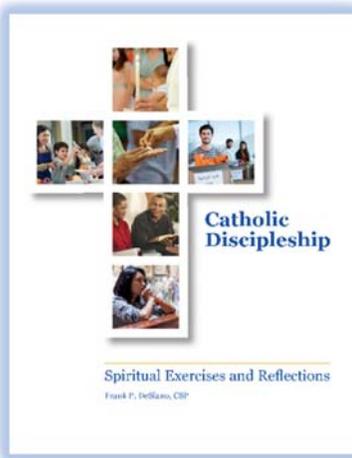


Introducing *Catholic Discipleship: Spiritual Exercises and Reflections*

Catholic Discipleship is a new resource for parishes and for individuals who want to grow in their identity as missionary disciples.



Written by Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP and available this fall, *Catholic Discipleship* features twelve units focusing on the fundamental dimensions of what it means to be a disciple in today's world. Each unit features a Spiritual Exercise which includes Scripture and questions for reflection and discussion.

Catholic Discipleship can be used by individuals looking to deepen their own connection to Christ, or by parishes looking for small group faith formation or a parish-wide renewal.

Read what Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington had to say about *Catholic Discipleship*:

“In this time defined by the call for a New Evangelization, Father Frank DeSiano, CSP’s book, *Catholic Discipleship: Spiritual Exercises and Reflections*, offers concrete, practical, insightful and engaging help in actually becoming a missionary disciple, an evangelizing disciple.

This short but rich text is a splendid pastoral tool to help the reader recognize the dimensions of discipleship and how better to experience the encounter with Christ that is at the very heart of the New Evangelization.”

To celebrate Catechetical Sunday, we present an excerpt from the final unit which focuses on missionary discipleship.

Learn more at
www.pemdc.org/Discipleship

Missionaries

We Catholics had vivid images of missionaries in our heads in the past. The Maryknoll Fathers and Sisters went to exotic places and learned difficult languages. The Medical Missionary Sisters provided wonderful health care to people who otherwise wouldn't have it. The Missionary Society of Africa braved heat and difficult terrain to bring the Gospel. We heard stories about St. Francis Xavier baptizing thousands. We honored those Jesuit missionaries in North America who gave their lives, after enduring great hardships, so that native peoples might hear the Gospel and be saved.

When Pope Paul VI presented “On Evangelization in the Modern World” in 1975, he substantially expanded this traditional concept of mission. Evangelization certainly does include outreach to people who do not know Jesus Christ, but it also includes inactive Catholics, children being catechized, our separated Protestant brothers and sisters, and even active Catholics. All need to be evangelized because none of us have heard the Gospel fully, and we do not live the Gospel as completely as we should.

In this way, the Church has come to understand every baptized Catholic as both an evangelizer and someone to be evangelized. This means that everyone who calls him- or herself a Christian has received, in baptism, the call to live, and share, the life of discipleship. Pope Francis puts this quite powerfully and simply:

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples.”

(“The Joy of the Gospel,” #120)

So, we Catholics cannot get ourselves off the hook by supporting foreign missions (though, of course, we should) or reading stories of the millions of converts in Africa in the past one hundred years. Nor can we absolve ourselves by saying that being missionary is the main job of “Father” or “Sister” or the pastoral associate at our parish. We are all evangelizers; we are all missionary disciples. That is, we are all disciples charged with inviting others into discipleship as well.

In this way, by becoming disciples and building discipleship in the Church, we all strive to continue the work of Jesus Christ—to proclaim and bring

about the Kingdom of God as God's plan for the fulfillment of our human longing and hope. No baptized Catholic can be exempt from mission. As faith was passed on to us—however it came—so we pass faith on to others as part of living our lives in faithfulness to Jesus, God's mission made incarnate.

With this more expansive notion of mission, we can demarcate what missionary discipleship means in the various spheres, or fields, of mission in our own lives—ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our world—in and through our parish communities.

Ourselves

Indeed, the first and essential field of mission is our own hearts. Any other evangelization I would undertake would become pure hypocrisy if I did not attend to the ongoing growth the Gospel demands in my own life. As Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem, the city where he knows he must die, he tells his followers: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). We can see the implication of Jesus' words: following him would be a daily process of denying oneself and accepting the cost of revealing the Kingdom of God in our ordinary lives.

This brings into play the various elements of discipleship which have been part of our spiritual exercises in discipleship—ongoing conversion, openness to God's Word, constant prayer, faithful worship, building up our community of believers, and becoming a selfless servant to others in the image of Christ. Being a disciple is the same as the call to holiness which every baptized person accepts as a personal commitment. Holiness, as the various lives of our saints shows us, takes on many forms and emphases. St. Francis de Sales, one of the most acute observers of the spiritual life, insisted that each person, and each state of life, had a unique form of devotion. Why would a king, for example, live the same way of life as a monk?

Crucial to ongoing evangelization is our staying connected to spiritual guides: our pastors and those who help with ongoing faith formation in the parish, our spouses and loved ones; close friends who share our commitments, various opportunities to renew our faith through retreats and parish missions; movements of spiritual renewal, and even finding a spiritual director with whom to share questions and life directions.

It involves staying close to our parish communities because these ground us in the Eucharist and community and give us many opportunities to grow outside our narrow preferences through serving others. In a world where many people routinely lay aside the opportunity (and obligation) of worship, we active Catholics play a decisive role in the way we show the centrality of the Mass to our lives as disciples. How can we be evangelized when we ignore essential resources for growing in faith which come through our faith communities? Needless to say, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to keep hypocrisy at bay and renew our experience of conversion.

Spiritual Exercise

Read the final section of Matthew's Gospel below. Imagine you were among the Eleven, coming to Jesus even with your doubts. Still, you feel in your heart the burden of his urging you to go to "all the nations." In your imagination, what do you imagine doing differently in your life in order to carry out the invitation of Jesus? Whom are those Jesus sends you to bring into his Kingdom of grace?

Scripture

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Questions for reflection/discussion:

1. How do you imagine the Eleven felt being addressed this way by Jesus, in this, their first encounter with him after his crucifixion?
2. In what ways do you see yourself challenged by Jesus, by bringing Good News to your world? Think of concrete examples from your life.
3. How do you think you can help inspire your co-believers to understand themselves more fully as missionary disciples?