

## **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 May 2020:**

**That our Blessed Mother's humble obedience to the Holy Spirit will inspire the same in all the laity and clergy of our Archdiocese during this Synod process.**

## **Opening Reflection**

Lord, as we honor our Blessed Mother this month, may we grow in our own following the Humble Obedience of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



The Cortona Altarpiece, The Annunciation, Fra Angelico, 1433-1434



At the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, Third Century

**May 3-9, 2020:** *“I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep, and mine know me.”*  
(John 10:14)

Take a moment and reflect on how often sheep and shepherds are mentioned in the Bible. Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve was a shepherd. Before becoming king, David tended his father’s sheep in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 17:15). About 1000 years later, shepherds from that same village would follow the invitation of an angel to worship “an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). How fitting that the one who would give his body and blood to nourish his flock would be found in a food trough for sheep.

This Sunday’s Gospel is taken from the tenth chapter of John. Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd and expounds upon what this means: “He calls them by name and leads them out...the sheep follow him...I know mine and they know me...I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly,” and ultimately, “A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (vv. 3,4,10,11,14).

In a beautiful and tender way, John concludes his Gospel with Jesus’ three-fold restoration of Simon Peter: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’” (John 21:15). Through the Church, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, continues to provide his flock with shepherds. Let us thank God for Archbishop Hebda, and pray that God will continue to equip him with all that he needs to be our good shepherd.

**May 3:** *Lord, reveal the abundant life you have for us as we pray with John 10:1-10.*

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**May 4:** *Lord, give us a deeper awareness and experience of what it means to belong to you as we pray with John 10:11-18.*

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*May 5: Lord, teach us to listen to your voice as we pray with John 10:22-30.*

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*May 6: Lord, reveal to our Archdiocese the work to which you are calling us as we pray with Acts 12:24-13:5a.*

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*May 7: Lord, help us to grow to be like you, our Master, as we pray with John 13:16-20.*

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*May 8: Lord, equip us to be able to share the story of Jesus as we pray with Acts 13:26-33.*

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*May 9: Lord, open our eyes to see you, the Triune God, as we pray with John 14:7-14.*

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The Cornerstone, James Tissot, 1886-1894

**May 10-16, 2020:** *“Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:6)*

In Sunday’s second reading, Saint Peter encourages us to be “living stones” and allow ourselves to “be built into a spiritual house acceptable to God” (1 Peter 2:5). Anyone who has attempted to build a tower of blocks understands the importance of incorporating a corner in the design. A single straight wall is much more likely to fall over than a structure comprised of two intersecting walls. In a masonry structure, the cornerstone would be the first stone laid with all the subsequent stones oriented to it. In the same way, we “living stones” must be built on and oriented to our Cornerstone, Jesus.

We see the theme of a “spiritual house” in this week’s Gospel as well. Jesus shares his final words of comfort and encouragement with his disciples before being led off to be crucified:

*Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” (John 14:1-4)*

As we continue to strive together to build up our Local Church, let’s follow the Master’s plan. Let us begin with the sure foundation of Jesus Christ as our cornerstone and generously offer ourselves as living stones. Finally, let us not be troubled but place our faith in the Lord, trusting that he is preparing a place for us!

**May 10:** *Lord, as we pray with 1 Peter 2:4-9, show us how you want to use us as living stones to build up your Church.*

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**May 11:** *Lord, attune our hearts to hear your Holy Spirit as we pray with John 14:21-26.*

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*May 12: Lord, fill us with your peace as we pray with John 14:27-31a.*

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*May 13: Lord, show us how you want to bear fruit in our Archdiocese as we pray with John 15:1-8.*

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*May 14: Lord, increase our joy and love for one another as we pray with John 15:9-17.*

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*May 15: Lord, we want to be people of gratitude. Let us praise you with thanksgiving as we pray with Psalm 57:8-12.*

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*May 16: Lord, when we encounter persecution and hardship, let us unite our suffering to yours as we pray with John 15:18-21.*

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Saint Peter Preaching in Jerusalem, Charles Poerson, 1642

**May 17-23, 2020:** *“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope...” (1 Peter 3:15)*

O the marvelous, mysterious wisdom of God! Who else would choose a man like Simon Peter to lead the Church? One of the great gifts of the Bible is that it doesn't gloss over the faults and failings of our early leaders. Since we too are sinners striving to be saints, this should fill us with hope.

Two weeks ago we read how Jesus asked Simon Peter three times, “Do you love me?” (John 21). He does this to give Peter the opportunity to confess his love and faith in the Lord after his threefold denial during Christ's Passion and Crucifixion. Consider the importance of these events! According to the letter to the Hebrews, Christ is able to identify with us: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Hebrews 4:15-16). God provides a leader for the Church who understands what it is like to fail miserably and be restored.

This makes Peter's letters all the more fascinating! Think of the “explanation” Peter could offer for his “reason to hope” (1 Peter 3:15). Yet each one of us has a unique and beautiful story that God wants us to share. Let us take some time this week to reflect on the many ways God has worked in our lives and how we might be able to share our reasons to hope with others.

**May 17:** *Lord, reveal to us the importance of our personal stories as we pray with 1 Peter 3:15-18.*

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**May 18:** *Lord, help our Local Church to grow in hospitality as we pray with Acts 16:11-15.*

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**May 19:** Lord, may we learn from Paul and Silas how to witness to you in affliction and deliverance as we pray with Acts 16:22-34.

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**May 20:** Lord, may your Holy Spirit “guide us to all truth” as we pray with John 16:12-15.

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**May 21:** Lord, show us how we may be your witnesses in the places where we work and serve as we pray with Acts 18:1-8.

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**May 22:** Lord, give our Archdiocese the strength to persevere in following you, knowing that one day we will see you again as we pray with John 16:20-23.

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**May 23:** Lord, help our Local Church to discern what we should ask of the Father as we pray with John 16:23-28.

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The Ascension of Christ, Rembrandt, 1636

**May 24-30, 2020:** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight” (Acts 1:8-9).*

We are nearing the end of the Easter Season. The liturgical year began in Advent as we prepared for Christ’s descending from heaven to earth. Today we celebrate his ascending and returning to the right hand of the Father:

*“This final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who ‘came from the Father’ can return to the Father: Christ Jesus. ‘No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.’ Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the ‘Father’s house,’ to God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us” (CCC 661).*

Through Christ we have “access to the Father, to his life and happiness,” and he wants us to share this great gift with others. Before he ascends, he gives his disciples a mission: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). To enable us to carry out this mission he gives the power of the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord, let us beg him for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work he has for us.

**May 24:** *Lord, enlighten our hearts as we pray with Ephesians 1:17-23.*

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**May 25:** *Lord, as we pray with John 16:29-33, strengthen our hearts and grant us peace in you, remembering that you have conquered the world.*

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**May 26:** Lord, as we pray with Acts 20:17-27 on this memorial of St. Philip Neri, may we follow his example, and the example of St. Paul, and follow wherever the Holy Spirit compels us to go.

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**May 27:** Lord, consecrate our Archdiocese in truth and send us into the world as we pray with John 17:11-19.

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**May 28:** Lord, show us the path of life as we pray with Psalm 16.

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**May 29:** Lord, as we pray with John 21:15-19 reveal to us where we have failed to love you and restore us so that we may follow you.

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**May 30:** Lord, sometimes like Saint Paul, we find ourselves in chains. As we pray with Acts 28:16-30, strengthen us to persevere and proclaim the gospel even when it's difficult.

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