

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.

Synod Prayer Intention for January 2020:

“That encountering our immigrant brothers and sisters in the Archdiocesan Synod Process would inspire in us greater solidarity and humanness, and spur us to offer our lives as a gift for others, we pray to the Lord.”

Opening Reflection

This month we honor the **Holy Name of Jesus**, claiming His promise that *“whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:13-14).



Adoration of the Holy Name of Jesus by El Greco 1577-1579



The Virgin of the Angels, William by Adolphe Bouguereau, 1881

December 29, 2019 - January 4, 2020: *“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”* (Luke 2:19).

How beautiful that the celebration of the Octave of Christmas concludes with the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. And how fitting that this occurs on the first day of the new calendar year. God in His wisdom created life with a certain rhythm. We see this each day: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands. Day unto day pours forth speech; night unto night whispers knowledge;”* (Psalm 19:2-3) and each year: *“All the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”* (Genesis 8:22). As we watch nature respond with light following darkness and Spring following Winter, we see God reminding us of His divine plan of life, death, and resurrection.

The Church also encourages a rhythm of worship to help us enter more deeply into prayer:

The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer. Some are daily, such as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours. Sundays, centered on the Eucharist, are kept holy primarily by prayer. The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are also basic rhythms of the Christian's life of prayer (CCC 2698).

As we reflect on 2019 and enter 2020, let’s ask our Blessed Mother who was the first to *“keep all these things, reflecting on them in her heart,”* to be our guide: *Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.*

December 29: *Lord, teach our Archdiocese how to walk in Your ways as we pray with Psalm 128.*

December 30: *Lord, show us how to let go of the things of the world and love You more fully as we pray with 1 John 2:12-17.*

December 31: Lord, we ask You to enlighten our Archdiocese with Your true light as we pray with John 1:1-18.

January 1: Lord, help our Local Church follow the example of the shepherds and “make known the message” of Jesus as we pray with Luke 2:16-21.

January 2: Lord, open our hearts to see and receive the victory You have won for us as we pray with Psalm 98.

January 3: Lord, show us how You are inviting us to testify that You are: “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” as we pray with John 1:29-34.

January 4: Lord, help us come to know what I am looking for, as we pray with John 1:35-42.



Journey of the Magi by James Tissot, 1894

January 5-11, 2020 *“They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh”* (Matthew 2:11).

Merriam-Webster defines *epiphany* as *“a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.”* The Epiphany of the Lord recalls the sudden manifestation of God Incarnate in a special way to the wise men from the East. *“In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi’s coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations”* (from CCC 528). What a gift the magi have given us for we see in their example that God reveals Himself to those who seek Him!

We also see the gratitude that overflows in those who find Him. The magi offer gifts to Jesus that are further revelations of who this Christ child is: gold – a gift for a king, frankincense – used in worship, and myrrh – a fragrant resin used in burying the dead.

At the beginning of this New Year let us follow the example of the magi and eagerly seek the Lord. Let us expectantly look for the personal way He desires to reveal Himself to us. And then may we respond with gifts worthy of our King and our God, who loves us so much that He died for our salvation.

January 5: *Lord, as we pray with Matthew 2:1-12, reveal to us the gifts that we have to offer of gold (gift for a king), frankincense (gift of prayer) and myrrh (gift of sacrifice).*

January 6: *Lord, as we pray with Matthew 4:12-25, show us how You want to proclaim the Gospel and bring healing to our Archdiocese.*

January 7: Lord, as we pray with 1 John 4:7-10, reveal to our Archdiocese how You are calling us to love one another.

January 8: Lord, show us what we must do to remain in Your love as we pray with 1 John 4:11-18.

January 9: Lord, we can't love You and hate our brother. Show us where You want to bring healing and forgiveness as we pray with 1 John 4:19-5:4.

January 10: Lord, give us the faith of the leper and show us how You want to cleanse our Local Church as we pray with Luke 5:12-16.

January 11: Lord, reveal in a particular way how we delight You as we pray with Psalm 149.



The Baptism of Christ by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci, 1472-1475

January 12-18, 2020: *“And a voice came from the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’”* (Matthew 3:17).

It is fitting that the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord should follow Epiphany, for this is another sudden manifestation of the Lord. We see in a new and powerful way the interplay of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. We also see in a new and powerful way the revelation of God’s personal love for us. The Catechism describes this beautifully:

The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Already he is anticipating the “baptism” of his bloody death. Already he is coming to “fulfill all righteousness,” that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to “rest on him.” Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism “the heavens were opened”- the heavens that Adam's sin had closed - and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation (CCC 536).

On this feast day, may we surrender our sins to the waters of baptism and unite ourselves to Christ, so that as we rise to new life in Him we may hear the Father say, *“This is my beloved child, in whom I am well-pleased!”*

January 12: *Lord, show us how we are pleasing to You as we pray with Matthew 3:13-17.*

January 13: *Lord, help us to follow You as we pray with Mark 1:14-20.*

January 14: Lord, reveal to our Local Church how You teach with authority as we pray with Mark 21:1-8.

January 15: Lord, help us, like Samuel, learn to recognize Your voice as we pray with 1 Samuel 3:1-10.

January 16: Lord, let us never fear to come to You in our need. Increase our resolve as we pray with Mark 1:40-45.

January 17: Lord, help us as an Archdiocese bring to You those in need of healing as we pray with Mark 2:1-12.

January 18: Lord, give us the courage to come to You for forgiveness and healing as we pray with Mark 2:13-17.



Ghent Altarpiece by Jan Van Eyck, 1432

January 19-25, 2020: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)*

This Sunday we hear another account of Christ’s Baptism, but this time from the Holy Gospel According to John. It is here that we find the words proclaimed in every Mass: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, [behold him] who takes away the sin of the world.”* In our daily lives we are frequently washing away dirt and grime with water. But in the rite of baptism a much deeper cleansing is taking place.

In the time leading up to Christ, in the Jewish faith there were many cleansing rituals required before offering an appropriate sacrifice. These helped to prepare the way for a day when there would be the ultimate purification – purification from sin. For this to be fulfilled, a *perfect* sacrifice needed to be offered.

“After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover. Christ's whole life expresses his mission: “to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (CCC 60).

The next time we dip our fingers in a font of holy water, let’s recall the price that Christ, the Lamb of God, paid for us to do so.

January 19: *Lord, show us how You want to restore us as we pray with Isaiah 49:3-6.*

January 20: *Lord, show us how to offer our sacrifice of praise as we pray with Psalm 50.*

January 21: Lord, on this Memorial of St. Agnes, help us to see how You're inviting us to be Your faithful servants as we pray with Psalm 89:20-28.

January 22: Lord, today we pray in a special way for the unborn. Give our Local Church courage to fight our "Goliaths" as we pray with 1 Samuel 17:32-51.

January 23: Lord, reveal to us in a personal way how You are with us as I pray with Psalm 56.

January 24: Lord, as we pray with Mark 3:13-19 on this Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, show us Your desire to be with us and to use us to make You known and loved.

January 25: Lord, as we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, take the scales off our eyes so that we can see more clearly Your desire for our Archdiocese as we pray with Acts 9:1-22.



Miraculous Draught of Fish by Raphael, 1515-1516

January 26 - February 1, 2020: *“He said to them, ‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” (Matthew 4:19)*

Shortly after Jesus’ baptism, John the Baptist is arrested and Jesus departs for the land of Galilee. This fulfills a prophesy from Isaiah: *“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 8:22-9:1)*. But perhaps more importantly, Jesus’ relocation to Galilee sets up an encounter with some lowly fishermen.

What an unlikely cast of characters to choose for disciples! And how often the Bible highlights their mistakes and shortcomings. But in these men Christ found people who were willing to *“at once”* leave their nets, their livelihoods, their homes and their families to follow Him. Two thousand years later we have these fishermen to thank for handing down to us the good news of Jesus Christ.

After Christ’s death and resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we see these same fishermen performing miracles and proclaiming the Gospel boldly, suffering persecution and imprisonment for doing so. *“Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus” (Acts 4:13)*. We may see ourselves as unqualified and ordinary; nevertheless Christ wants us to be His companions. Let us follow the example of these simple men from Galilee and *at once* leave all else behind to follow him.

January 26: *Lord, give us the courage to respond to Your call as we pray with Matthew 4:12-23.*

January 27: *Lord, it was You who empowered David to rule Israel. Empower our Archdiocese to do Your will as we pray with Psalm 89:20-26*

January 28: *Lord, on this Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas, we remember a man through whom You did a mighty work. Open our hearts wide that the King of Glory may enter as we pray with Psalm 24:7-10.*

January 29: *Lord, make our hearts rich soil to receive Your word as we pray with Mark 4:1-20.*

January 30: *Lord, make our Archdiocese a beacon of light as we pray with Mark 4:21-25.*

January 31: *Lord, as we pray with Mark 4:26-34 on this Memorial of St. John Bosco, we pray in a particular way for our youth. May their faith flourish like that of the mustard seed.*

February 1: *Lord, thank You for the gift of forgiveness. Help us to come to You with contrite heart as we pray with Psalm 51:12-17.*
