

Contents of WE DARE TO HOPE

Introductory Pages	2
1 / CHRISTIAN HOPE Christian hope is unique: it is a gift from God, it is a desire for God, and it is fulfilled by God who calls us to trust him. It is first received at baptism.	6
2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE Hope is a gift of God, but it is also a human act, a decision to trust God and rely on Him, especially in moments of anxiety, when the absence of God is felt. These are opportunities to grow in hope.	14
3 / THE PRAYER OF HOPE Hope and prayer are inseparable. Prayer is always an act of hope in God, an act of desire for God and of trust in Him. We exercise hope in prayer, as we come to God in our poverty.	22
4 / HOPE AGAINST HOPE The virtue of hope enables us to desire things that are naturally impossible to us, such as holiness, eternal life and beatitude in God. We hope because God makes these things possible for us to obtain.	30
5 / CHRIST, OUR HOPE The resurrection of Christ is the motive for our hope. He is risen and invites us to share in his eternal glory. This hope impels us to build his Kingdom here on earth without being defeated by apparent failure.	38
Additional Materials and Further Reading	46

Why Share Your Faith in Small Groups?

In St Luke's account of the Early Church we hear that three thousand were baptised following Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Guided by the Holy Spirit, the newly baptised 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42). In a similar fashion thousands of people have found spiritual nourishment in faith-sharing, in reflecting on Scripture and prayer as part of a small group.

This resource feeds such small groups drawing on the Scriptures with each session clearly rooted in a passage from the Bible. As the Second Vatican Council Fathers emphasised 'in the sacred books the Father comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them' (Dei Verbum, 21).

Fellowship is a vital part of small group participation. In these small groups you are able to get to know your fellow Christians better and to form strong, mutually supportive bonds. We are a living community: 'God does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link ...' (Lumen Gentium, 9).

Members of small groups are encouraged to share and gain confidence in talking about their faith. It is this confidence building in a trusting environment that helps participants to 'love in all the circumstances of ordinary life' (Gaudium et Spes, 38). Our prayers together help us to become the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit that we are called to be (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 2).

Foreword to **WE DARE TO HOPE**

Lent is often thought of as a time for giving something up, in order to engage with a penitential practice. The liturgy reminds us, Lent is also a season for the Lord to pour out his grace and blessing upon us. The renewal within our lives which we seek, is the fruit of God's saving grace, and not something we may achieve by ourselves. It is good for us to keep these things in mind, as we receive the gift of this five week Lenten programme during this Jubilee Year.

Our thanks go to Mark Nash of the Archdiocese of Southwark for producing the booklet and to Sr Hyacinthe OP and the Dominican Sisters for preparing these five sessions and reflections on the mystery of Christian Hope.

During our journey through Lent, these reflections invite us to enter five familiar Gospel moments. Through these stories of Hope; the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the return of Our Lady and St Joseph for the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, the encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite Woman, the meeting of the repentant thief with Jesus at Calvary, the journey of two disciples to Emmaus and their meeting with Jesus, we discover much about the virtue of Hope. We too are pilgrims of the good news, engaged with a journey into missionary discipleship.

Whether we are following these resources in a group or on our own, may these beautiful prayers and reflections help us to encounter the Hope which Christ Jesus offers each and every one of us. And please remember me in your prayers.

Rt Revd Dr David J Oakley

Chair of the Department of Evangelisation and Discipleship
Bishop of Northampton

About this Resource

Artwork

A choice of art intended to illustrate the theme for meditation and contemplation

Theme Box

A short paragraph outlining the broad theme of each session, useful for preparation

Opening Prayer

The same prayer is used in all five sessions and participants are invited to pray for one another and for the needs of the world

Read the Word

The Scripture passage around which the session is built. Here you will also find a brief introduction. A selection of prayers before reading the passage is on p.46

Meditate on the Word

A series of questions to encourage prolonged meditation on the Word of God in the pages of the Bible

Explore and Reflect on the Theme

A reflection, containing references to the Church's teaching and to Scripture, designed to unfold the theme

4 WE DARE TO HOPE



Jesus Among the Doctors, stained glass by St Martin Church, Chester, not shown

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE 15

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:3-5).

Theme Hope is a gift of God, but it is also a human act, a decision to trust God and rely on him, especially in moments of anxiety, when the absence of God is felt. There are opportunities to grow in hope.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (1:15-16)

O God,
send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might persevere,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate. In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

4 WE DARE TO HOPE

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read the Word Luke 24:1-51 (1:15-16)

Now Luke's account of the finding in the Temple is the only Gospel passage to depict Jesus as a teenager. It is an event of joy mixed with despair (cf John Paul II, *Sacrosanctae Virginitas Mariae*, 30), where the hope of Mary and Joseph, experienced in anxiety, is fulfilled in the joyful finding of Jesus.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Meditate on the Word Luke 24:1-51 (1:15-16)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in your mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions: How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE 17

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (1:15-16)

Why did the 12-year-old Jesus stay in Jerusalem without telling his parents, causing them unpleasurable distress during these days of frantic search?

This mystery reveals to us that not even Mary and Joseph were spared the experience of the absence of God, of the pain of searching for Jesus, their own son placed under their care by the Father.

On finding him, Mary His Mother says: "Son, why have you treated us so?"

Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." In the original Greek, the word for "great distress" can also be translated as "pain", physical or mental, acute suffering, grief, or torment indeed, losing him must have been, for them, an experience of unimaginable anxiety.

Without denying or understating the permanent feeling of distress they experienced during the three awful days, their action - who they chose to do - reveals to us their hope. They chose to search for him and did not give up. They kept going in hope of finding him, in distress, and whether they felt hopeful or not, they hoped because they acted, and moved forward until who they hoped for - Jesus - was found. Hope, then, is not a feeling, but a decision that can be made even while experiencing the worst feelings of pain and anxiety. Hope is the decision to act by moving forward, placing our total trust in God.

In their situation, Mary and Joseph could have been tempted to fall into the two attitudes which are contrary to hope and destroy it: despair and presumption. In despair, they could have given up the search, thinking it was impossible for them to find Jesus. In presumption, they could have decided that everything would turn out fine without even looking for Jesus, relinquishing their responsibility.

The three days search of Mary and Joseph is a mirror of our own pilgrimage of hope in this life. In hope, we are called to keep going, to keep searching for

Additional Material
for reflection, from the
Saints and Catechism, are
signposted throughout in
gold/green text boxes

18 WE DARE TO HOPE

Jesus, to keep walking each day, one step at a time, until we find Him, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the Father's house. We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even when we experience the darkness of the apparent absence of God.

The temptations to despair and presumption are a constant threat to us. We can despair by deciding that God's call of holiness is not for us, and that the happiness He wants us to enjoy in Him is beyond our reach. We can also presume by deciding that we will obtain from God all the happiness we want without searching for Him and striving to do His will. Both despair and presumption place us in a state of spiritual paralysis, putting an end to our pilgrimage to God, making it be impossible or useless.

What does the decision to hope look like for us? It is the decision, every day, to trust God, to follow Jesus intimately in prayer, to receive faithfully the grace He gives us through His Church, in His Word and Sacraments, and to strive to live according to His commandment of love. It is the decision to return to Him every time we fall away through sin, no matter how often we have to do it. It is the decision to keep going in our relationship with Him even in the midst of pain, suffering and anxiety, until we are united forever to Him in Heaven.



We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even in the apparent absence of God.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope reside in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

20 WE DARE TO HOPE

Hope is the decision to trust God even in anxiety

My God, I believe most firmly that You watch over all who hope in You, and that we can wait for nothing when we rely upon You in all things. Therefore I am resolved for the future, to cast all my cares upon You.

St. Cyprian de la Colombiere

He Who tests our hearts wishes us to win crowns of righteousness after long and protracted trial. Only let our spirits be kept unbroken, the firmness of our faith in Christ be maintained unshaken, and we long our Champions will appear! He will come and will not tarry. Expect tribulation after tribulation, hope upon hope yet a little while yet a little while. Thus the Holy Ghost knows how to comfort His running by a promise of the future. After tribulation comes hope, and what we are hoping for is not far off for let a man name the whole of human life. It is but a tiny interval compared with the endless age which is laid up in our hopes.

St. Basil of Caesarea

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away. God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.

St. Teresa of Avila

O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope, defend us, and carry us. You will carry us both when little, and even to grey hairs will You carry us; for our fortress, when it is thus, then is it firmness; but when it is our own, then it is infirmity.

St. Augustine

Explore and Reflect on the Theme

Our reflection, continued with references to Church teaching and Scripture, unfolding the theme

Responding to what has been heard

A short paragraph with an encouragement to make the explicit connection between what has been heard in the Scripture, reflection and in daily living

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord

To conclude the session we invite you to slowly pray the session's psalm together and end with the blessing

Text Box

Quotes from Saints and Catechism references are included for group or personal meditation with each session

Visio Divina

An optional opportunity to reflect on the pictures used to illustrate each section of *We Dare To Hope*, with questions to support your reflection. This mode of prayer is becoming increasingly popular

Timings

Timings for each of the different sections have been suggested. They are intended as a guide only.

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE 19

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10-15 min)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 42 (41). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

- A: In God alone is my soul at rest; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress. I shall not greatly falter.
- B: In God alone be at rest, my soul, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress; never shall I falter.
- A: In God is my salvation and glory, my rock of strength; Trust him at all times, O people. Pour not your hearts before him.
- B: Do not put your trust in oppression, nor vain hopes on plunder. Even if riches increase, set not your heart on them.
- A: For God has said only one thing: only two have I heard: that the God alone bestows power; and to you, Lord, merciful love; and that you repay each one according to his deeds.
- All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
- A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here. May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE 21



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

What do the bodily attitudes of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus portray? How do they tell us about human emotions and the choice to trust in God?

Why is trusting in God difficult in times of incomprehension, distress, and anxiety?

Remember an anxious time in your life and ponder on it in light of Christian hope.

Christ Discovers in the Temple (1362) by Simone Martini



Presentation at the Temple (1342) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti / Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

SESSION 1 / CHRISTIAN HOPE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:13).

Theme Christian hope is unique: it is a gift from God, it is a desire for God, and it is fulfilled by God who calls us to trust him. It is first received at baptism.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
 send forth your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts that we might perceive,
 into our minds that we might remember,
 into our souls that we might meditate.
 Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
 tenderness and mercy.
 Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
 from beginning to end.
 May your grace help us to see with your eyes
 and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
 May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
 for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read the Word Luke 2:22-32 (5 mins)

Note: the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel narrate the conception and infancy of Jesus. Here, the child Jesus is presented to the temple by Mary and Joseph forty days after his birth, and the hope of Simeon is fulfilled by God.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.' Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.'

Meditate on the Word 1 John 3:1-6,11,16-24 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way might my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture change me?

How might it help me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

God's promise of salvation was fulfilled when He sent His Son into the world to free us from sin and to open His own eternal beatitude to us. Christ is the fulfilment and the reason for our hope in God. Simeon experiences the fulfilment of God's promise, and he teaches us what it means to hope in God.

Simeon's hope is not common hope, a feeling of desire experienced by everyone at some time, that 'things will turn out well' or that 'it won't rain on the big day.' Simeon's hope comes from a revelation made to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Saviour. In the same way, Christian hope comes from God as His gift, received at baptism together with faith and charity. This gift of hope is a supernatural ability to desire and trust God and to wait, like Simeon, for the fulfilment of His promises. The theological virtue of hope is *from* God, given as a new promise and a new power beyond human capacity alone to know or claim.

Simeon's hope is focused on Christ. It is a hope for happiness in God, for 'the consolation of Israel', centred on the person of the Messiah. This hope is fulfilled mysteriously when Simeon sees a little Child who must have looked like every other child presented into the Temple every day. This Child is God Himself, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father! Holding Him, Simeon proclaims: 'My eyes have seen your salvation'. Yet physically, he can only see a helpless baby. It is through faith and guided by the Holy Spirit that Simeon can *see* God's salvation in the human Child. His hope, therefore, is rooted in his faith. In the same way, our hope is rooted in what we know through faith, which is God's revelation of Himself and of His salvation in Christ, handed on to us through the Church. Both faith and hope are directed to God. Faith is a supernatural power to know or 'to see' God and hope is a supernatural power to desire

10 WE DARE TO HOPE

Him as our eternal happiness. Christian Hope is *for* God. It is fulfilled in Christ, in Whom God gives Himself to us.

Simeon's hope is fulfilled *by* God. Simeon lives in companionship with the Holy Spirit and knows how to listen to Him. In docility and obedience to the Holy Spirit, Simeon is given God's promise and is led to the Temple, to behold its fulfilment. Having waited in hope for so long, the time has come for him to see God! Yet seeing God can only happen through the power of God, through the Helper, the Holy Spirit. All Simeon can do is to keep trusting and to keep waiting, without giving up. Perhaps Simeon didn't expect that the fulfilment of God's promise would look like a tiny infant. It is the same with Christian hope. We hope, not for what we can do, but for what God will do for us, in His own way, and on His own terms. We are called to trust Him, even when appearances tell us not to. Christian hope is *in* God. It is a radical trust and confidence in God's infinite power and mercy.



Faith is a supernatural power to know or 'to see' God and hope is a supernatural power to desire Him as our eternal happiness.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 33 (32). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

- A: Blessed the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people he has chosen as his heritage.
From the heavens the Lord looks forth;
he sees the whole human race.
- B: From the place where he dwells he gazes
on all the dwellers on the earth,
he who shapes the hearts of them all,
and considers all their deeds.
- A: Yes, the Lord's eyes are on those who fear him,
who hope in his merciful love,
to rescue their soul from death,
to keep them alive in famine.
- B: Our soul is waiting for the Lord.
He is our help and our shield.
In him do our hearts find joy.
We trust in his holy name.
- A: May your merciful love be upon us,
as we hope in you, O Lord.
- All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was
in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Our Hope comes from God

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1817

He had compassion on us, and mercifully saved us, observing the many errors in which we were entangled, as well as the destruction to which we were exposed, and that we had no hope of salvation except it came to us from Him. For He called us when we were not, and willed that out of nothing we should attain a real existence.

St Clement

The good which we ought to hope for from God ... is eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God Himself. For we should hope from Him for nothing less than Himself.

St Thomas Aquinas

Unto those things which are not seen then extend your hope, wait, endure...Fix your hope in God, desire the things eternal, wait for the things eternal.

St Augustine

[See Catechism 1817-1821]



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

Where does Simeon fix his eyes? Why? How is he holding the child?

The artwork portrays Simeon's hope fulfilled. What could help you grow in hope?

The light in the artwork is on the Christ-Child and comes from Him. How is Christ the light of your life and the source of your hope?

Simeon's Song of Praise (c.1700-1710) by Aert de Gelder



SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rm 5:3-5).

Theme Hope is a gift of God, but it is also a human act, a decision to trust God and rely on Him, especially in moments of anxiety, when the absence of God is felt. These are opportunities to grow in hope.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
 send forth your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts that we might perceive,
 into our minds that we might remember,
 into our souls that we might meditate.
 Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
 tenderness and mercy.
 Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
 from beginning to end.
 May your grace help us to see with your eyes
 and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
 May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
 for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read the Word Luke 2:41-51 (5 mins)

Note: Luke's account of the finding in the Temple is the only Gospel passage to depict Jesus as a teenager. It is an event of 'joy mixed with drama' (St John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 20), where the hope of Mary and Joseph, experienced in anxiety, is fulfilled in the joyful finding of Jesus.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Meditate on the Word Luke 2:41-51 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

Why did the 12-year-old Jesus stay in Jerusalem without telling his parents, causing them unspeakable distress during three days of frantic search?

This mystery reveals to us that not even Mary and Joseph were spared the experience of the absence of God, of the pain of searching for Jesus, their own Son placed under their care by the Father.

On finding Him, Mary His Mother says: 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' In the original Greek, the word for 'great distress' can also be translated as 'pain', physical or mental, 'acute suffering', 'grief', or 'torment'. Indeed, losing Him must have been, for them, an experience of unimaginable anxiety.

Without denying or understating the permanent feeling of distress they experienced during the three awful days, their action – *what they chose to do* – reveals to us their hope. They chose to search for Him and did not give up. They kept going, in hope of finding Him. In distress, and whether they felt hopeful or not, they hoped because they acted, and moved forward until who they hoped for – Jesus – was found. Hope, then, is not a feeling, but a *decision* that can be made even while experiencing the worst feelings of pain and anxiety. Hope is the decision to act by moving forward, placing our total trust in God.

In their situation, Mary and Joseph could have been tempted to fall into the two attitudes which are contrary to hope and destroy it: despair and presumption. In despair, they could have given up the search, thinking it was impossible for them to find Jesus. In presumption, they could have decided that everything would turn out fine without even looking for Jesus, relinquishing their responsibility.

The three days search of Mary and Joseph is an image of our own pilgrimage of hope in this life. In hope, we are called to keep going, to keep searching for

Jesus, to keep walking each day, one step at a time, until we find Him, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the Father's house. We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even when we experience the darkness of the apparent absence of God.

The temptations to despair and presumption are a constant threat to us. We can despair by deciding that God's call of holiness is not for us, and that the happiness He wants us to enjoy in Him is beyond our reach. We can also presume by deciding that we will obtain from God all the happiness we want without searching for Him and striving to do His will. Both despair and presumption place us in a state of spiritual paralysis, putting an end to our pilgrimage to God, making it to be impossible or useless.

What does the decision to hope look like for us? It is the decision, every day, to trust God, to follow Jesus intimately in prayer, to receive faithfully the grace He gives us through His Church, in His Word and Sacraments, and to strive to live according to His commandment of love. It is the decision to return to Him every time we fall away through sin, no matter how often we have to do it. It is the decision to keep going in our relationship with Him even in the midst of pain, suffering and anxiety, until we are united forever to Him in Heaven.



**We are called,
each day, to make
decisions of hope,
even in the midst
of suffering and
anxiety, even
in the apparent
absence of God.**

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 62 (61). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: In God alone is my soul at rest;
my salvation comes from him.
He alone is my rock, my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not greatly falter.

B: In God alone be at rest, my soul,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock, my salvation,
my fortress; never shall I falter.

A: In God is my salvation and glory, my rock of strength;
in God is my refuge.
Trust him at all times, O people.
Pour out your hearts before him.

B: Do not put your trust in oppression,
nor vain hopes on plunder.
Even if riches increase,
set not your heart on them.

A: For God has said only one thing;
only two have I heard:
that to God alone belongs power,
and to you, Lord, merciful love;
and that you repay each one
according to his deeds.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was
in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Hope is the decision to trust God even in anxiety

My God, I believe most firmly that You watch over all who hope in You, and that we can want for nothing when we rely upon You in all things. Therefore I am resolved for the future...to cast all my cares upon You.

St Claude de la Colombiere

He Who tests our hearts wishes us to win crowns of righteousness after long and protracted trial. Only let our spirit be kept unbroken, the firmness of our faith in Christ be maintained unshaken, and ere long our Champion will appear; He will come and will not tarry. Expect tribulation after tribulation, hope upon hope; yet a little while; yet a little while. Thus the Holy Ghost knows how to comfort His nurslings by a promise of the future. After tribulations comes hope, and what we are hoping for is not far off, for let a man name the whole of human life, it is but a tiny interval compared with the endless age which is laid up in our hopes.

St Basil of Caesarea

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.

St Teresa of Avila

O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope, defend us, and carry us. You will carry us both when little, and even to grey hairs will You carry us; for our firmness, when it is Thou, then is it firmness; but when it is our own, then it is infirmity.

St Augustine



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

What do the bodily attitudes of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus portray? What do they tell us about human emotions and the choice to trust God in hope?

Why is trusting in God difficult in times of incomprehension, distress, and anxiety?

Remember an anxious time in your life and ponder on it in light of Christian hope.

Christ Discovered in the Temple (1342) by Simone Martini



SESSION 3 / THE PRAYER OF HOPE

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Romans 12:12).

Theme Hope and prayer are inseparable. Prayer is always an act of hope in God, an act of desire for God and of trust in Him. We exercise hope in prayer, as we come to God in our poverty.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
 send forth your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts that we might perceive,
 into our minds that we might remember,
 into our souls that we might meditate.
 Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
 tenderness and mercy.
 Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
 from beginning to end.
 May your grace help us to see with your eyes
 and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
 May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
 for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Matthew 15:21-28 (5 mins)

Note: In this account from Matthew also recorded in Mark 7, Jesus journeys from the Jewish territory to the pagan district of Tyre and Sidon, only to return to Galilee immediately afterwards. Perhaps Jesus decides to visit the pagan district only to elicit and answer the Canaanite woman's prayer of hope, a model for our own.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Meditate on the Word Matthew 15:21-28 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

Before being answered, the woman's prayer is rejected *three times* by Jesus. First, 'he did not answer her a word.' Then, he responds to her indirectly, saying to his disciples who are annoyed by her pleading: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Finally, he rejects her request directly: 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' Having endured three rejections, the woman nevertheless perseveres and succeeds on her fourth attempt: 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' In this, she teaches us how to pray and never give up, using Jesus' own words of rejection to her advantage. Instead of destroying the woman's faith and hope in Jesus, the three rejections have made them stronger, until she obtains what she desires from Him.

Jesus praises the woman's faith, yet hope is also central to this account. Although faith and hope are almost interchangeable² in the Bible, a distinction can be made between faith, which concerns *what we know*, and hope which concerns *what we desire and do*. The woman *knows* in faith that Jesus can heal her daughter, and she *acts* accordingly, in hope: *she prays*. Prayer involves both faith and hope. Faith knows that God has the infinite power and mercy to respond to all the prayers that are made to him in accord with his will. Hope acts on the knowledge of faith, in desire for what it does not yet possess and in trust that God will grant it, by asking for it in humility. Hope is crucially necessary, since it is possible to believe that God can give us what we desire and yet not pray for it, and so fail to obtain it.

The gospel of the Canaanite woman helps us to understand the power and necessity of prayer. In the account, it seems that Jesus changes his mind, first refusing and then accepting to answer the woman's prayer simply because she will not take 'no' for an answer. This change of mind is only apparent, to teach us that prayer has a significant role in God's plan of salvation. God does not need our prayers since He is the One who creates and redeems, but he makes room for us to be active participants in the coming of His Kingdom by our actions, and most of all by our prayers, offered for ourselves and for others in accordance with His will.

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 2: "'Hope', in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words 'faith' and 'hope' seem interchangeable."

Hope is a gift, a decision, and a dynamic act which is ours alone to make. In hope, I can choose to spend time everyday praying for the coming of the Kingdom, for peace, for the conversion of all hearts to God, and for all the specific intentions which are entrusted to me through the circumstances of life. In doing so, I am assured, from the example of the Canaanite woman, that Jesus will hear my prayer and answer it, even if I have to persevere through darkness and apparent rejection. All of us have been given the dignity and power to make a difference in this world by what we can achieve in love through grace but most of all by what we can ask from God who alone can change the human heart and bring light into the darkness. Our decision to act and so to make a difference is motivated by hope.



**Hope is a gift, a
decision, and a
dynamic act which
is ours alone to
make.**

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 13(12). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
 How long must I bear grief in my soul,
 have sorrow in my heart all day long?
 How long shall my enemy prevail over me?

B: Look, and answer me, O Lord my God!
 Give light to my eyes lest I fall asleep in death;
 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him";
 lest my foes rejoice when they see me fall.

A: As for me, I trust in your merciful love.
 Let my heart rejoice in your salvation.
 I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was
 in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
 and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

In hope, we are confident that God will answer our prayer

Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire.

CCC 1820

The Holy Spirit, who instructs us to celebrate the liturgy in expectation of Christ's return, teaches us to pray in hope. Conversely, the prayer of the Church and personal prayer nourish hope in us. The psalms especially, with their concrete and varied language, teach us to fix our hope in God: 'I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.'

CCC 2657

Unless we wept in Your ears, there would be no hope for us remaining. Whence, then, is it that such sweet fruit is plucked from the bitterness of life, from groans, tears, sighs, and lamentations? Is it the hope that You hear us that sweetens it? This is true of prayer, for therein is a desire to approach unto You.

St Augustine

To limit your desires and your hopes is to misunderstand God's infinite goodness!

St Therese of Lisieux

We can never have too much confidence in the good God... As we hope in Him so shall we receive.

St Therese of Lisieux

It is impossible to trust too much in the Divine assistance.

St Thomas Aquinas



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

What is the exact moment illustrated in the painting? Where are the disciples of Jesus? Why are they in the background, leaving Jesus and the woman alone?

Describe what Jesus and the woman express through their physical attitude and gestures. What do they teach us about prayer and confidence?

Where is Jesus' right hand? What do we know about the Heart of Jesus?

In prayer, turn to Jesus who opens His Sacred Heart to you, and place your trust entirely in Him.

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman (1674) by Francisco Antolinez y Sarabia



The Crucifixion of Christ (1512) by Hans Baldung Grien

SESSION 4 / HOPE AGAINST HOPE

In hope, he believed against hope (Romans 4:18).

Theme The virtue of hope enables us to desire things that are naturally impossible to us, such as holiness, eternal life and beatitude in God. We hope because God makes these things possible for us to obtain.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
 send forth your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts that we might perceive,
 into our minds that we might remember,
 into our souls that we might meditate.
 Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
 tenderness and mercy.
 Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
 from beginning to end.
 May your grace help us to see with your eyes
 and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
 May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
 for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Luke 23:32-43 (5 mins)

Note: Luke is the only evangelist to mention the interaction of the two criminals with Jesus during the crucifixion. This passage recounts the extraordinary prayer of hope of the 'good thief', who becomes, as a result, the first saint to enter heaven.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Meditate on the Word Luke 15:11-24 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

At Calvary, as he is facing inevitable death in the most terrible pains, a criminal is able to recognise in the disfigured one crucified by his side the Lord who alone is able to welcome him into his eternal Kingdom. In the final moments of his sinful life, when nothing can possibly be hoped for in human terms, the 'good thief' turns to the only One who offers humanity 'hope against hope': a divine hope, infinite in scope, when all human hope ends.

Human hope is always framed by the limits of realistic possibilities. As humans, we can only hope for what lies within our limited expectation: a new job, a good bargain, a great relationship, a positive result... We cannot hope, on our strength alone, for what is beyond our natural possibility to achieve or obtain, such as physically growing wings, being loved perfectly by another human person, the total avoidance of sin, or a life that does not end in death.

Through His Sacrifice, Jesus Christ opens for humanity a new hope. The good thief is one of the first witnesses of this new hope, showing us that holiness is possible for everyone, even the worst sinner, and that physical death can be the entry into the eternal beatitude of God's Kingdom. The possibilities of our new hope in Christ are infinite, since they correspond to the infinity of his love for us. God in Christ saves us from the inner slavery of sin, from our inability to love perfectly, from the inevitability of eternal death. He alone transforms the human heart through grace and makes saints out of sinners. Like the good thief, we are invited simply to place all our trust in Him. Those who have placed their hope in God do not fear human failure, sin, and death, since on the Cross they are revealed to be overcome by an infinitely greater love: the all-powerful mercy of God.

We first receive God's gift of salvation in Christ at Baptism. Having died to sin and risen to new life in Him, our baptismal grace keeps us united to Him, strong in the virtues of faith, hope and charity. Should we fall away from Christ, the sacrament of reconciliation is freely offered to us through

the Church as the way to return to Him and be restored in grace and holiness. In this sacrament, we experience the infinity of God's mercy in the forgiveness of all our sins, regardless of their gravity or quantity.

Following the example of the good thief, we need the humility to recognise in the sacrament of confession the presence of the Lord who alone can open his Kingdom to us, and the hope to approach Him there. Despair or presumption can sometimes prevent us from taking hold of the salvation God offers us in the sacrament of his forgiveness: we can despair that our sins are too great for Him to forgive, or we can presume that receiving His forgiveness sacramentally, in the way that He offers it to us, is unnecessary. Yet Jesus constantly offers those who turn to Him in the sacrament of confession the new hope of holiness and eternal happiness in Him.



Jesus constantly offers those who turn to Him in the sacrament of confession the new hope of holiness and eternal happiness in Him.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 130 (129). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
O let your ears be attentive
to the sound of my pleadings.

B: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you is found forgiveness,
that you may be revered.

A: I long for you, O Lord,
my soul longs for his word.
My soul awaits the Lord
more than watchmen for daybreak.
More than watchmen for daybreak,
let Israel hope for the Lord.

B: For with the Lord there is mercy,
in him is plentiful redemption.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was
in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Christ offers us infinite hope

The Christian meaning of death is revealed in the light of the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ in whom resides our only hope. The Christian who dies in Christ Jesus is “away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

CCC 1681

There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. “There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin.

CCC 982

No man in this world is strong, except in the hope of God’s promises: for as to our own deservings, we are weak, in His mercy we are strong.

St Augustine

I’m not relying on my own merits, as I have none, but I put my hope in Him who is goodness and holiness Himself.

St Therese of Lisieux

I am certain that even if I had on my conscience every imaginable crime, I should lose nothing of my confidence; rather I would hurry, with a heart broken with sorrow, to throw myself into the Arms of my Jesus.

St Therese of Lisieux

Hope does not trust chiefly in grace already received, but on God’s omnipotence and mercy, whereby even he that has not grace, can obtain it, so as to come to eternal life.

St Thomas Aquinas



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Spend some time identifying the people surrounding Jesus on the Cross and their different attitudes and actions.

What are the visual differences portrayed between the two criminals crucified on each side of the Lord? What do they express?

How did the artist choose to depict the background of the scene? How does it communicate hope?

How can the artwork help us to understand the sacrament of reconciliation and encourage us to approach it in hope?

The Crucifixion (1711) by Ioannis Moskos



The Supper at Emmaus (1639) by Francisco de Zurbarán

SESSION 5 / CHRIST, OUR HOPE

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).

Theme The resurrection of Christ is the motive for our hope. He is risen and invites us to share in his eternal glory. This hope impels us to build his Kingdom here on earth without being defeated by apparent failure.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
 send forth your Holy Spirit
 into our hearts that we might perceive,
 into our minds that we might remember,
 into our souls that we might meditate.
 Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
 tenderness and mercy.
 Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
 from beginning to end.
 May your grace help us to see with your eyes
 and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
 May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
 for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
 Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Luke 24:13-35 (5 mins)

Note: The meeting of the risen Christ with the disciples on their way to Emmaus takes place in the Gospel of Luke on the day of resurrection. Christ walks alongside the despondent disciples and takes time to restore in them a new hope in Him.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognising him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And he said to them, 'What things?' And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.' And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognised him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the

Scriptures?’ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Meditate on the Word Luke 24:13-35 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

On the way to Emmaus, we find two disciples whose hope has been destroyed by the crucifixion and death of Jesus: ‘we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.’ The disciples have experienced the crushing disappointment that can happen after a great hope has come to nothing. Their hope is disappointed because it had been entirely focused on a specific outcome (hoping that) instead of being primarily placed in Jesus Christ (hoping in). Jesus Christ did redeem Israel, and the whole of humanity, but not in the way they had expected.

Jesus encounters the disciples on the way and lets them express their despondency. He invites them to recount the event of his death from their

own perspective. Not even the account of the empty tomb was reason enough for them to stay in Jerusalem. There is nothing for them to hope for now, and they are returning to the daily routine of their everyday life. Yet after their encounter with Jesus, the two pilgrims are filled with a new hope, rebuilt and nourished by the Lord who has opened the Scripture and broken the Bread for them. Having recognised the risen Lord, they rise in their turn to share with others their invincible hope in Him.

Disappointed hope, placed in human persons or outcomes, is something we all experience at some point in our life. As he did for the Emmaus pilgrims, Jesus offers us all a greater hope, which does not erase suffering and death but transfigures them in love and opens for us the horizons of God's eternal beatitude. By placing our hope in Christ, we surrender to Him the plans and terms of our human expectations and learn to trust Him unconditionally as we journey through life's joys and pains.

At every Mass, the risen Lord comes to nourish us with his Word and his Body, food for our common pilgrimage of hope. Like the disciples, we may be tempted to focus all our hope on specific outcomes, events, or persons. The Lord purifies our hope through the Liturgy of the Church, as we recall every



The hope of eternal life in God offered by the risen Lord is not a distraction from the present need to build God's Kingdom... rather it is an inspiration.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

day the history of our salvation and ‘await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.’²

The hope of eternal life in God offered by the risen Lord is not a distraction from the present need to build God’s Kingdom and to work and pray every day for greater justice and peace, out of love of neighbour. Rather, our hope in Christ inspires us to persevere through every challenge and difficulty, certain that his grace will never fail, and that his plan of love is mysteriously unfolding, especially under the weight of the cross.

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 42 (41). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord’s Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: Like the deer that yearns
for running streams,
so my soul is yearning
for you, my God.

B: My soul is thirsting for God,
the living God;
when can I enter and appear
before the face of God?

A: My tears have become my bread,
by day, by night,
as they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was
in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

² Communion Rite from the Roman Missal, 2010 International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

Jesus Christ is our Hope

Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.

CCC 666

There is no surer pledge or dearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth "in which righteousness dwells," than the Eucharist. Every time this mystery is celebrated, "the work of our redemption is carried on" and we "break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ."

CCC1405

The Lord, through whom our sins have been remitted, arose from the dead at the morning watch, so that we may hope that what went before in the Lord will take place in us. For our sins have been already forgiven: but we have not yet risen again... The Lord as it were thus speaks to us: What you have seen in Me, hope for in yourselves; that is, because I have risen from the dead, you also shall rise again.

St Augustine

if you are to be looking for everything in this world, what need is there for hope? What is hope then? It is feeling confidence in things to come. What great demand then does God make upon you, since He Himself gives you blessings quite entire from His own stores? One thing only, hope, He asks of you, that you too may have somewhat of your own to contribute toward your salvation.

St John Chrysostom



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Identify the persons depicted in the picture and reflect on their attitude. What are they looking at? Why?

List all the Eucharistic motifs and symbols present in the picture. What parallels can be made with the liturgical celebration of the Mass?

How has the artist depicted the transformation of the disciples and their new hope?

In a prayerful contemplation of the picture, reflect on your own journey with Christ, on the places and times when you may have experienced an encounter with Him, and ask Him to renew your hope in Him.

The Pilgrims of Emmaus (1905) by Henry Ossawa Tanner

Introductory phrases before reading Scripture

Let us listen carefully to the Word of the Lord, and attend to it with the ear of our hearts. Let us welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. *St Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547) adapted*

Merciful God, anoint me with your Holy Spirit. As I read your Word, let me hear your voice speaking to me from within. Give me the wisdom to understand your message to me. Give me strength to build my life on your Word. May I rejoice in hearing your Word and keeping it. *Fr Augustine Vallooran V.C.*

Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort me and restore me. *att. St Patrick (c.387-c.460)*

Let us pray with great confidence, with confidence based upon the goodness and infinite generosity of God and upon the promises of Jesus Christ. God is a spring of living water which flows unceasingly into the hearts of those who pray. *St Louis de Montfort (1673-1716)*

Lord, inspire me to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give me real understanding of what I need, that I in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet, I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart. *Origen (184-253)*

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Thy word and understand and do Thy will. On Thee do I set my hope, that Thou shalt enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of Thy knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. *St John Chrysostom (347-407)*

Let us speak of the God whom we love, listen to the God who wishes to speak to us. 'Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening'. *EG, 146 and 1 Samuel 3:9*

Let us go forward in peace, our eyes upon heaven, the only one goal of our labours. *St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897)*

