean hands and pure heart. We are the same. Our hands are dirty, and our hearts sometimes distracted, but we seek the face of the Lord. Mary and Joseph lived this psalm well.

1. Read the lectio Divina guide, before reading the bible text.

(I prefer people use their own bibles, rather than us copying a text)

2. Do the Lectio Divina

4. After the "lectio" is ended, think about how you plan to serve the Lord this week. Play some peaceful, inspirational CD of music

5. Time of community prayer together Let's be quiet for a few moments as we pray together. Pray for the members of your little group, that this season of Christmas might be blessed. You might want to spontaneously pray a blessing for each member of the group. Finish with a prayer to Mary.

6. Have someone read the text below, about "Daily Catholic Religious practices". (If there is time, you can briefly discuss it, but take it home to think about)

Daily Catholic religious practices: Raise your eyes frequently to heaven

Then looking up to heaven he sighed (Mark 7:34)

The last religious practice is one which St. Francis de Sales wrote about frequently in His book, "The Devout Life". Our lives are busy, and much goes on. Some people today say, they are so busy, they have no time to pray. Nothing has changed. People told St. Francis the same thing, 500 hundred years ago. The cows needed to be fed, food prepared, etc. But, he insisted, **we do have time**, but we miss the obvious moments because our faith is weak. St. Francis insisted that through the day, we should "frequently raise our minds and hearts to the Lord".

There are plenty of moments to pray through the day. You are in the car for 1 hour caught in traffic. Why not turn off the nonsense radio, and be quiet. Put in a tape of Gregorian chant. You are in the bus, the metro or walking down the street. There is a 30 minute gap to pray and walk. You have a busy schedule at work, you like to rush home the minute work is ended. Take 20 minutes in your office, when work ends, and sit quietly praying. Why not? Or perhaps you arrive at work early, because you like to beat traffic. Why not stop somewhere quiet, before entering the busy world of the office.

Besides this, St. Francis de Sales, suggests that even during work hours, or when brushing your teeth, when preparing meals or when doing work around the house, you should take a "prayer break" for 1 minute. This is not a "coffee break", but a "prayer break". You stop. You pause. You breathe deeply and mindfully, then you pray to the Lord. Raise your thoughts, for a moment, to heavenly things. Breathe deeply and allow the Holy Spirit to calm your agitation in order to recover inner peace. And then... you return to your tasks, refreshed. Simple.

We live very agitated lives. The moment we have a spare second, we flip to the cell phone, we check for messages, we text... we fidget. We are a fidget society. Defined, fidget means... *constant little motions of restlessness due to an agitated spirit*. Rather than being peaceful, our minds are thinking of what to do. Restless. No wonder we are stressed! Rest and relax in the Lord, says St. Francis de S. You have a moment: tell the Lord you love Him. You have a moment: think of the joy of being alive. You have a moment: breathe the quiet of the Holy Spirit.

Some people like to keep a rosary in their pocket, as a reminder. When they put their hand in their pocket, and feel the rosary, this reminds them to raise their thoughts to the Lord. It is a moment to say a brief: "Lord have mercy on me". "Lord bless my work".

This simple Catholic practice brings peace. Living prayerful lives brings inner peace. St. Paul says: "Pray constantly". This is what he meant... raise our minds and thoughts often to the Lord.