

## **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 April 2020:**

**That our encounter with Jesus Christ in the Easter Sacraments will lead us to welcome his presence in members of the Church during our Archdiocesan Synod process.**

**Opening Reflection**

Lord, as we celebrate this holy season, we give you thanks for your presence among us, Jesus, and the opportunity to encounter you in the Church and Sacraments.



The Resurrection of Christ from the Isenheim Altarpiece, Matthias Grunewald, 1512-1516



Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples, Jacopo Tintoretto, 1548-1549

**April 5 - 11, 2020:** *“So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power...[he] began to wash the disciples’ feet.” (John 13:3-6)*

We are entering the holiest time of the year. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday and Jesus entering Jerusalem to a cheering crowd. A few days later the crowd turns and he’s led away to be crucified.

Many are familiar with John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world...”* But when we look at the context of this verse we get a glimpse of what this love cost: *“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:14-17)*

The salvation of the world comes through Jesus being *lifted up*, i.e., it comes through the cross. The great celebration of Easter follows our Lord’s suffering and crucifixion. The familiar hymn expresses it well: *“What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul? What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss, to bear the dreadful curse, for my soul, for my soul”*

To prepare for Easter let us fully enter Holy Week and immerse ourselves in the wondrous love of God.

*By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.” God “shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (CCC 604)*

**April 5:** *Lord, prepare our hearts to receive you this Holy Week as we pray with Matthew 21:1-11.*

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**April 6:** *Lord, help us learn how to worship you extravagantly as we pray with John 12:1-11.*

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*April 7: Lord, we do not want to betray you. Help us to look at ourselves honestly and repent of our sins as we pray with John 13:21-38.*

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*April 8: Lord, show us how to follow you resolutely as we pray with Isaiah 50:4-9.*

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*April 9: Lord, open our hearts to see how you would like us to wash one another's feet as we pray with John 13:1-15.*

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*April 10: Lord, increase our gratitude for the gift of your Passion as we pray with Hebrews 4:14-16 and Hebrews 5:7-9.*

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*April 11: Lord, may we strive to give you fitting thanks and praise for rescuing us as we pray with Psalm 30.*

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Noli Me Tangere, Giotto, 1304

**April 12-18, 2020:** *“On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.” (John 20, 1-2)*

Alleluia, the Lord is risen; he is risen indeed! We have made the journey through Lent and have finally arrived at Easter. Because this is not just another Sunday we have spent 40 days engaging in the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to prepare our hearts to enter into the great “Feast of feasts.” Almsgiving opens our hearts to better love our neighbor. Fasting makes us hunger for the Bread of Life. In his letter to Proba, St. Augustine teaches us that prayer increases our capacity to receive what God wants to give us:

*Why God should ask us to pray, when he knows what we need before we ask him, may perplex us if we do not realize that our Lord and God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it) but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. His gift is very great indeed, but our capacity is too small and limited to receive it.*

His gift is very great indeed! He loves us so much that he willingly suffered and died to set us free from sin. Yet the tomb could not contain him. He rose again to open for us the way to new life. “This new life is above all justification that reinstates us in God's grace, ‘so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.’” (CCC 654)

Alleluia, the Lord is risen; He is risen indeed! Happy Easter!

**April 12:** *Lord, let us rejoice and be glad this Easter Sunday as we pray with Psalm 118.*

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**April 13:** *Lord, may we as a Local Church learn from Mary Magdalene how to spread the Gospel with joy as we pray with Matthew 28:8-15.*

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*April 14: Lord, help us to open our eyes to recognize you as we pray with John 20:11-18.*

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*April 15: Lord, help us to follow Peter and John's example and offer you to those in need as we pray with Acts 3:1-10.*

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*April 16: Lord, increase our confidence in you as we pray with Luke 24:35-48.*

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*April 17: Lord, give our Archdiocese the courage needed to proclaim you even in times of adversity as we pray with Acts 4:1-12.*

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*April 18: Lord, may we be recognized as 'ordinary people who are companions of Jesus' as we pray with Acts 4:13-21.*

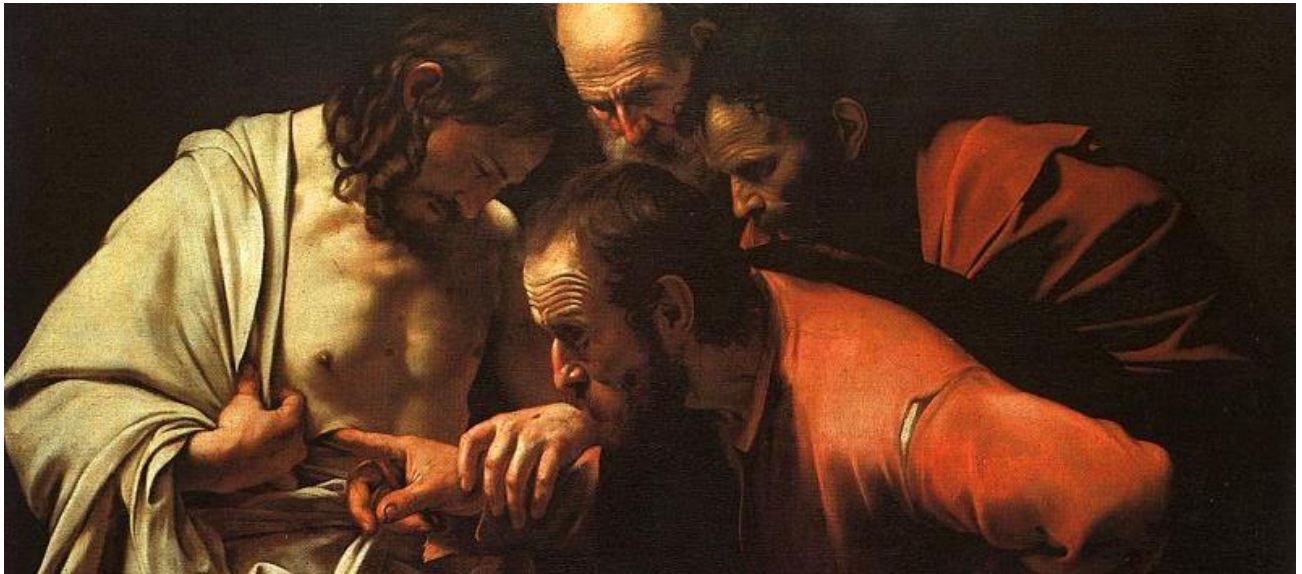
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The Incredulity of St. Thomas, Caravaggio, 1601-1602

**April 19-25, 2020:** *“Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.’ Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:27-28)*

What a gift Saint Thomas is to the Church! Because of his incredulity, he will be forever known as “Doubting Thomas.” But hasn’t he spoken for all those who long for tangible evidence of the miracle of Easter?

There are times when, like Thomas, we struggle to believe. Fortunately, God knows our frailty and gives us his Holy Spirit:

*One cannot believe in Jesus Christ without sharing in his Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to men who Jesus is. For “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit,” who “searches everything, even the depths of God. No one comprehends the thoughts of God, except the Spirit of God.” Only God knows God completely: we believe in the Holy Spirit because he is God. (CCC152)*

After Thomas’ profession of faith Jesus replies, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” We are invited to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). But fortunately we don’t have to walk alone. God gives us not only his Holy Spirit, but he also provides a “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) to accompany us: our Blessed Mother, all the angels and saints, and each other. “Saint Thomas, pray for us!”

**April 19:** *Lord, increase our faith in you as we pray with John 20:19-31.*

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**April 20:** *Lord, make us come to Jesus as did Nicodemus as we pray with John 3:1-8.*

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**April 21:** Lord, help our Archdiocese to be “of one heart and mind” so that there will no longer ‘be needy people among us’ as we pray with Acts 4:32-37.

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**April 22:** Lord, fill us with your light as we pray with John 3:16-21.

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**April 23:** Lord, as we pray with Acts 5:27-33, give us courage to obey you even when it may lead to persecution.

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**April 24:** Lord, may you be ‘the one thing we seek’ as we pray with Psalm 27.

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**April 25:** Lord, on this Feast of St. Mark, may we as a Local Church be bold in ‘going into the whole world and proclaiming the Gospel’ as we pray with Mark 16:15-20.

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The Way to Emmaus, Robert Zund, 1877

**April 26 – May 2, 2020:** *“And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them...” (Luke 24:15)*

How accurately can you describe the houses or buildings within a block or two of where you live? Or how easily can you recall the teams that won the last couple of Super Bowls? In a fast-paced, noise-filled society like ours, there is a tendency for activities to occupy our attention for only a brief moment before being replaced by something else. It can become easy to flit from one thing to the next and miss the opportunity to go to a deeper level.

The same thing can happen in our spiritual lives. How often do we worship at Mass and can't recall the Scripture readings by the time we leave? Or how often do we recite the Our Father or Hail Mary without really entering deeply into prayer? It is important that we slow down and quiet our souls if we are to hear what the Lord wants to say to us.

Think of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were familiar with the Law and the Prophets. They had spent the last few years with Jesus. But they still were unable to see how they all fit together. They needed to take a seven-mile walk with Jesus so he could reveal himself to them.

How does the Lord want to open the Scriptures to us? How does he want to reveal himself to us in ever new and deeper ways? Will we be willing to slow down and quiet our souls and journey with him?

**April 26:** *Lord, open our hearts to see you anew as we pray with Luke 24:13-35.*

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**April 27:** *Lord, help us to ‘accomplish the works of God’ by increasing our belief in you as we pray with John 6:22-29.*

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**April 28:** *Lord, open our eyes to see ever more clearly that you are the Bread of Life as we pray with John 6:30-35.*

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**April 29:** *Lord, on this Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena, may we follow her example and seek our sustenance in you as we pray with John 6:35-40.*

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**April 30:** *Lord, as we pray with Acts 8:26-40, may we follow Philip's example and be willing to share the Gospel with whomever you bring to us.*

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**May 1:** *Lord, lead us to ever deeper conversion as we pray with Acts 9:1-20.*

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**May 2:** *Lord, as we pray with John 6:60-69, strengthen us to be able to hold fast to you even when things get hard, for "You have the words of eternal life."*

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