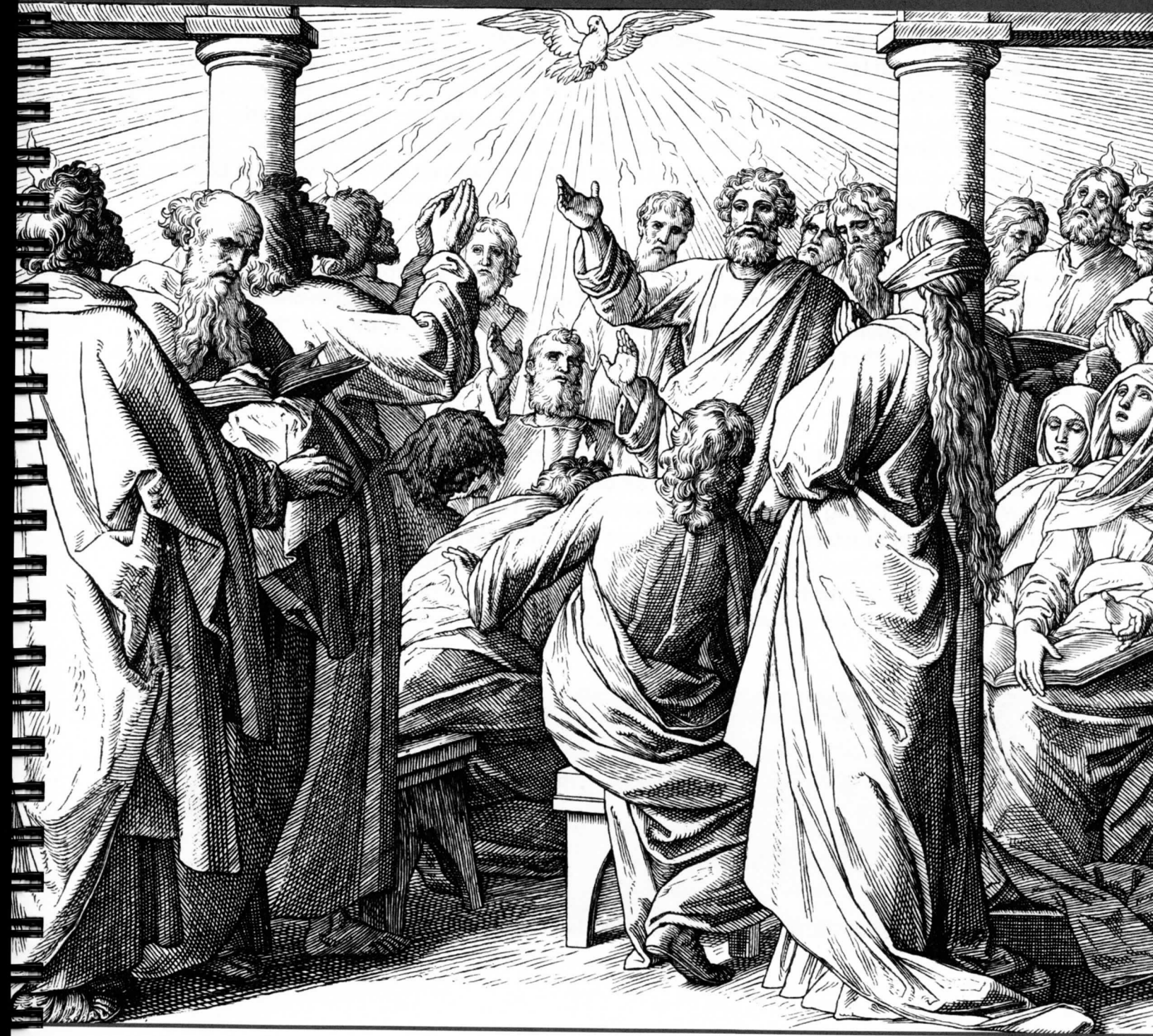


Session Eleven: Invitation to Discipleship

If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! 1 Corinthians 9:16



Session Eleven: Invitation to Discipleship

HOW WILL WE RESPOND TO CHRIST'S CALL?

Session Introduction

The death and Resurrection of Jesus places before us a choice: believe and follow the one who died and rose again for us or turn away from him and pursue other things. This choice is the same that Adam and Eve faced in the garden, it is the same that Abraham and Moses faced, the same that the disciples faced on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The list of things that we could pursue today is nothing new: wealth, power, fame, comfort, pleasure, security, honor. Jesus, on the other hand, offers his disciples the cross that must be taken up daily, but with the promise of eternal glory, divine life restored.

The apostles and the early Church recognized this. They knew that following Christ was not going to lead to worldly power and possessions. Each of the eleven apostles died as martyrs or in exile, being faithful to the one for whom they had left everything. They knew the choice before them was either to follow Christ with their entire lives or to abandon him and reject what he had done for them.

The apostles also knew that the choice to follow Jesus was not just for them. They were tasked by Jesus to bring the Good News – the news of the death and resurrection of Jesus himself – to the entire world. Starting at Pentecost, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter and the apostles went out proclaiming this Good News to people, telling them about how Jesus has saved them from sin and death and given them the opportunity to live a life transformed by God's grace. The core message of the Church, from the very beginning, has been nothing other than the person of Jesus and the story of God's great love for humanity.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 3

Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world. This treasure, received from the apostles, has been faithfully guarded by their successors. All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.

As we approach the end of this Bible study, it is important for us to recognize that we have followed the same outline that the apostles and the early Church used to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ:

1. God created us to be in relationship with him, to “make [us] share in his own blessed life” (CCC 1)
2. We broke that relationship through sin – yes, through the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, but also our own personal sins, which alienate us from God who time and again calls us back to him.
3. Jesus, the Son of God, redeemed us and has given us the opportunity to live a life of grace now and in eternity.
4. Jesus invites us to follow him as his disciples within the Church. What is our response to what God has done?

This core proclamation of the Good News, what the Church has called the *kerygma*, is what has captivated the entire world for 2000 years and led men to leave behind everything that the world has to offer in order to follow the crucified and risen Jesus into a life of adventure – a life pursuing goodness, virtue, beauty, and truth. Each of us must answer on our own, and answer every single day, “Will I follow Christ? Will I serve God?”

I. Opening Prayer

Pray together as a group:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your Word,
and understand and do your will.*

*Do not hide your commandments from me, but open my eyes,
that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.*

Speak to me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

*On you I set my hope, O my God,
that you shall enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge;
not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them;
For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness,
and from you comes every good deed and every gift.*

Amen.

II. Reading Scripture

Read aloud as a group the following passages.

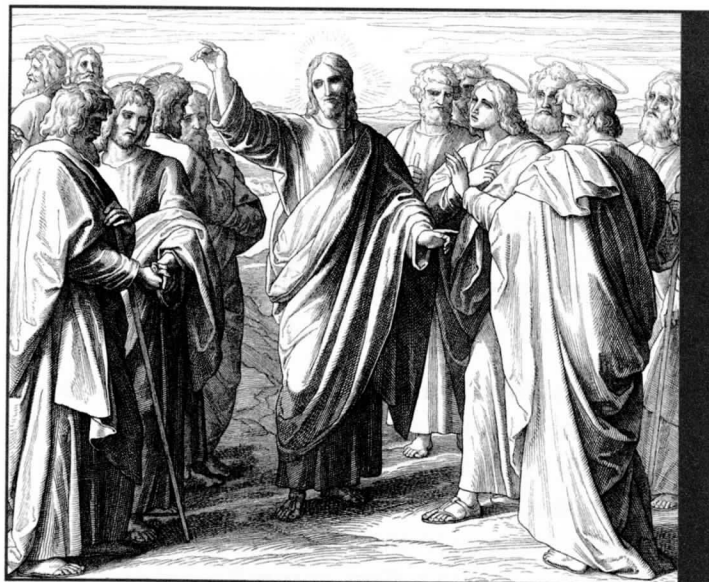
After reading each passage, answer the questions together in order to draw out some of the key ideas.

Some main ideas for each passage are listed in the back of this book to help with your discussion if needed.

1. Matthew 28:16-20
(The Great Commission)



- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- This passage is known as the Great Commission – what does Jesus command the apostles to do?
- Does this command still carry weight for the Church today?



2. Acts 2:37-45
(St. Peter Preaching on Pentecost)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What was the reaction of the people to St. Peter's preaching?
- What does St. Peter tell the people to do now that they've heard the Good News?
- What are some of the distinctive characteristics of the early Christian community?

3. Acts 17: 22-34 (St. Paul preaching to the Athenians)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What techniques does St. Paul use to draw in his audience of highly educated Athenians?
- What are the main ideas of St. Paul's preaching here? What is the final point that he confronts his audience with?
- What are the different reactions of the Athenians listening to St. Paul?

4. 1 Peter 1:3-9 (The Goal of our Faith)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What does this passage say is the "goal of your faith"?

III. Applying Scripture

Based on your reading, discuss the following questions as they apply to your life. Depending on how much time you have available, you may not be able to discuss all of these questions. If necessary, choose one question to discuss in a significant way.

- 1 A typical fault that many men today fall into is the tendency to be noncommittal. We are hesitant to make a decision, commit to it, and do everything necessary to pursue it to the end. The message of the Good News does not allow us to respond without commitment. The preaching of St. Peter, St. Paul, and the first Christians led people to make a choice to repent, believe in the Good News, be baptized, and live as committed disciples of Jesus. **Have you made a firm commitment to follow Christ with your whole life, leaving behind sin, and surrendering your future to his plans? Are there things that are holding you back from making such a commitment? What struggles do you face to stay faithful to the life of a disciple?**

- 2 Christianity is not meant to be shared passively. Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus is an active work of disciples who have been so transformed by their living relationship with Christ that they cannot help but share what they have received. In today's world, men are often pressured, subtly or overtly, to stay quiet about our inner, spiritual lives or about how God has worked in our lives. **How has God worked in your life? How would you describe your relationship with God? Does your relationship with God compel you to share it with others? Are you able to see how your life's story connects to the story of the Good News, the *kerygma*, as described above?**

"The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn."

Pope St. Paul VI

- 3 We live today in a post-Christian society which, although formed by Christianity, now rejects and discards the essentials of Christian faith. The idea of “evangelizing” or spreading the Good News makes many Catholics uneasy because we’ve absorbed our society’s understanding that faith should be kept private and not shared. **Has this been your experience? Are you comfortable sharing your faith and your relationship with God? What are ways that you can evangelize those around you – in your home, your community, your workplace, etc.?**

- 4 One reason the early Church grew in a hostile society was the fact that Christians lived an authentic life: their radical proclamation about Jesus was matched by a similarly radical way of life. They lived lives of virtue that were an incredible witness to those around them, and they were most particularly marked out by their love for one another. **If someone were to observe your words and actions on a regular day, would they know that you are a Christian man? What would a radical life of faith look like today? In what ways do you have to change your life to be more in line with the faith you profess?**

IV. Concrete Resolution

Write down for yourself one concrete way that you are going to apply today's Scripture Study to your life.

Example:

Share with someone close to you how God is working in your life and how your life has been transformed by your relationship with Christ. If you are unsure if you will have an opportunity to share this with someone, spend time in prayer asking God to present such an opportunity.

V. Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind
and meditate on them day and night,
persevering in prayer, always on watch.
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,
and to show us not only how to understand it,
but how to put it into practice,
and to obtain spiritual gifts
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.
Amen.*

Additional Readings from Scripture

These optional readings build on the themes discussed in this session. You are encouraged to read and pray with them on your own in between this meeting and the next.

Acts 7:1-54 *"My brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he had settled in Haran, and said to him, 'Go forth from your land and [from] your kinsfolk to the land that I will show you.'" St. Stephen, one of the first deacons, proclaims the Good News through the story of salvation history starting with Abraham*

1 Timothy 3:14-15 *"... the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." Paul notes an essential quality of the Church as a place where God's truth can be found.*

Acts 4:32-3 *"Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common." From its beginnings, believers understood that they shared a profound unity in the Holy Spirit, even to the sharing of their possessions.*

Romans 12:4-5 *"For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Here St. Paul again compares the Church to a single body united in Christ.*

Revelation 21:1-4 *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people... and death shall be no more.'" We are given a glimpse of the Church as it will be in its fulfillment, the renewed human race living in the presence of God.*