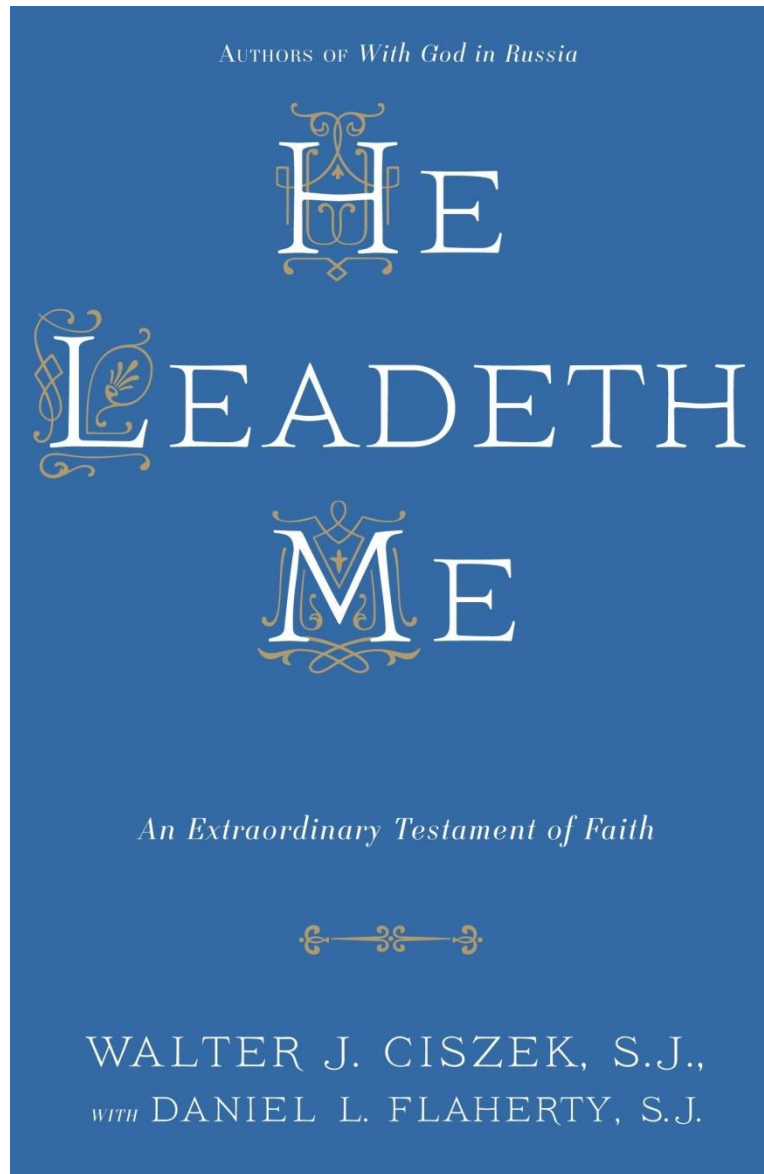




Saint Pius X Catholic Church

Fall 2020 Book Study



Study Guide

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All references and page numbers are to the following edition of Fr. Ciszek's book:
He Leadeth Me: An Extraordinary Testament of Faith, by Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., with Daniel L. Flaherty, S.J.
New York: Image, 2014.

Introduction

Our current pandemic has led many of us to face some uncomfortable truths about ourselves, our world, and our faith. Who are we without our distractions, our routines, our communities, even the sacred things we hold dear, like receiving the Eucharist? What can we hold to when everything around us seems so fragile and so difficult? Where can we put our hope and trust when so much seems uncertain, when trust in our public officials is eroding, when we and our world are suffering so much?

Servant of God Fr. Walter Ciszek, SJ, has some amazing insights to share with us in our situation. Fr. Ciszek faced hardships that we can hardly imagine. He suffered five years in a Soviet prison for interrogation, usually in solitary confinement. He was then sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor in Siberia with little food and shoddy clothing. He faced exile from his home and family for several decades. His Jesuit brothers even offered Masses for the repose of his soul, supposing he was dead!

Yet Fr. Ciszek also faced some of the same trials that we are facing: extreme isolation, deprivation of the Eucharist, a sense of confusion, distrust, and near-despair. Throughout it all, Fr. Ciszek clung to a “core of seemingly simple truths” and grew in his relationship with the Lord (p. 12). He writes, “I felt that I had learned much during those years of hardship and suffering that could be of help to others in their lives. For every man’s life contains its share of suffering” (p. 12). Fr. Ciszek is speaking to us in our trials!

Some notes about reading and discussing the book:

- Each chapter contains one central lesson that Fr. Ciszek wants to expand upon and draw out. Our sessions will encourage you to discover those central lessons and put them into your own words.
- Mark up the book! Though we do have assigned readings for discussion, much of the book is going to have its effect by lingering and talking about a particular sentence, phrase, or image. Underline, highlight, dog-ear: do what you need to let the words take effect. Write them in your study guide! Bring them to prayer, and see how the Lord wants to encourage you in relation to your own situation.
- Fr. Ciszek wrote this book out of the conviction that his suffering was actually not extraordinary: everyone suffers, and everyone’s suffering can be redemptive. Let Fr. Ciszek’s experiences meet you in your suffering and help you to see it in a new light.

Thank you for letting Fr. Ciszek speak to you in this unique historical moment. We hope that it helps to draw you closer to Christ’s heart!

Proposed Reading and Discussion Schedule

My Group's Gathering Day and Time:

My Group's Gathering Location/Zoom Link:

Fri., 8/21-Sat., 8/29: Read Introduction, Chapters 1-3

Sun., 8/30-Sat., 9/5: Week 1 Small Group Gathering to discuss Intro, Chapters 1-3
For Week 2 gathering, read Chapters 4-6

Sun., 9/6-Sat., 9/12: Week 2 Small Group Gathering to discuss Chapters 4-6
For Week 3 gathering, read Chapters 7-10

Sun., 9/13-Sat., 9/19: Week 3 Small Group Gathering to discuss Chapters 7-10
For Week 4 gathering, read Chapters 11-14

Sun., 9/20-Sat., 9/26: Week 4 Small Group Gathering to discuss Chapters 11-14
For Week 5 gathering, read Chapters 15-18

Sun., 9/27-Sat., 10/3: Week 5 Small Group Gathering to discuss Chapters 15-18
For Week 6 gathering, read Chapters 19-20 and Epilogue

Sun., 10/4-Sat., 10/10: Week 6 Small Group Gathering to discuss Chapters 19-20 and
Epilogue

Week One: Introduction & Chapters 1-3

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Introduction: *What Fr. Cizek thought was most important from his experiences...*
- Chapter 1: *Comfort, Suffering, and Trust in God...*
- Chapter 2: *Discerning God's will and fruits of the Spirit...*
- Chapter 3: *When God's will is not what we expected...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions:

- Recall an experience in which you grew in trusting the Lord. How did suffering help you to trust the Lord? In our current pandemic situation, is your suffering helping you to trust the Lord more deeply?
- Like Fr. Cizek being close to the people of Albertyn, how can we be close to someone who is suffering when we don't know what to say?
- Call to mind a major life decision in which you discerned God's will. What helped you to understand what God wanted from you? What made you "pull the trigger" on the decision?

Week Two: Chapters 4-6

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Chapter 4: *Doing God's will in "hopeless" situations...*
- Chapter 5: *Prayer as a conversation to be received...*
- Chapter 6: *Focus on self, failure, and purifying our desire to do God's will...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions:

- Our current pandemic and political situation can seem hopeless sometimes. How do you respond to Fr. Cizek's statement: "God does not expect a man single-handedly to change the world or overthrow all evil or cure all ills. He does expect him, though, to act as he would have him act in these circumstances ordained by his will and his providence"?
- Fr. Cizek claimed that "Lubianka, in many ways, was a school of prayer to me." How have you grown in your ability to pray? What life situations have been like a school of prayer for you?
- Did Fr. Cizek's signing of the false confession shock you? How did his failure help him to grow? How can humiliation help us to grow in our relationship with God?

Week Three: Chapters 7-10

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Chapter 7: *Surrender and abandonment to God's will in all circumstances...*
- Chapter 8: *Not just survival, but total dedication to God's will...*
- Chapter 9: *Salvation in and through the body...*
- Chapter 10: *Work, Christ, and God's creation...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions:

- Fr. Cizek believed that we can find God's will in every circumstance of our lives. Do you experience God's will and providence in your daily life? How can you be more attentive and responsive to God's will?
- How do you respond to Fr. Cizek's descriptions of how Christ experienced the pain and difficulty of the body or the drudgery of work? How can you try to invite Christ to share your bodily pains or your work?
- Fr. Cizek claimed that he was meant to be "Christ in this prison camp." Do you experience yourself as bringing the presence of Christ to your work or daily situations?

Week Four: Chapters 11-14

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Chapter 11: *Being a “witness” and doing little, simple things as our mission...*
- Chapter 12: *What is most important in the Father’s eyes for the apostolate...*
- Chapter 13: *The consolation and worth of the Holy Eucharist...*
- Chapter 14: *How the Kingdom of God has spread from Christ’s coming until now...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions

- Fr. Cizek can teach us a lot about evangelization. What was the most effective way for him to bring souls to Christ as his apostolate? How can you use his insights to evangelize others in your life?
- Like you, Fr. Cizek was deprived of Mass and the Eucharist for extended periods of time. How did he respond to this deprivation? How have you responded to this?
- Fr. Cizek found that it was very important to break up the monotony of prison life with retreats for his fellow priests and “parishioners.” When is the last time you’ve been on retreat? How do you break up the monotony of daily life to grow closer to the Lord?

Week Five: Chapters 15-18

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Chapter 15: *How Christ changes the way we face death compared to the world...*
- Chapter 16: *The surest guarantee of peace of soul and freedom of spirit...*
- Chapter 17: *The only way to enter God's Kingdom and our primary responsibility...*
- Chapter 18: *The meaning of humility and being grateful for humiliations...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions

- Fr. Cizek based his whole spiritual life on his understanding of God's providence. Do you experience God as being intimately involved in the details of your life? Do you recognize the circumstances of your day as His will for you? How can you grow to see and accept God's will and providence in your daily life?
- Fr. Cizek found profound freedom in recognizing how God had conquered his fears. What fears interfere with your life: fear of death? Failure or humiliation? Others' reaction? How can you more fully invite God to conquer your fears?
- Though Fr. Cizek contrasted his faith with the Communist world around him, surely our faith is countercultural to our secular, success- and profit-driven American society too. How does our faith make us different?

Week Six: Chapters 19-20, Epilogue

What I Thought the Central Lesson of Each Chapter Was:

- Chapter 19: *How faith can become operative in all we do and how it makes the difference between our lives and the lives of others...*
- Chapter 20: *How Christ provides a different and more human vision of humanity...*
- Epilogue: *The answer to how Fr. Cizek managed to survive and what it means ...*

What Passages, Sentences, or Phrases Stood Out Most to You?

Discussion Questions

- Why does Fr. Cizek believe the Morning Offering is such an effective way to strengthen faith? Do you pray the Morning Offering? How does it affect your day?
- Fr. Cizek says that our faith is a gift “to cherish or to take for granted.” Are you cherishing or taking your faith for granted right now?
- What is the view of humanity that our society holds? How does our faith present a richer and more human view of our nature?
- What was the most powerful part of this book for you? What part was the most difficult to read? In what ways do you want to grow in your relationship with the Lord as a result of reading it?