



# **Renewing Our Baptisms**

## **Journeying Toward Easter Renewal**

**Participant Guide**  
**Lent Small Groups 2024**

## Optional Background Stuff -- Feel Free to Skip!

Welcome to your small group!

This small group guide is designed to get you and your group into prayerful and meaningful conversations about Lent, faith, and life with as little preparation and fuss as possible. There's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all group guide, so **it's up to you and your group to find what works and leave out what doesn't**. This guide is just an outline of time-tested suggestions for what often works really well for small groups. The sign of your success as a small group isn't whether you followed the guide to the letter but whether everyone walked away feeling nourished and inspired by your community-within-community.

After time for introductions, group prayer, and silent reflection, each week's discussion will focus on the that Sunday's second reading. There are some questions you'll be asking yourselves every week, like "What stood out to me about this passage?" There are questions specific to each week that might take your group more deeply into the meaning of the reading. And there are some questions that will help you wrap up your conversation. **But the most important questions are the ones you bring to the group.** This guide is meant to inspire sharing, not to get in your way.

**You won't get through all the discussion questions.** That's okay. Your goal is to have a great conversation with your group, listening together for that still small voice of God that can speak in so many ways. Trust yourselves, make sure all voices are heard, and make space for silence. That's all you really need to do.

I'll leave you with a "recipe" written by parishioner Staci Roccasalva, codesigner of this small group format. May God use this Lent time of repentance to prepare us all to renew our baptismal covenant at Easter!

Peace!

Jon Stotts

### **Staci's recipe for a small group that people attend and like just fine:**

People show up, but they are somewhat distracted - and have some "expectations" (but with mostly great intentions!) People share their name, age, and stage of life. People talk about the number of kids they have. People share the 'stats' of their life. This is what feels comfortable. The same people contribute every week. There is prayer. There are readings. There is time for reflection. People look at the clock. They may expect to meet someone they click with instantly, or may expect to have a giant ah-ha moment. None of this is wrong, and we are all doing our best, but consider that if a small group is meant to be meaningful and help you transform your heart during this season, it might take more than checking the boxes.

### **Staci's recipe for a transformational community:**

People show up on time, even early, and with an open heart. People made time for 10 minutes of silence and prayer before the meeting even started. Group members have less expectations and only intend to spend quality time in community...People bring a spirit of wonder: "I wonder what this week will bring?" An attitude of: How can I serve and participate in this group? What will I learn? What will I be moved to share? What small seed of faith will speak to me today? People will share "where their heart is these days." People listen to each other deeply. Someone needs a Kleenex because they were so vulnerable and honest, and then everyone feels less alone because someone was willing to share their heart. Which inspires more sharing. And all of the sudden, this small group becomes a place of hope and trust and knowing that this is a place in the world where we can be less than perfect. People share their virtues they could use prayer for (less praying about outcomes). There is meaningful prayer. We take away some inspiration for how to stay in the moment, give our concerns to the foot of the cross, and everyone is sad it's over - that went by so fast!

## Optional Background Stuff -- Feel Free to Skip!

### What is baptismal renewal?

If you've been attending Christ the King for awhile, you have probably experienced Fr. Dexter's unique renewing of baptismal promises, when he processes through the church and liberally douses everyone with baptismal water.

But did you know that Lent, derived from the Old English word for "springtime," originally served as a time of preparation for adults, known as catechumens or converts, who were getting ready for Easter baptism? This period involved practices like prayer, fasting, and giving to those in need. However, as fewer adults and more infants were baptized, the original baptismal focus of Lent became somewhat obscured, and it evolved into a season of Catholics "giving things up." After the Second Vatican Council, the Church called for a return to Lent's baptismal roots, but it's taken us a while to learn what this means.

So, each Easter, we're invited to reaffirm the commitments made at our baptism, often made on our behalf by parents and godparents. We reaffirm our allegiance to Christ and our communion with the church throughout the world. We renounce Satan, and we profess our faith. And then we get doused with baptismal water, renewing our covenant with God in Christ through the power of the Spirit once more.

What if we centered our Lenten observance on renewing our baptismal promises? This small group series will explore this idea using the second readings from each Sunday Mass. Through these discussions, we'll delve into the deeper meaning of baptism, viewing it not just as a ceremony for infants but as a journey of following Christ through death and resurrection. Our goal is that, through our participation in these discussions and prayers each week, our Lenten journey toward Easter will culminate in an experience of renewed hope and confidence in God's trustworthiness.

DO YOU REJECT SATAN?  
AND ALL HIS WORKS?  
AND ALL HIS EMPTY SHOW?



DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD,  
THE FATHER ALMIGHTY,  
CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH?

DO YOU BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST,  
HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD,  
WHO WAS BORN  
OF THE VIRGIN MARY,  
SUFFERED DEATH AND WAS BURIED,  
ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD  
AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND  
OF THE FATHER?

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH,  
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS,  
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS,  
THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY,  
AND LIFE EVERLASTING?



# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #1

### Attendees

*List all names of the group members.*

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

Grant, almighty God,  
through the yearly observance 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.

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person shares their name and why they signed up for a small group. Additionally, feel free to let the group know if there are any topics you'd prefer to avoid or if there are particular ways you'd like to engage with the material. What ground rules or guidelines will help you have a successful small group experience?*

## Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

### A Tip for the Group

Silence can be an important and challenging component of a positive small group experience. We need silence to collect our ourselves, to reflect on what we're experiencing, and to let the words we have spoken breathe.

To create fruitful expectations around this time of silent reflection, please openly set a timer on your phone for 2 – 5 minutes. Begin the time of silent reflection by reading the prompt and the reflection questions below out loud.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent - 1 Peter 3:18-22

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Beloved:

Christ suffered for sins once,  
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,  
that he might lead you to God.  
Put to death in the flesh,  
he was brought to life in the Spirit.  
In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison,  
who had once been disobedient  
while God patiently waited in the days of Noah  
during the building of the ark,  
in which a few persons, eight in all,  
were saved through water.  
This prefigured baptism, which saves you now.  
It is not a removal of dirt from the body  
but an appeal to God for a clear conscience,  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
who has gone into heaven  
and is at the right hand of God,  
with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

## What's Going on in This Passage?

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

In this passage, St. Peter is explaining baptism to the first generation of Christians. Reminding them of the story of Noah, Peter says that being baptized is like getting on the ark in order to survive the coming flood. In his analogy, the flood that's coming is our eventual death, and also all the little deaths that we have to experience as part of living in this world. Peter thinks that the lifestyle that baptism introduces will teach us to imitate Jesus's own attitude toward death, an attitude that leads to resurrection. Since the early Christians practiced baptism by immersion, St. Peter also compares baptism to a bath that cleans our conscience with the confidence that that Jesus, who is ultimately in charge of the cosmos and all its powers, has taken responsibility for our salvation.

## Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

## First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

### A Tip for the Group

To get the discussion started, it can be useful for everyone to simply to share a word or phrase that stuck out to them from the reading. Until everyone has had a chance to speak, you might refrain from offering additional details, interpretations, or explanations at this point. This allows everyone to chime in without feeling pressure to figure it all out at once. It also helps the group to get a common sense of what seems most interesting.

## Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- For Catholics, baptism is the central sign of our renewed life in Christ. Share your baptismal story with the members of your group. Do you remember your baptism? If not, what have you learned about it from others? Where did it take place, and who was there?

- Suppose the whole purpose of our Lenten practices is to prepare ourselves to renew our baptismal relationship with Christ at Easter. How would this affect how you observe Lent? Does it change how you perceive the meaning of the Lenten season when you see it all leading up to your renewal of baptismal vows?
- In the passage above, St. Peter talks about how God waited patiently for Noah and his family to build the ark. The rite of baptism celebrates the beginning of our faith, but like Noah building the ark, it might take awhile for our faith to be seaworthy. Does your faith feel like it's under construction? Where does it seem strong these days? Where your faith use a little support?

### A Tip for the Group

The purpose of this small group discussion is to listen for what God might be saying – in the reading, in our own hearts, and in the voices of others in the group. The questions included are meant to be **suggestions** for listening more deeply to what the passage might be saying.

You do not need to “get through” the questions, and they don’t need to be answered in any order. The group can respond to anything that comes up in the conversation. If other questions or interpretations arise, please feel free to use them!

## Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How is this small group experience going for you? What is working really well? What might work better next week?

### A Tip for the Group

Once the discussion seems to be winding down, or if you're approaching the end of the session, it can be helpful to use a few wrap up questions to collect the group's insights and key takeaways.

## Closing Prayer

*To close your meeting, you might give everyone the chance to ask for prayer with the format we use for the prayers of the faithful at Mass.*

*Someone with a prayer request says, “For [individual prayer request], we pray to the Lord” and the group responds, “Lord, hear our prayer.” (E.g. “For my niece, who is having surgery on Thursday, we pray to the Lord.” “Lord, hear our prayer.”)*

*Once it seems like everyone has asked for what they need, the group can close with the Our Father.*

### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.





# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #2

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

O God, who have commanded us  
to listen to your beloved Son,  
be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word,  
that, with spiritual sight made pure,  
we may rejoice to behold your glory.  
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.

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person reminds the group of their name and shares, briefly, how things are going.*

### Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

#### A Tip for the Group

Silence can be an important and challenging component of a positive small group experience. We need silence to collect our ourselves, to reflect on what we're experiencing, and to let the words we have spoken breathe.

To create fruitful expectations around this time of silent reflection, please openly set a timer on your phone for 2 – 5 minutes. Begin the time of silent reflection by reading the prompt and the reflection questions below out loud.

Baptism washes away all, absolutely all, our sins, whether of deed, word, or thought, whether sins original or added, whether knowingly or unknowingly contracted.

--St. Augustine



### 2nd Sunday of Lent - Romans 8:31b-34

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Brothers and sisters:

If God is for us, who can be against us?  
He who did not spare his own Son  
but handed him over for us all,  
how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones?  
It is God who acquits us, who will condemn?  
Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—  
who also is at the right hand of God,  
who indeed intercedes for us.

### What's Going on in This Passage?

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

In this passage, St. Paul is trying to convey the sheer magnitude of the good news of Christ's resurrection to the Christian community in Rome. The Son of God is so "on our side" that he puts on our humanity and even undergoes a real human death. What's more, God the Father considers us to be so valuable that he is willing to be a bystander, so to speak, when the Son refuses to violently resist torture and death. Paul asks his hearers to imagine ourselves in a Roman court of law, with all the potential charges of sin, law-breaking, and negligence that might be leveled against us. But! (he declares) our lawyer Jesus has already argued and won our case for us. And! (he goes on) God had already decided to dismiss the charges. So who else can make a case against us? What else do we have to fear? What else are we trying so hard to achieve? We are free!

### Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

#### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

### First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

#### A Tip for the Group

To get the discussion started, it can be useful for everyone to simply to share a word or phrase that stuck out to them from the reading. Until everyone has had a chance to speak, you might refrain from offering additional details, interpretations, or explanations at this point. This allows everyone to chime in without feeling pressure to figure it all out at once. It also helps the group to get a common sense of what seems most interesting.

### Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- Sometimes we can struggle to feel as valuable as we know we truly and eternally are in God's eyes. Is this ever true for you? Who are the people in your life who help you to remember your own essential value and dignity? Why do you think so many people struggle to have a healthy sense of their own valuableness?
- Some people picture God as loving us unconditionally, so that no matter what we do, He will always be there, on our side. Other people see God as giving us consequences for our actions, in order to punish us justly or so we learn to do the right thing. How do you tend to see God? Based on this week's Scripture passage, how do you think St. Paul would describe God?
- Baptism is a sign of our fundamental goodness in God's eyes. It is also a sign of God's unwavering commitment to restore us to our original goodness if we get lost along the way. As St. Paul says, "How will he not also give us everything else along with him?" Nevertheless, in the Scriptures, baptism is always accompanied by repentance. How do you make sense of the relationship between God's permanent love for us on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the need for us to keep repenting, improving, and growing?

#### A Tip for the Group

The purpose of this small group discussion is to listen for what God might be saying – in the reading, in our own hearts, and in the voices of others in the group. The questions included are meant to be **suggestions** for listening more deeply to what the passage might be saying.

You do not need to "get through" the questions, and they don't need to be answered in any order. The group can respond to anything that comes up in the conversation. If other questions or interpretations arise, please feel free to use them!

### Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How is this small group experience going for you? What is working really well? What might work better next week?

#### A Tip for the Group

Once the discussion seems to be winding down, or if you're approaching the end of the session, it can be helpful to use a few wrap up questions to collect the group's insights and key takeaways.

### Closing Prayer

*To close your meeting, you might give everyone the chance to ask for prayer with the format we use for the prayers of the faithful at Mass.*

*Someone with a prayer request says, "For [individual prayer request], we pray to the Lord" and the group responds, "Lord, hear our prayer." (E.g. "For my niece, who is having surgery on Thursday, we pray to the Lord." "Lord, hear our prayer.")*

*Once it seems like everyone has asked for what they need, the group can close with the Our Father.*

#### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.

By Baptism we are made flesh of the Crucified.

--Pope Leo I



# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #3

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,  
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving  
have shown us a remedy of sin,  
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness  
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,  
may always be lifted up by your mercy.  
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.

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person reminds the group of their name and shares, briefly, how things are going.*

### Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

#### A Tip for the Group

Silence can be an important and challenging component of a positive small group experience. We need silence to collect our ourselves, to reflect on what we're experiencing, and to let the words we have spoken breathe.

To create fruitful expectations around this time of silent reflection, please openly set a timer on your phone for 2 – 5 minutes. Begin the time of silent reflection by reading the prompt and the reflection questions below out loud.

### 3rd Sunday of Lent -Romans 5:1-8

*(We use Year A readings for the 3rd, 4th, & 5th Sundays of Lent when we have catechumens who are preparing for baptism.)*

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have been justified by faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom we have gained access by faith  
to this grace in which we stand,  
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.  
Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces  
endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope.

And hope does not disappoint,  
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.  
For Christ, while we were still helpless,  
died at the appointed time for the ungodly.  
Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person,  
though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.

But God proves his love for us  
in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

### What's Going on in This Passage?

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

We return again to St. Paul's letter to the first generation of Christians in Rome. According to Paul, God is not waiting for us to do anything before responding with love. On the contrary, God's own love for us has been poured into our hearts through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit. The proof of this, says Paul, is that Jesus didn't wait for his followers to figure it all out before surrendering himself to death. Instead, Jesus put his trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the mystery of his death and resurrection. The presence of the Holy Spirit doesn't take away our struggles, but instead transforms them into opportunities to see God at work saving us.

### Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

#### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

### First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

#### A Tip for the Group

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### Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- According to St. Paul, God's love is not a response to what we do. It comes first, before we can even earn it. Describe a time that you received some help, a significant gift, or an important opportunity that you feel you truly didn't earn. How did you feel toward your benefactor? How did it affect your relationship? How does the feeling of receiving such generosity compare to purchasing something with your own money or reaching a goal on your own?
- For Paul, to "boast" is to express a deep joy in something about ourselves. In addition to finding joy in our hard work or status, Paul thinks we can discover an even deeper joy in our troubles. When trouble comes, says

#### A Tip for the Group

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You do not need to "get through" the questions, and they don't need to be answered in any order. The group can respond to anything that comes up in the conversation. If other questions or interpretations arise, please feel free to use them!

Paul, and we endure with hope, we get to see God at work more clearly in our lives. Is this realistic? Do you believe God always gets us out of trouble? What's the benefit in this kind of attitude?

- Baptism uses water as a sign of God's power and love. Using St. Paul's language from the passage, when this water is poured over us, our baptism becomes a sign that "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Have you ever taken time to meaningfully renew your baptism? What would our church experience be like if we all used Lent to prepare ourselves to renew our commitments to Christ and one another at Easter?

### Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How is this small group experience going for you? What is working really well? What might work better next week?

#### A Tip for the Group

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### Closing Prayer

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#### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.





# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #4

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

**O God, who through your Word  
reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way,  
grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith  
the Christian people may hasten  
toward solemn celebrations to come.  
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.**

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person reminds the group of their name and shares, briefly, how things are going.*

### Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

#### A Tip for the Group

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### 4th Sunday of Lent - Ephesians 5:8-14

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Brothers and sisters:

You were once darkness,  
but now you are light in the Lord.  
Live as children of light,  
for light produces every kind of goodness  
and righteousness and truth.  
Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.  
Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness;  
rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention  
the things done by them in secret;  
but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,  
for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore, it says:

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will give you light.”

### What's Going on in This Passage?

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

In this passage, St. Paul urges the first generation of Christians in the city of Ephesus to adopt a lifestyle that matches the story of their salvation in Christ. He compares two kinds of people: people with access to light who can see clearly how to flourish, and people who have to grope along in the dark doing things that won't bring them lasting joy. Paul seems to think that without hope in God's transforming love, people will struggle to see what's actually worth doing, and naturally they will fail to live a meaningful and joyful life. Shifting metaphors, he concludes that trusting in God's love for us is like waking up from sleep -- or even like dying and being brought back to life.

### Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

#### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

### First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

#### A Tip for the Group

To get the discussion started, it can be useful for everyone to simply to share a word or phrase that stuck out to them from the reading. Until everyone has had a chance to speak, you might refrain from offering additional details, interpretations, or explanations at this point. This allows everyone to chime in without feeling pressure to figure it all out at once. It also helps the group to get a common sense of what seems most interesting.

### Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- Paul creates a stark contrast between people in darkness and people in light, but maybe we can be a little of both. Part of growing into our baptism means learning, even into adulthood, "what is pleasing to the Lord." What are some of the biggest lessons about God, faith, and life that you have learned over the past year or two?
- St. Paul contrasts things done in the light, which produce goodness in the world, with things done in the dark, which bear no fruit. Are there such a thing as healthy secrets? When is it important to expose harmful secrets? In what ways can Christians actively "expose" the fruitless works of darkness without succumbing to judgmentalism or

#### A Tip for the Group

The purpose of this small group discussion is to listen for what God might be saying – in the reading, in our own hearts, and in the voices of others in the group. The questions included are meant to be **suggestions** for listening more deeply to what the passage might be saying.

You do not need to "get through" the questions, and they don't need to be answered in any order. The group can respond to anything that comes up in the conversation. If other questions or interpretations arise, please feel free to use them!

condemnation?

- Baptism, practiced by the first several generations of Christians as the full immersion of adults in a pool of water, is a sign and promise that God will raise us from being dead just as he raised Jesus. Those being baptized go down into the waters of death and emerge into a new life that points to, little by little, the coming life of the resurrection. Do you believe that you and your loved ones will be raised from the dead someday? Does this belief give you any “light” -- that is, any clarity around how to live and what worthwhile goals to work towards?

### Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How has this small group experience gone for you? What's next in your spiritual life?

#### A Tip for the Group

Once the discussion seems to be winding down, or if you're approaching the end of the session, it can be helpful to use a few wrap up questions to collect the group's insights and key takeaways.

### Closing Prayer

*To close your meeting, you might give everyone the chance to ask for prayer with the format we use for the prayers of the faithful at Mass.*

*Someone with a prayer request says, "For [individual prayer request], we pray to the Lord" and the group responds, "Lord, hear our prayer." (E.g. "For my niece, who is having surgery on Thursday, we pray to the Lord." "Lord, hear our prayer.")*

*Once it seems like everyone has asked for what they need, the group can close with the Our Father.*

#### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.

If you accept the belief that baptism incorporates us in the mystical body of Christ, into the divine DNA,  
then you might say that the Holy Spirit is present in each of us,  
and thus we have the capacity for the fullness of redemption, of transformation.

--Thomas Keating



# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #5

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,  
may we walk eagerly in that same charity  
with which, out of love for the world,  
your Son handed himself over to death.  
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.

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person reminds the group of their name and shares, briefly, how things are going.*

### Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

#### A Tip for the Group

Silence can be an important and challenging component of a positive small group experience. We need silence to collect our ourselves, to reflect on what we're experiencing, and to let the words we have spoken breathe.

To create fruitful expectations around this time of silent reflection, please openly set a timer on your phone for 2 - 5 minutes. Begin the time of silent reflection by reading the prompt and the reflection questions below out loud.

### 5th Sunday of Lent – Romans 8:8-11

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Brothers and sisters:

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.  
But you are not in the flesh;  
on the contrary, you are in the spirit,  
if only the Spirit of God dwells in you.  
Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you,  
although the body is dead because of sin,  
the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,  
the one who raised Christ from the dead  
will give life to your mortal bodies also,  
through his Spirit dwelling in you.

### What's Going on in This Passage?

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

This week, we return to Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. He is describing what we might begin to experience when Christ comes to life within us. Belonging to Christ is more than attending the right church, having the right opinions, or having the approval of the right people -- it's a matter of having spiritual contact with the living Christ. Paul seems to think that surrendering to the Spirit of Christ will sometimes feel like dying. He encourages us to trust this process. Maybe we will have to let go of things because they no longer fit into the life that God is growing in us -- but, according to Paul, everything that dies will eventually come back to life at the proper time.

### Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

#### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

### First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

#### A Tip for the Group

To get the discussion started, it can be useful for everyone to simply to share a word or phrase that stuck out to them from the reading. Until everyone has had a chance to speak, you might refrain from offering additional details, interpretations, or explanations at this point. This allows everyone to chime in without feeling pressure to figure it all out at once. It also helps the group to get a common sense of what seems most interesting.

### Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- What do you make of the contrast in this passage between being “in the flesh” and “in the spirit”? What kinds of thoughts, attitudes, ways of relating to others, or actions belong to “the flesh”? And what kinds of thoughts, attitudes, ways of relating to others, or actions belong to “the spirit”? How does someone change from being in the flesh to being in the spirit?
- In our baptism, we are drenched in water and the Holy Spirit. Even if we can't always sense the Spirit, we trust that the Spirit continues to dwell in us. Can you recall a specific instance where you sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life? How did the Spirit manifest? and what impact did this have on your thoughts, actions, or decisions?
- Discuss the idea that “those without the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him.” What does it mean to have the Spirit of Christ? How does this statement shape your understanding of belonging to the church? Have you ever met any non-Christians who seemed to have the “Spirit of Christ”?



### Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How has this small group experience gone for you? What's next in your spiritual life?

#### A Tip for the Group

Once the discussion seems to be winding down, or if you're approaching the end of the session, it can be helpful to use a few wrap up questions to collect the group's insights and key takeaways.

### Closing Prayer

*To close your meeting, you might give everyone the chance to ask for prayer with the format we use for the prayers of the faithful at Mass.*

*Someone with a prayer request says, "For [individual prayer request], we pray to the Lord" and the group responds, "Lord, hear our prayer." (E.g. "For my niece, who is having surgery on Thursday, we pray to the Lord." "Lord, hear our prayer.")*

*Once it seems like everyone has asked for what they need, the group can close with the Our Father.*

#### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.

The rediscovery of the value of one's baptism is the basis of the missionary commitment of every Christian, because we see in the Gospel that he who lets himself be fascinated by Christ cannot do without witnessing the joy of following in his footsteps; we understand even more that, in virtue of baptism, we have an inherent missionary vocation.

--Pope Benedict XVI



# Renewing Our Baptisms

## Week #6 - Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

### Opening Prayer

*Open the meeting with a prayer. One person can pray on behalf of the group, or the whole group can pray together.*

*If you can't think of any other way to pray, you can use the following opening prayer from this week's Sunday mass:*

Almighty ever-living God,  
who as an example of humility for the human race to follow  
caused our Savior to take flesh and submit to the Cross,  
graciously grant that we may heed  
his lesson of patient suffering  
and so merit a share in his Resurrection.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

#### A Tip for the Group

Here are some possibilities for an opening prayer:

- Offer a prayer in your own words asking God to guide the group.
- Open with a familiar prayer like the Our Father or Hail Mary.
- Begin with a few minutes of silent prayer.

### Introductions (~5-7 minutes)

*Each person reminds the group of their name and shares, briefly, how things are going.*

### Personal Check-In (~2-5 minutes)

*Take a couple minutes to reflect silently on one or two of the following questions:*

- Where / how is my heart these days?
- What is God asking of me this season?
- What does God want for me that I might be resisting or too busy to recognize?

#### A Tip for the Group

Silence can be an important and challenging component of a positive small group experience. We need silence to collect our ourselves, to reflect on what we're experiencing, and to let the words we have spoken breathe.

To create fruitful expectations around this time of silent reflection, please openly set a timer on your phone for 2 - 5 minutes. Begin the time of silent reflection by reading the prompt and the reflection questions below out loud.

### **Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord - Philippians 2:5-11**

*A volunteer reads this passage outloud to the group.*

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
something to be grasped.  
Rather, he emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
coming in human likeness;  
and found human in appearance,  
he humbled himself,  
becoming obedient to the point of death,  
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name  
which is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that  
Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

### **What's Going on in This Passage?**

*A volunteer reads the following description of the reading.*

In this passage of a letter written to the first generation of Christians in the city of Philippi, St. Paul uses the words of an early Christian hymn to describe the how Jesus becomes the ruler of the cosmos not through conquest and violence, like many of the other gods in the ancient world, but through surrender and self-emptying. The God that Christians worship does not look like a strong and mighty god-emperor but like a powerless slave, tortured and disposed, who holds nothing back for himself. The lesson that Paul teaches is clear: Jesus has the fullness of God's life because he lovingly and freely gives it all away. When we follow Jesus's example, we too will be filled with the divine glory.

### Listen to the Passage Again

*A volunteer reads the passage once more. (It can be the same reader or a new reader.)*

#### A Tip for the Group

Because the Scriptures contain many layers of meaning, it can be helpful to hear them read aloud at least twice. Reading the passage once, providing some context and explanation, and then reading the passage again ensures that everyone has had a chance to take it in.

### First Impressions (~5-10 minutes)

*What did you hear? Share a word or a phrase that stands out to you. Spend some time sharing with the group what the passage might mean to you, your impressions of what others have said, or any questions that come to mind.*

#### A Tip for the Group

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### Going Deeper (~20-30 minutes)

*Spend the bulk of your time together reflecting on the meaning of the passage. Where does it overlap with your life? What light does it shed on your spiritual journey? What questions does it raise about God, faith, family, work, or relationships?*

*If you can't find anything else to talk about, here are some questions to prompt further discussion.*

- Reflect on the humility displayed by Christ in emptying himself and taking the form of a slave. How does this example challenge our own attitudes towards status, power, and service in our daily lives? Are all of us called to follow Christ in voluntarily adopting the lower positions in society? Are there other ways of emptying ourselves? Is there a danger that in following Christ, we will become a "doormat" for others to ignore or take advantage of?
- Paul shares a resurrection vision of every knee bending and every tongue joyfully confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. What would it be like to share Paul's hope that God will save all people in the end? How does might this universal vision affect what it means to share the good news of Christ with others?

#### A Tip for the Group

The purpose of this small group discussion is to listen for what God might be saying – in the reading, in our own hearts, and in the voices of others in the group. The questions included are meant to be **suggestions** for listening more deeply to what the passage might be saying.

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## Week 6



- Throughout our time in this small group, you've had the chance to contemplate your baptism and consider the significance of renewing your baptismal promises at Easter. What revelations or insights have emerged for you during these discussions? Are you looking forward to Easter renewal?

### Wrapping Up (~10-15 minutes)

*Here are some questions to help you reflect on what's worth taking away from today's discussion.*

- What did we hear today?
- What might God be saying to you / us?
- What will you be looking for over the next week?
- What is one small change you can make in your week to prepare to renew your baptism at Easter?
- How has this small group experience gone for you? What's next in your spiritual life?

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#### A Tip for the Group

If a different prayer makes more sense to you, use it! This way of closing with prayer is only a suggestion. It works well because it gives everyone a chance to share their requests, and it's in a familiar format.

Either way, it's usually good to use the same kind of closing prayer from week to week.

And we can ask ourselves: am I aware of the immense gift I carry within me through Baptism? Do I acknowledge, in my life, the light of the presence of God, who sees me as his beloved son, his beloved daughter? And now, in memory of our Baptism, let us welcome God's presence within us.

--Pope Francis



# An Optional Ritual for Renewing Your Baptisms

*Not everyone can make it to the Easter Vigil or to an Easter Sunday liturgy where the renewal of baptismal promises is celebrated. If you and/or your group would like to set aside time to renew your baptismal promises during the Easter season, here is a slightly modified version of the Renewal of Baptismal Promises found in the Roman Missal, 3rd edition. Feel free to improvise by adding Scripture readings, additional prayers, or a feast!*

## **You Will Need:**

- some holy water in a bowl
- a prayer leader
- maybe a lighted candle or two

## **Leader:**

Through the Paschal Mystery we have been buried with Christ in Baptism, that we may walk with him in newness of life. And so, let us renew the promises of Holy Baptism, which we once renounced Satan and his works and promised to serve God in the holy Catholic Church.

And so I ask you all:

Do you renounce Satan? (I do.)  
And all his works? (I do.)  
And all his empty show? (I do.)

Do you believe in God,  
the Father Almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth? (I do.)

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered death and was buried,  
rose again from the dead  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father? (I do.)

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting? (I do.)

And may almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has given us new birth by water and the Holy Spirit  
and bestowed on us forgiveness of our sins,  
keep us by his grace, in Christ Jesus our Lord, for eternal life. (Amen.)

*All renew their baptisms by taking water from the bowl and making the sign of the cross.*