

## About this journal

Each month will begin with a specific intention for our Archdiocesan Synod. We encourage all the faithful of the local Church to join us in praying together for that intention.

There will be a brief reflection for each week followed by a recommended Scripture passage for the day and a prompt to get you started. Since the Scripture passages will come from the daily Mass readings they can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings>.

Please remember that this journal is meant as an offering, not an obligation. We encourage you to use it in whatever way serves you best.

## Why Pray?

The very first paragraph of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins:

*God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength (CCC 1)*

God is drawing close to us. Are we willing to seek him, to know him, to love him with all our strength? We begin the journey of seeking, knowing and loving him in prayer.

## What is prayer?

*God desires each of us to enter into a vital and personal relationship with him. This relationship is prayer (CCC 2558).* Just as each relationship between two people is unique, so is each relationship between a person and God. Consequently, there is not a given formula for prayer. It is more important *that* a person prays than *how* a person prays.

We have the gift, however, of being able to learn from one another, from the saints and from people in the church who are particularly gifted at prayer. Therefore we will be offering suggestions from the experts to help us get started.

We encourage each person to discover how God speaks most clearly to him or her. Feel free to try different forms of prayer, but do not feel pressured to try them all. In fact, if you find a particular way of prayer leads you to intimacy with God, continue to pray that way until God draws you in a new direction.

Finally, it is good for us to remember that prayer is God's gift to us:

*"If you knew the gift of God!" The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: There, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (CCC 2560)*

## How to Pray?

Since prayer is going to flow from our unique relationship with God, it is up to us to discover how God wants to communicate with us. To do this we seek to learn to listen to his voice in our hearts. The following is one method that might be helpful for us as we begin:

***Always begin by recalling that you're in the Presence of God:*** It's easy to launch into prayer without realizing that you are called to enter into a conversation with God. One priest remarked that for many people, prayer is just "worrying on one's knees." Take a moment to recall that God is always with you and that he desires this time with you even more than you do. Ask him to help and guide you as you pray.

### **A-R-R-R: Acknowledge – Relate – Receive – Respond**

**Acknowledge:** After you become aware of God's Presence, it's important to become aware of your own heart. Take some time to acknowledge your thoughts, feelings, and desires as you begin to pray. Acknowledge your physical and emotional needs ("I'm tired; I'm hungry; I'm worried; I'm excited; I'm lonely;" etc.), but try to also acknowledge the spiritual stirrings within you ("I want to be free from this temptation to sin; I feel God is leading me to do this; I want more of what God wants to give me;" etc.) If there is a particular grace you are seeking, write it down. Perhaps it will be answered immediately. Perhaps you will see over time that God is putting a certain desire into your heart to prepare you for what he wants to give you.

**Relate:** Once you have acknowledged the stirrings of your heart, relate them to God. It's easy to just think about these things and assume God knows them, but he wants you to share them with him. Tell him what is in your heart. Ask him about anything that's troubling you. Share your desires with him. He loves having a "heart-to-heart" with you!

**Receive:** After sharing your heart with God, allow him to share *his* heart with you. This is a time to quiet your own heart and mind and listen to God who loves you. Perhaps he will speak through a reflection you read, or a scripture passage, or simply with a "still small voice" inside you. (See 1 Kings 19:12-13)

**Respond:** To end your time of prayer, respond to God. Thank him for what you received; resolve to do what he asks of you; tell him how much you love him.

***Journaling*** is a great way to conclude your prayer time. It often helps to process what took place during your conversation with God. It also can be very helpful to refer back to your notes in future times of discouragement or discernment. Many times God is doing a work in you that takes days, months, perhaps even years. Journaling can help you learn to recognize the subtle ways God is carrying out his good purpose in you. (See Romans 8:28)

### **A Word of Encouragement from Saint Ambrose**

*God's temple is holy; you are his temple.*

*My Father and I will come and make our home with you. Let your door stand open to receive him, unlock your soul to him, offer him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the joy of grace. Throw wide the gate of your heart, stand before the sun of the everlasting light that shines on every man. This true light shines on all, but if anyone closes his window he will deprive himself of eternal light. If you shut the door of your mind, you shut out Christ. Though he can enter, he does not want to force his way in rudely, or compel us to admit him against our will.*

*... It is the soul that has its door, its gates. Christ comes to this door and knocks; he knocks at these gates. Open to him; he wants to enter, to find his bride waiting and watching.*

### **Prayer Intention for July 2020:**

**That as we encounter the Risen Christ through our Synod process, we may, like St. Mary Magdalene, lead lives of greater sanctity and joyfully proclaim Him to the world, let us pray to the Lord.**

### **Opening Reflection**

Lord, we want to be holy. Help us, like St. Mary Magdalene, to surrender our lives to you for our sanctification.



St. Mary Magdalene in Penitence, Orazio Gentileschi, 1615





The Prophet Elisha and the Woman of Shunem, Gerbrand van den Eekhout, 1664

**June 28 – July 4, 2020:** “...Elisha asked, ‘Can something be done for her?’” (2 Kings 4:14)

The readings for this Sunday speak powerfully about the importance of generosity and hospitality. In 2 Kings we see a beautiful relationship between the prophet Elisha and a Shunamite woman. We first see the hospitality of the woman: “*One day Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman of influence, who pressed him to dine with her. Afterward, whenever he passed by, he would stop there to dine. So she said to her husband, ‘I know that he is a holy man of God. Since he visits us often, let us arrange a little room on the roof and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp, so that when he comes to us he can stay there.’*” (2 Kings 4:8-10)

Elisha, is greatly moved by this woman’s kindness and wants to respond generously. He asks his servant Gehazi, “‘*What can we do for her?*’ Gehazi answered, ‘*She has no son, and her husband is old.*’ Elisha said, ‘*Call her.*’ He did so, and when she stood at the door, Elisha promised, ‘*This time next year you will be cradling a baby son.*’” (2 Kings 4:14-16)

Such grand gestures of generosity are inspiring. But even simple acts such as sending a note of gratitude, sharing a word of encouragement, or offering a listening ear can touch another’s soul. Moreover, Jesus tells us that whatever kindness we do for another we do for him. “*And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.*” (Matthew 10:42)

**June 28:** Lord, show us those you’re inviting us to serve as we pray with Matthew 10:37-42.

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**June 29:** Lord, on this Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, increase our boldness to make you known and loved as we pray with Acts 12:1-11.

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**June 30:** Lord, give us a deeper understanding of who you are as we pray with Matthew 8:23-27.

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**July 1:** Lord, as we pray with Amos 5:14-15, 21-24, may we as a Local Church “seek good and not evil” and “let justice surge like water and goodness like an unfailing stream.”

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**July 2:** Lord, ‘refresh our souls with your law’ as we pray with Psalm 19:8-11.

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**July 3:** Lord, on this Feast of Saint Thomas, build us together as an Archdiocese “into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” as we pray with Ephesians 2:19-22.

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**July 4:** Lord, as we remember and celebrate Independence Day, proclaim peace to our nation and our Local Church as we pray with Psalm 85:9-14.

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The Entry into Jerusalem, Giotto, 1304-1306

**July 5-11, 2020:** *“Thus says the LORD: Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on an ass.” (1 Zechariah 9:9)*

The refrain for this Sunday’s responsorial psalm is, “I will praise your name forever, my King and my God!” When we think of a king or a god, we often picture someone having power, wealth, honor, and a life of pleasure. But the rest of this psalm and the other readings for the day paint a very different portrait of our God and King.

In the first reading, Zechariah prophesies to Jerusalem that ‘their king shall come to them.’ But this king will not be riding a mighty steed or warhorse ready for battle, but rather he will be on a lowly donkey, coming in all meekness and proclaiming peace. (1 Zechariah 9:9-10) On Palm Sunday this prophecy was fulfilled by our King and our God, who a few days later made that peace for us on the cross, surrendering his power, wealth, honor, and ultimately his life out of his for love of us.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that people often seek power, wealth, honor, and pleasure as a substitute for God. But Jesus invites us to embrace his way instead: *“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30) It may seem at times that the work God has for us is difficult and heavy, but if we are yoked with him, we need only keep in step and he will shoulder the load.

**July 5:** *Lord, teach us how to ‘take your yoke upon us’ as we pray with Matthew 11:25-30.*

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**July 6:** *Lord, reveal your spousal love for us as we pray with Hosea 2:16-22, and may we guard that gift heroically as did St. Maria Goretti.*

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**July 7:** Lord, reveal to us any false idols we have made and help us to repent of them as we pray with Psalm 115:1-8.

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**July 8:** Lord, increase our desire to always seek your face as we pray with Psalm 105:1-7.

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**July 9:** Lord, help us, your children, to know and experience your Fatherly love as we pray with Hosea 11:1-4.

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**July 10:** Lord, may your Holy Spirit speak through our Local Church and give us strength as we pray with Matthew 10:16-23.

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**July 11:** Lord, on this memorial of Saint Benedict, help us to follow his example and strive to be like you, our teacher, as we pray with Matthew 10:24-33.

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Parable of the Sower, Marten van Valckenborch, 1580-1590

**July 12-18, 2020:** *“But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.” (Matthew 13:23)*

In the Gospel readings over the next few weeks Jesus uses parables to proclaim the kingdom of God to the people. *“The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word? ...Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to ‘know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.’ For those who stay ‘outside,’ everything remains enigmatic.” (CCC546b)* For someone hearing the parable of the sower for the first time, this story may simply appear to be about good farming practices. But there’s so much more!

We have the gift of Jesus himself explaining the deeper meaning to us in Matthew’s Gospel: *“Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.” (Matthew 13:18-23)*

Let us offer God our hearts and ask him to make them rich soil in which he might plant his seed and bear much fruit!

**July 12:** *Lord, reveal to us any hardness of heart that we need to bring to you to transform into rich soil as we pray with Matthew 13:1-23.*

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**July 13:** *Lord, show us where we are going astray and lead us to the right path as we pray with Psalm 50.*

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**July 14:** Lord, on this memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, we offer you a hymn of praise as we pray with Psalm 48.

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**July 15:** Lord, on this memorial of Saint Bonaventure, reveal the Father to us as we pray with Matthew 11:25-27.

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**July 16:** Lord, as we pray with Isaiah 26:7-19, may we as an Archdiocese yearn for you and recognize that it is you who accomplish all that we do.

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**July 17:** Lord, show us where you “desire mercy, not sacrifice” as we pray with Matthew 12:1-8.

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**July 18:** Lord, as we pray with Psalm 10, show us as a Local Church how you’d like us to tend to the needs of the poor.

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The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, Dominico Fetti, 17<sup>th</sup> Century

**July 19-25, 2020:** *“The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off.” (Matthew 13:24)*

This week’s parable is again about seed being sown, but has a very different message. After the good seed is sown an enemy comes and sows weeds. We might be frustrated that Jesus is telling such a discouraging story, but in doing so he has much to teach us about life in this world. In this parable Jesus brings to the forefront the age-old problem of evil. The *Catechism* offers some valuable insight:

*Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it:*

*For almighty God. . . , because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. (CCC 311)*

The farmer demonstrates great patience, not pulling up the weeds until harvest time so as to not accidentally uproot any wheat. Likewise, God is patient with us, always desiring us to choose him, but never violating our free will. Let us trust in the goodness of the Lord and follow him so that we too will be counted among *“the righteous [who] will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear.” (Matthew 13:43)*

**July 19:** *Lord, may we humbly come to you seeking mercy and truth as we pray with Psalm 86.*

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**July 20:** *Lord, show us how we are to “walk humbly with our God” as we pray with Micah 6:1-8.*

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**July 21:** Lord, you are merciful and forgiving. On this memorial of St. Lawrence of Brindisi let us run to you with our sins that you might restore us to life as we pray with Psalm 85.

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**July 22:** Lord, on this feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, increase our yearning for you as we pray with John 20:1-2, 11-18.

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**July 23:** Lord, grant to our Local Church “knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven” as we pray with Matthew 13:10-17.

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**July 24:** Lord, as we pray with Jeremiah 3:14-17, we thank you for giving us Archbishop Hebda as a ‘shepherd after your own heart.’

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**July 25:** Lord, on this feast of Saint James, may your life be made manifest in our lives as we pray with 2 Corinthians 4:7-15.

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The Hidden Treasure, James Tissot, 1886-1896

**July 26 – August 1, 2020:** *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44)*

Think of all the stories about buried treasure! We are filled with delight and excitement when we discover something valuable. Sometimes we receive great satisfaction from discovering a “treasure” not because of its monetary worth, but because we were diligently seeking for it out of necessity. Finding a lost set of car keys or a parking spot when we’re late can seem like winning the lottery.

Consequently, Jesus’ parable about the kingdom of heaven being like a treasure buried in a field resonates with us. Not only is the kingdom of heaven of supreme value, but it’s also that which every human heart seeks. Even though people often try to fill this longing with other things, nothing else will satisfy. This is why it is so important for the people of God to proclaim the Gospel.

It’s also important to realize that this longing in each of our hearts is but a glimpse of God’s longing for us. We come to see this in the parable if we look at it from another perspective: *we* are the treasure in the field and *God* is the one who finds us. God treasures us! We are so valuable to him that he ‘sold all that he had’ – he gave his only Son – that he might claim us as his own.

**July 26:** *Lord, grant us a deeper awareness and experience of how much you value us as we pray with Matthew 13:44-52.*

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**July 27:** *Lord, may our faith grow to be like that of the mustard seed as we pray with Matthew 13:31-35.*

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**July 28:** Lord, 'deliver us and pardon us for your name's sake' as we pray with Psalm 79.

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**July 29:** Lord, on this memorial of Saint Martha may we as an Archdiocese follow her example and boldly witness that "you are the Christ, the Son of God" as we pray with John 11:19-27.

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**July 30:** Lord, as we pray with Jeremiah 18:1-6, may we be like clay in your hands and let you make of us whatever you please as did Blessed Solanus Casey, who was confirmed as a boy in our Archdiocese.

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**July 31:** Lord, as we pray with Matthew 13:54-58 on this memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, increase our faith that you may do many mighty deeds through us.

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**August 1:** Lord, give us the boldness of Saint John the Baptist to proclaim the truth as we pray with Matthew 14:1-12.

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