

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

YEAR 1, 34th Sunday of Ordinary Time

For setup, place an opaque container at the foot of the altar and fill a pitcher/bucket with water. You may want to place a mat under the container to avoid splashing and spilling on the floor. Hand out small stones to all participants, preferably something heavy but small enough to sit well within the palm of your hand.

Explain that the container represents the unwavering security of God's justice and that the water is a symbol of God's cleansing mercy. Pour the water into the opaque container, half full (leave room for the stones). Explain that God is always standing before us: He waits for our response. Sin is the rejection of God: wanting to look the other way.

Then ask participants to consider the ugliness of sin (especially their own sin) and how it affects their lives and trickles into the whole world. Explain that our selfishness clouds the world and destroys our ability to know and see God here with us.

Ask the participants to let go of their sin and their dealings with the sin of the world. Ask participants to take off all their dealings with sin, all their compromises, regrets, fears and place all their sin and the sin of the world figuratively into that rock. Be done with sin and one by one (as ready) come drop that sin into the eager justice and mercy of our living God. Then after everyone has dropped their rocks into the water explain that Christ was that rock for us. He became that sacrifice, that offering. Briefly describe His Passion. Invite everyone to make confession a regular activity in their lives and explain the dire need for the sacrament.

DISCOVERING IMMENSITY

YEAR 1, 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print one “Discovering Immensity Test” and one “Discovering Immensity Results” page for each participant.

Explain to the group that they are going to begin to define their natural aptitudes for work, talent and prayer by taking this test. Hand everyone a test page and a writing instrument. Briefly go over instructions at the top and then hand out the results page as each participant finishes.

Give everyone a little time to explore their results and then gather everyone back to talk about their questions and reactions. If there is time, discuss the statement and question at the top of the result page, which reads: “There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ in the spiritual life but, at the same time, we do share many similarities in our desire to serve God. Use your highest scores to begin defining your interests and your natural abilities. Know that, no matter who you are, everyone has the potential to become a saint. What is most helpful or most exciting about becoming aware of your potential and ‘discovering your immensity’?”

GOOD WORKS

YEAR 1, 9th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print the “Good Works” handout, one for each participant.

Pass out the “Good Works” list to everyone and give a brief overview. Ask the participants to circle the good works that stand out or attract them the most as you read through the descriptions. Instruct the participants to then narrow down and underline the services that they would most like to fulfill for those circled good works.

Ask them to narrow down one last time and put a star next one underlined service that they are most interested in. Then instruct everyone to compile a list of things needed to complete that task (i.e. a ride, a free Saturday, a friend, cleaning supplies...).

After everyone’s list is completed allow for some time, at least five minutes, for the group to mingle and see if anyone is interested in the same service opportunities and if anyone can help fulfill the needs on their list. Encourage everyone to keep this list and gather the supplies needed as soon as possible. Explain that once a person has the courage and the motivation to do something great, the devil is going to try and tempt them out of it and your pride will begin to discourage you. Don’t let either scare you away but remember that committing to your first service opportunity or doing anything you have never done before is a lot like removing a bandaid... Pull it off quick without overthinking it. You won’t regret it.

LOVE LANGUAGES

YEAR 1, 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print “The 5 Love Languages Test” and the “Results and Devotions” pages, one for each participant.

Explain to the group that God is love. He is the source of love, the spirit of love, no person can love as much as God loves us. Sometimes people say that it's impossible for that God to exist in this type of world we live in; however, the reality is that just because we are often oblivious to love in our lives doesn't mean that God is nonexistent. Rather, it means that God is nonintrusive, noninvasive. He is always with us, wanting to help us as a Father. (Just reach out and see.) God is always there, always in love, but He is not a tyrant of love. He gives us freewill to choose. Meaning that we are responsible for opening our eyes, ears, heart and mind to Him: everyone is. We have to willingly invite Him into our lives. Explain that, for this exercise, we're going to analyze and become better aware of the ways we naturally reach out to God in spirit and in person.

Briefly introduce the The 5 Love Languages and hand out “The 5 Love Languages Test” and a writing instrument to everyone. Ask everyone to add up their individual scores after they have completed the test, and then pick up the “Results and Devotions” page and look over their results and all the love languages.

Once everyone has finished the test, gather everyone together and ask, “How is God using your familiar love languages (your top two) to share the Gospel message with you and those you encounter?” Then ask, “How is God asking you to move outside of your comfort zones and participate in the totality of love?”

NEW WINESKINS

YEAR 1, 8th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print one “New Wineskins” examination for each participant.

Explain to the group that Jesus proclaimed the Gospel so that we could reject the bondage and slavery to sin and choose to serve God in the liberty and joy of His goodness. He warned that some would try to follow the Gospel but find themselves hopelessly lost and frustrated. Jesus Christ informed us: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24) Meaning, you can’t look at one and walk in the opposite direction toward the other. You will be stretched, to your break point, far between the two. If you want to serve God but are still looking with lustful eyes at the world, you’ll either be angry at God for being far away from you OR you will be angry at mammon for keeping you from God. This will cause you to lash out at others, be unhappy and ignore charity. Many people give up on the Gospel far too soon because they fail to realize that the more a person wants to serve God, the more self-service that person has to relent in order to keep peace of mind and not become frustrated and angry. Look at the saints. They are happy in the sinful world, giving patient love and good service; they are at peace. What is their secret? They serve God alone. They are not in bondage to the world of sin; they are not stretched to their breaking points between two polar opposites. They trust and rely solely on their creator and lover, their God.

Jesus shared this wisdom again when He was accused of being indifferent to the Mosaic law of the land. He explained that He wasn’t indifferent to the law but that He had fulfilled the old law and was now creating something completely new. The Jews had a hard time understanding why God would ever dispose of the old law when He was the one who gave it to them in the first place. Though it was for the very same reason, that one could not serve God and the world: they would not be able to serve two masters. Jesus explains in this parable: “No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16-17)

Handout the “New Wineskins” examination and a writing instrument to each participant. Briefly go over the instructions. Invite the participants spread out throughout the room and ask them to answer the questions privately. Then instruct them to reflect on their current relationship with God. Ask (for nonverbal reflection only), “Is there anything getting in the way of that relationship? Can you see any anger, resentment or jealousy in your life? What are you lusting after? What’s driving you crazy? Can you let it go? Will you let it go.” Wrap things up by answering any questions and reminding the participants to be sensitive to any person who may want to keep privacy about the exam.

PERSONAL TRAINING

YEAR 1, 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print one "Personal Training" handout for each participant. It's best to print each page separately (not double-sided).

Explain to participants that an inability to recognize our thirst for God causes us to fill this longing for love with all sorts of worldly fillers. The saints were greatly tempted to obtain the comforts and pleasures of the world in place of God. However, not wanting to be satisfied with the world and death but throwing their hopes in life and heaven, they trained their bodies to remember that things of this world, while attractive and available, can never in all actuality fill their need for God who they know to be the very source and summit of their lives.

Distribute Personal Training handouts and instruct participants that they are going to come up with a personal Training Plan to kick your body into God-loving gear. Review the various "healthy habits" in comparison to the "filler habits". Ask participants to consider if they're guilty of any of these filler habits or of any others they know are bad habits that they wish they could break.

Instruct participants to consider their typical day and fill in the schedule as best they can as to what an average day's activities look like for them. Then, considering how those bad habits compare to better habits, schedule a brand new day's schedule. Everyone can improve their training plan: consider if you are trying to build a beginner's or an expert's schedule and build your new day.

Ask participants to share some of the new habits they have scheduled into their new day. Reflect with participants that we get to know and love God through love and prayer. If prayer isn't part of our day, we must start by purposefully making it a part of our day. Healing/getting into shape in one area always benefits the others as well: there is crossover between categories. Good habits beget more good habits.

SANCTUARY

YEAR 1, 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time/YEAR 1, 3rd Sunday of Lent/YEAR 3, 5th Sunday of Lent

Print the "Examination of Conscience" handout, one for each participant.

Pass out the "Examination of Conscience" page and a writing instrument to each participant. Instruct everyone spread out and imagine that they are in their own "sanctuary".

Explain that the reason we make examinations is to become aware of the hurt we have caused ourselves and others by running away from God. Explain that we need to hear that we are forgiven in confession and just as Moses lifted the serpent in the desert (Numbers 21:4-9), God wills to heal us through the sacrament of confession; therefore, an examination of conscience, is an intimate moment of apology, hope, love and renewal (a meeting place with God, aka: a sanctuary).