

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In the time of Jesus, mountains were considered very sacred places. People believed that when they were on top of a mountain, they were closer to God. We believe that God's Spirit is everywhere, and that there are countless places we can feel God's presence. Is there a place that you feel close to God? What is that place like? How do you feel when you are there?
- ◆ Isaiah tells the people to walk in God's light. Paul talks about the difference between day and night, light and darkness. What kinds of things give you the feeling that you are in the light? What kinds of things make you feel like you are in the darkness?
- ◆ Jesus wants all of us to be ready for him. Advent is a time when the entire community prepares for the arrival of Jesus in a special way. If someone really special was coming to visit your family, what would you do? Is there something you want to do together as a family to get ready for Jesus?
- ◆ Advent is a season of peace. The reading from Isaiah speaks to the radical peace that is possible and promised by God. How peaceful is your home? After a brief conversation, ask each family member to write down things they do that make your home less peaceful. Share with one another one thing you are going to do in the weeks of Advent to add to the peace of your family rather than detract from it.
- ◆ Jesus reminds the people that it is important to get ready for special events. Talk about an event in recent memory for which you prepared together as a family. Perhaps you had a sacramental celebration, or an event like a birthday, anniversary, or graduation. Why did you take the time to get ready? What did you do? How did being ready impact your experience of the event? What would the event have been like if you hadn't prepared for it? Make a special dinner together to share. Have everyone contribute through planning, shopping, cooking, setting the table in a special way, lighting a candle, or more. When you are done eating, talk about what the experience was like for your family. What did you learn about getting ready for Jesus by getting ready to be with one another in this special way?

### Activities

- ◆ We believe that our church sanctuaries are very sacred places. Invite your children to look at the way in which your sanctuary is decorated for this peaceful and holy season. What color is being used? Is there an Advent wreath in the space? Decide together how your home could reflect the season of Advent. Put together a family Advent wreath to light at dinner each night.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The prophet Isaiah uses attention-getting images to describe God's anointed one. Can you imagine a baby playing with a cobra? A wolf made welcome by a lamb? Is Isaiah crazy? If not, what is Isaiah trying to say to us?
- ◆ John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. What do you think of how he looks? He is wearing camel's hair and eating insects, but still people are flocking to his side for baptism. Why are people coming to this unusual person?
- ◆ Notice that some of the people who are coming to John are not really sincere. He yells at them. He tells them to show that they have truly repented by producing "good fruit." Why is it important not just to ask for forgiveness, but show that we have changed our hearts and our behavior?

### Activities

- ◆ Gather some paper and colored pencils or crayons. Have each family member pick one of the images in Isaiah that they find particularly interesting and illustrate it. Hang these where you can see them this week.
- ◆ Consider making a Jesse Tree for your home. Each day, hang or pin the images of the family history of Jesus to help tell his story and prepare for Christmas.
- ◆ John the Baptist cries out to us across the ages to prepare the way of the Lord. Invite each family member to think of one thing they could do to "make straight [God's] paths."

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah and the psalmist describe the actions of God. What kinds of things does God do for his people? After you think about this, what kind of feeling do you have about our God?
- ◆ James speaks of being patient, like a farmer is patient. In what ways do farmers have to be patient? Are you patient? Do you know anyone who is particularly patient?
- ◆ Jesus tells the people that John is a prophet and a messenger that was sent ahead of him. What did John do to help the people get ready for Jesus? Why was this important?

### Activities

- ◆ The psalmist describes how powerful, loving, and saving our God is. Is there something you are facing as a family that you could trust more fully to God? Discuss this and offer your concern to God in your family prayer this week.
- ◆ The Lord's Prayer demonstrates profound trust in God. Read the prayer slowly together. Pray this prayer each day this week.
- ◆ Find a recording of the spiritual "Soon and Very Soon" (available on the Internet). Try singing this at the close of dinner each night.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah says that “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” Who is this woman? Who is the son? Isaiah says that God will give Israel a sign. Why do you think people need signs in order to pay attention to things? What would the world be like without signs?
- ◆ The angel tells Joseph that Mary’s baby will fulfill the promises that God made through the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the one who will be named Emmanuel, a Hebrew word that means “God is with us.” How is Jesus Emmanuel?
- ◆ An angel comes to Joseph to reassure him that God is the reason that Mary is having a baby. The angel tells him all about what is going to happen. Joseph listens to the angel and takes Mary into his home. Are you someone who can trust God, even when life is very challenging?

### Activities

- ◆ Are you singing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” as you light your Advent wreath at home or in church? Sing more than the first verse together as a family. What images in the song have you heard this season?
- ◆ As you go about your lives this week, notice where you see signs. What do signs tell people? Why are signs important? What sign was the most important in your travels this week? The clearest? The most interesting or amusing?
- ◆ Take your family crèche out. Place the figure of Joseph and one of the angels on your dinner table to remind you of Joseph’s open heart and faithfulness.

# December 25, 2019

## The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass during the Night

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ On Christmas morning, ask the child, “Who, besides our family, might be happy today? Are other children happy? Are children in other countries happy? Are animals happy? What about trees? Oceans?” Encourage the child to imagine trees shouting for joy and all the earth rejoicing. How would a tree express joy? Perhaps act it out.
- ◆ In the early dark of a late afternoon, ask your child, “What would it be like if you were guarding sheep at night and an angel suddenly appeared? What might the angel look like? Would you be scared? Would you feel special? If the angel told you not to be afraid, would you believe the angel?”
- ◆ Ask the child, “What’s a manger?” When she understands that it’s a trough for feeding cows and sheep, ask, “Would you put a baby in there? How could you make a trough clean and cozy enough for a newborn baby?” If you have a crèche, line it with a soft cloth and place the baby Jesus inside.

#### Activities

- ◆ Gather with other families with children to sing Christmas carols. Make a space for the children to dance if they wish and encourage them by joining in, enacting Christian joy. You could break the ice by prescribing a simple gesture for all, such as laying cheek on hands in “Away in a Manger” on the line, “Little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.”
- ◆ With your child, use crèche or other improvised figures to tell and enact the story of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2:1–14: the travel to Judaea, search for a room, birth in a stable, and celebration with the friendly beasts.
- ◆ Make a book, using construction paper or cardboard, that tells the Nativity story, using passages selected from Luke 2:1–14 and Matthew 1:18–25. Illustrate with pictures from catalogues, magazines, or yours or the child’s artwork. As the child learns to read, he can read the story aloud each Christmas. Keep the book in a prominent place during the Christmas season and put it away for the year after Epiphany.

# December 29, 2020

## Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ Ben Sira is a wise man who is trying to help the people live as God wants them to live. Why do you think God puts mothers and fathers in charge of their households? Why do you think God wants children to listen to their parents?
- ◆ When we hear the psalm and the word “fear,” we may think this means being scared of God. But this is not what the original Hebrew word means. It means something more like “awe” or “wonder.” Have you ever felt those feelings about God? Where were you? What was happening?
- ◆ Again we see Joseph, the faithful father of Jesus, listening to God and taking action. Can you think of any experiences where parents had to be brave to help their children?

#### Activities

- ◆ Read the Ten Commandments out loud. Discuss the instruction to “honor your father and your mother.” What does this mean? Parents, describe your experience with this as a child and an adult. Children and youth, share one step you can take to better fulfill what God asks of you. Pray together for God’s help.
- ◆ “Fear of the Lord” is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We each received this gift in Baptism. Take the time to look at pictures of family Baptisms. If you still have a baptismal candle, light it as you tell stories about what Baptisms have been like in your family.
- ◆ Joseph is told in a dream to take his family to Egypt. This Gospel story tells us about rulers and places in the early days of Jesus’ life. Go online or consult a book, and look together at a map. Where is Nazareth? Judea? Egypt? What do you think Joseph and Mary’s journey was like?

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ St. Paul is telling the people that Jesus has come as the Messiah, not just for the Jewish people, but for all people. He says that the Gentiles, or non-Jews, are “co-heirs.” What is an heir? What does it mean to be a co-heir?
- ◆ The magi, wise men from the East, are seeking Jesus. They are following a star and asking for directions. Do you ever ask for directions in your life? Are there good people to ask? Are there people who are not good to ask? Who has good information for the magi in this story? Who has information with bad intent?
- ◆ The magi bring gifts to the infant Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold is a precious metal. Frankincense was a perfume. Myrrh was an oil used in anointing. Each was very valuable. Why do they bring these valuable gifts? What do you think they symbolize?

### Activities

- ◆ Discuss with your family what it means to have an inheritance. Do you have any objects that belonged to your ancestors? What did it mean to you to receive them? What is the inheritance, material and spiritual, that you hope to give to your family?
- ◆ The wise magi are travelers. For the week leading up to the Epiphany of the Lord, take turns moving the wise men from your Nativity set around the house as they travel to the crèche. Talk about their travels and note together where they are, whether on the windowsill or the toybox! On the Epiphany of the Lord, reverently place them around Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus as you sing “We Three Kings.”
- ◆ On the Epiphany of the Lord, it is traditional to bless the doors of your house. Using chalk, mark the lintel of your door with 20 + C + M + B + 17. The numeral twenty stands for the first part of the year. The letters C, M, and B stand both for the traditional names of the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) and also for *Christus mansionem benedicat* (Latin for “May Christ bless the house”). The plus signs remind us of the Cross and 17 completes the year.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah tells us about God's servant. What are the things he will do? How will he do them? Is he a peaceful servant? A gentle servant?
- ◆ Peter tells the people that everything they have experienced through Jesus begins with his baptism in the Jordan. When were you baptized? Why was that a beginning for you?
- ◆ John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan. At first John resists Jesus, saying he is not worthy. Do you think people sometimes resist what Jesus wants them to do? How?

### Activities

- ◆ Bring home a bottle of holy water from your church font and put it in a bowl on your table. Start each meal by blessing yourself in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Draw a picture of yourself being baptized. Include your image of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Show God saying, "This is my beloved [son/daughter], in whom I am well pleased."
- ◆ As you enter the sanctuary of your Church, take a moment to bless yourself with holy water. Catholic Christians do this upon entering the sanctuary to remind themselves that it is through their Baptism that they are invited to fullness of life in the Eucharist, the table of the Lord.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah says that the Jewish people, Israel, will not only be restored but will be a “light to the nations.” What does a light do when it shines?
- ◆ This week we begin what is called Ordinary Time. It is not that these days somehow aren’t special; the word “Ordinary” comes from the numbering of the Sundays with ordinal numbers (that is, second, third, fourth). Is there another color in your church this weekend? Listen carefully to the Gospel. John the Baptist tells us that he “saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain” on Jesus. What qualities does a dove have? What are doves associated with?
- ◆ In the Gospel, John the Baptist says “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Do you recognize these words? When you are next at Mass, notice where these words are spoken. What is happening?

### Activities

- ◆ Sing “This Little Light of Mine” as your table grace this week!
- ◆ Read about the animals that are part of the powerful metaphors for God in this Gospel reading. Discover the qualities of lambs and doves, and what these images tell us about God.
- ◆ Gather around your table at bedtime. Have each family member hold a flashlight. Turn out the lights so that it is as dark as possible (without scaring little ones!). One by one, after a pause, turn on your flashlights so that light is increased in your circle. What is the “world” like with one light? What could you see? What is the world around you like when all family members let their light shine? Close in prayer, with parents thanking God for the particular “light” of each child as they experience it (humor, trustworthiness, kindness, affection, and so forth).

# January 26, 2020

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah affirms that “the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” How do you think people feel when they no longer live in the “land of gloom”? Are there times you feel like you are in the land of gloom? What could you do when you feel that way? What should parents do if their families are acting like they are in a “land of gloom”? Can mothers and fathers be prophets? Why or why not?
- ◆ Paul is upset with the people in Corinth because they are splitting into groups and are not being one community. Where in your life do you see similar splits? Do you know of places where there are “in” groups and “out” groups? Do you know people who ignore those ideas of “in” and “out” and simply welcome everyone with love?
- ◆ Jesus walks on the shore and starts calling his disciples. James and John put down their nets and follow him, leaving things behind. Jesus still calls people to follow him today. How does he do that?

### Activities

- ◆ Get up early one morning and watch the sun rise, and notice how the light dispels the darkness.
- ◆ As you go to school or work, notice if there are places where people are split into groups and not connected to each other. What is one thing you could do to bring people together this week?
- ◆ James and John will become dear friends of Jesus. He promises that they will be “fishers of men.” What does that mean? Draw a picture of the calling of the disciples.

# February 2, 2020

## Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ What is refining? What does it mean to refine gold or silver? What else is refined? How are people refined by God?
- ◆ Were you ever presented in the “temple”? When? Were there elders like Anna and Simeon there? What was their reaction?
- ◆ What do you think of the idea that a baby can have a great destiny? Are there people around you who are hopeful about your destiny? What are they hoping?

#### Activities

- ◆ Sing “The King of Glory Comes” for your table grace this week.
- ◆ Many cultures have deep respect for ancestors and living elders. Take out pictures of the elders in your family and life and talk about them. Whether they are alive or with God, why are they still important?
- ◆ The Cantic of Simeon, also called *Nunc Dimittis*, (the words from Luke 2:29–32) is one of three great canticles in the Gospel. It is traditionally prayed in Night Prayer. Pray this prayer together as a family to close your day this week.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Read the first five lines of Isaiah. How do you and your family fulfill these commands?
- ◆ Do you think Paul knows nothing “except Jesus Christ crucified”? Why does he say this so strongly? What do you think he wants the people to understand?
- ◆ The Gospel says we are like salt and light. What does that mean to you? Do you know anyone who shines in life? What do they do?

### Activities

- ◆ Do something this week to “share your bread with the hungry.” Read your parish bulletin and see what the community does to feed the hungry, as well.
- ◆ “You are the light of the world!” This week, do a good deed that another person can see. At the end of the week, discuss what you each did and how others reacted.
- ◆ Buy a bag of unsalted nuts or potato chips, and a bag of salted nuts or potato chips. Do a family taste test. What’s different? What do you think Jesus is saying about people being like salt? Why would it be a problem if “salt loses its taste”?

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Jesus says he is not going to abolish the Law, he is going to fulfill it. What is the Law? Does Jesus understand the Law? Why? How important is it to Jesus?
- ◆ Jesus says that we have to be reconciled with our brother. What does this word mean? What sacrament helps Catholic Christians stay reconciled to God and one another?
- ◆ Jesus says “let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’” Do you ever say “yes” or “no” and then waffle? Are you ever insincere when you say “yes” or “no”? When and why?

### Activities

- ◆ Ben Sira, the author of the Book of Sirach, tells us how important it is to keep the Commandments. Read them together out loud and discuss why each is important.
- ◆ Watch an age-appropriate movie about Moses and the Ten Commandments this week.
- ◆ Talk about the importance of being reconciled to one another. If members of your family have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, participate in the sacrament this week. If members have not, talk about how we can be reconciled to one another from day to day. What does it mean to ask for forgiveness and to forgive in your family?

# February 23, 2020

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ God tells Moses that he is to tell the people to be holy, and not to bear a grudge or take revenge. What do these three things mean?
- ◆ Read the first half of the Gospel carefully. Jesus says that when people make difficult demands on us, we are to give them even more than they want. Is it “fair” in the way our culture understands fairness? What is your reaction to this? What do you think Jesus is telling us?
- ◆ Jesus says love your enemies. Who are enemies today? What would happen if there was love present among enemies? Do you think enemies can have a change of heart? Why or why not?

### Activities

- ◆ Do an act of kindness for a brother or sister, or someone in your life who is like a brother or sister to you.
- ◆ As a family, do something helpful for a neighbor this week.
- ◆ Jesus tells us to pray for those who hurt, or persecute, us. This can be hard! This week, add to your bedtime prayers a prayer by name for someone who is an “enemy” or a person who is acting in a way that is upsetting.

# March 1, 2020

First Sunday of Lent

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Read the story of Adam and Eve together.  
What words describe the serpent? Are there any situations you can think of where people try to persuade others to do something other than what God wants for them? Is that what sin is?
- ◆ Jesus is tempted by the devil in the desert.  
What are the three temptations? What does Jesus say?
- ◆ When Jesus is tempted, what does he do?  
Do you ever feel tempted? How? What could you do when you feel tempted to do something that is not right?

### Activities

- ◆ Spend some time working with clay. Imagine what it was like for the Creator to create all living things including humankind. Talk about what it would be like if something damaged the work you did, leaving it less than it was originally.
- ◆ Choose one of the three answers Jesus gave to Satan, and use it sometime this week when you are tempted to do something of which God would not approve.
- ◆ This is the First Sunday of Lent. Make a centerpiece for your table out of bread and stones or other elements in this Gospel. Place it on a piece of purple cloth, the liturgical color of this season.

# March 8, 2020

## Second Sunday of Lent

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ God promises Abraham that his children and their children after them will be the beginning of a great nation. How much does God love Abraham? How much does he love you?
- ◆ Paul says that those who follow God will need to bear their share of hardship. What does this mean? Do you know anyone in your life or in our world who has been willing to bear hardship for the sake of the Gospel? During Lent, we often give something up to demonstrate that we are willing to experience some hardship as we ask God to forgive our sins and make ourselves ready for the Gospel. Are you giving something up for Lent? What is it? What's easier, giving up something like sweets or giving up something like being mean to our brother or sister?
- ◆ Jesus takes his friends Peter, James, and John up a mountain and something miraculous happens. Who else appears? Whose voice is heard? What do you think Peter, James, and John were thinking? How would you act if you heard God's voice so clearly?

#### Activities

- ◆ Abram is someone who listens to God and obeys his commands. Do you obey God? Whom do you obey? Why? How important is it to obey parents, teachers, and other safe people?
- ◆ Sometimes, following Jesus is not easy. Pick something to let go of for Lent if you haven't already. Consider fasting from judgment, angry words, or other behaviors instead of focusing on food or things like television.
- ◆ Draw a picture of Jesus' face when it was as bright as the sun.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In this story, the Israelites are no longer grateful to Moses. They are crabby and complaining. They even want to go back to Egypt! What makes you grumble or complain?
- ◆ Paul tells the people in Rome that they can be hopeful. What makes you hopeful? Why? How does it feel to be hopeful? What are we hoping for during Lent?
- ◆ John tells us a wonderful tale about Jesus. He talks to a woman and they discuss many things. How is the woman changed through her conversation with Jesus? Where do Christians meet Jesus in the water? How are we changed by that? Have you ever run to tell people good news? What would it be like for you to tell people about the Good News of Jesus?

### Activities

- ◆ Try giving up quarreling and grumbling this week. What would life in your home be like if there were no quarreling and grumbling going on?
- ◆ What would life be like without water? At bath time, first sit in the tub without water in it. How does that feel? Fill the tub up, and climb back in! What do you think of water now? Move the water around. Talk about Jesus and the living water he gives us.
- ◆ Check out a book from the public library that illustrates the story of the woman at the well. Enjoy this story together each night at bedtime.

# March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Lent

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In this beautiful story from the Book of Samuel, the Lord calls forth the person who will be the king. He is one of Jesse's sons. To everyone's surprise, the Lord chooses not one of the powerful older sons, but the youngest son, David. Do you find this surprising? Think of families you know. When you need a leader, do you think first of the oldest? Why? What does God's choice tell us?
- ◆ Psalm 23 is one of the most loved of all the psalms. People find it very comforting. What images are in this psalm that give people a sense of safety and love?
- ◆ In the Gospel, Jesus heals the blind man. The neighbors are very suspicious and claim that this healing cannot be from God. Why? What do the parents say? Why? What does the man say? How does Jesus react? Who is blind in this story, and in what ways? Are we ever blind? How? What will God do for us in our blindness?

### Activities

- ◆ Watch an age-appropriate movie that depicts the story of David, such as *King David* or *The Story of David*.
- ◆ Find a picture or a small statue of the Good Shepherd and use it in your table centerpiece this week.
- ◆ What does the Good Shepherd do? Illustrate some of the images in the psalm.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In both the reading from the prophet Ezekiel and Paul's letter to the community in Rome, we hear about rising from the dead. God has promised us life everlasting. What are signs of death in our lives and in our world? How are we comforted by God's promise?
- ◆ In the Gospel, we hear about a family that was very close to Jesus. They loved him very much, and he loved them in return. When Jesus knows that Lazarus has died, he returns to Bethany to raise him from the dead. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, have great faith in Jesus. What does Jesus tell them? How do they react? What does Jesus do? Do you think people came to have faith in Jesus after seeing this? How can this miracle deepen our own faith in Jesus?
- ◆ Jesus thanks his Father, and says that he knows that his Father always hears him. Do you say prayers? Do you believe that God hears your prayers?

### Activities

- ◆ Do you know people who died believing in God's promise? Take out pictures and talk about them and remember their faithfulness and God's love for them. If you know the traditional song "Dry Bones," sing it together. (You can hear it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVoPG9HtYF8>.)
- ◆ This week, as you close your prayers, pray as Jesus did. Say to God, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me."
- ◆ Jesus goes where he is needed, even though there is danger nearby. What do you think about this? Investigate people who faithfully go where they are needed despite danger. Pray for one of those people this week.

# April 5, 2020

## Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ We hear two long and important stories today. The first comes in an unusual place: the beginning of Mass. What is happening here? Why do we use palm branches in our worship this day? How is your community commemorating Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem? What song did you sing? What kind of feelings do we have remembering this moment? What do the people cry out to Jesus?
- ◆ The Gospel is a reading of the Passion of the Lord. Each Gospel has this important story in it. What special moments do you notice in this story? What characters are memorable to you? What does Judas do? What does Peter say and do?
- ◆ Listen carefully to the description of the crucifixion and death of our Lord. What happens as Jesus dies? Who is there? What do they say? What have they realized?

#### Activities

- ◆ Many cultures have traditions related to the palm branches we used in Mass this morning. Bring some palm branches home and braid or weave them (please do not do this in Mass; it will distract you and other people around you!).
- ◆ Palm branches dry very quickly. They will be used next year to create the ashes of Ash Wednesday. Discuss the symbolism of the palms as a family.
- ◆ There are many special foods eaten by people on Palm Sunday. In Great Britain, people eat fig pudding, because there is a story about Jesus eating figs on his entry into the city of Jerusalem. In Greece, the Lenten fast is broken with a fish dinner. Discover a Palm Sunday food tradition and practice it in your home this year.

# April 12, 2020

## Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ He is risen! Easter is here! Today, we remember the Resurrection and embrace it anew in our hearts and our lives. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells this story using the word “we.” How are “we” part of the Resurrection of Jesus? Why do we renew our baptismal promises at Easter?
- ◆ Paul reminds us that we have been raised with Christ. How were you raised with Christ? Why is part of the fullness of our life still “hidden”? When will we see the fullness of the reign of Christ? What are we called to do in this time that is “already” and also “not yet”?
- ◆ Mary of Magdala finds the stone rolled away from the tomb of Jesus, and runs to Simon Peter and the disciples. They find the tomb empty. What is their reaction? Do they believe? Do we?

#### Activities

- ◆ Eggs are a part of countless Easter traditions. Do you know why? Decorate some eggs and learn more about how they symbolize rebirth and Resurrection in the Christian tradition.
- ◆ Mary of Magdala is sometimes called the Apostle to the Apostles. Why is that? In what ways is she a powerful role model for girls and women?
- ◆ Find a picture of Mary of Magdala holding the red egg and share this folk tale about her.

# April 19, 2020

Second Sunday of Easter (or Sunday of Divine Mercy)

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In the story from Acts, Luke tells us what the people did in the early Church. What are the four things that people were devoted to?
- ◆ John tells us that the disciples were scared and behind a locked door. What do you think they were scared of? Are you ever scared? What happens? What does Jesus say to them? How did they feel?
- ◆ Later, Thomas hears that the other disciples have seen the Lord. He doesn't believe them. What does Thomas need in order to believe? We sometimes call Thomas "doubting" Thomas. Do you ever have doubts? What could you do when you doubt?

### Activities

- ◆ From the earliest times, people who were Christians have looked out for one another and have cared for one another. In what ways could your family become more devoted to learning "the teachings of the apostles," "the communal life," "the breaking of bread," and the "prayers"? Try doing one new thing this week.
- ◆ When do we say "peace be with you" like Christ did? How do you act when you do this? Are you shy? Crabby? Excited? Try saying "peace be with you" in Mass in a way that lets someone know you really mean what you say!
- ◆ What do people do when they have doubts about something? In what ways are we like Thomas and in what ways are we different than Thomas? Make a list and talk about what you discover.

# April 26, 2020

Third Sunday of Easter

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The story from the Acts of the Apostles describes a moment on Pentecost. People don't believe it could be possible that the Apostles, who have received the Holy Spirit, can be speaking to people in their own languages. Peter gets up and addresses everyone who is within hearing distance. Peter is telling the people that Jesus is the Messiah, the descendant of King David whom they await. Why is it important for the people of Israel, the Jewish people, to understand this?
- ◆ Peter tells us that Christ was known before the foundation of the world. This is part of the mystery of the Trinity, our God that is Three-in-One. What does this "beyond time" God mean for each of us?
- ◆ The sad disciples on the road to Emmaus meet a stranger. They tell him a story, and then he tells them their whole history. How do they come to realize they are with Jesus? Where do we hear our history as followers of Jesus? Why is it important to gather to hear our sacred story and to meet him in the breaking of the bread to this day?

### Activities

- ◆ Christians have a very special relationship with their Jewish brothers and sisters. We share many ancestors. As a family, visit or tour a synagogue, or join a Jewish family with which you are friends for a Sabbath meal or other celebration.
- ◆ Have you ever traveled a figurative or a literal road? Share stories about what that was like and how you felt. Are you traveling a road with Christ right now?
- ◆ This Sunday, take time to be with the people as they process to the Eucharist. Look at their faces. They are on a road to meet Jesus. What do you notice? Share your thoughts with one another as you break bread at home.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ This week, we hear more from Peter, who is speaking to the people on Pentecost. What do the people need to do to respond to the promise of Jesus? How have you done this? How can you continue?
- ◆ Peter tells us that suffering is transformed in Jesus. Have you ever experienced suffering? Do you know someone who suffers? How can remembering the suffering of Jesus help us and give us strength?
- ◆ Sometimes, this Sunday is called “Good Shepherd Sunday.” Jesus says that there are good shepherds and bad shepherds. He says that he is the “gate” for all of us to come into safety and love. Are there good shepherds today? False shepherds? What are they? Which are you following right now?

### Activities

- ◆ Talk about sharing your faith with people. Do you do that? Why or why not? Can you think of someone or a family that would benefit from knowing about your faith? Talk about a step you can take to share your faith this week.
- ◆ Pray for people by name who are suffering. Include people you know, people who are nearby, and people who are far away. Pray for people who are still enslaved.
- ◆ The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Find a picture of the Good Shepherd and place it in your home so that you can see it often and discuss it this week.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ From before the time of Jesus, there were Jews who lived beyond the borders of Jerusalem. Many of them spoke Greek. In this story from Acts, the community is growing. Why are new leaders needed? Who is chosen? Why are they chosen?
- ◆ Paul tells us that Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church, and we become like him as spiritual stones that build his house. What is a stone like? Can you imagine that you are a stone in Christ's Church?
- ◆ In John's Gospel account, Jesus continues to teach us about himself and the promise God has made to us through him. How is Jesus "the way"? How do we know how to follow him?

### Activities

- ◆ Do you know what a cornerstone is? Learn about cornerstones, and see if you can find them this week. Does your church have a cornerstone? Does your school? What do they do for the building? Why are they important? Share your thoughts.
- ◆ Jesus says, "If you know me, then you will also know my Father." Think about what this means. What is Jesus like? What does that tell us about God the Father? Are you discovering any new things about God our Father by discussing this question? What are they?
- ◆ Jesus is about to leave his friends, so, in some ways, this Gospel is sad. His friends are worried they will not be able to follow him to where he is going. What does Jesus do to reassure his friends? Have you ever said goodbye to a friend? Did you stay in touch? Of course, Jesus is not like ordinary human friends. He can be truly with us even when we can't see him. How can you stay in touch with Jesus even after his Ascension to the Father?

# May 17, 2020

Sixth Sunday of Easter

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Philip leaves the community in Jerusalem because they are being persecuted. He goes to Samaria, the home of the people who were traditionally the enemies of Israel. What happens? What qualities does Philip show that you could copy?
- ◆ Peter asks us to be gentle, reverent, and to have a clear conscience. Are you already doing these things? Do you know anyone who is an example of these qualities? Why does Peter want us to have lives that reflect our faith?
- ◆ Jesus tells us that if we love him, we will follow his Commandments. But we will not have to do this only by our own power: he will ask the Father to send his Spirit to us. When have you received the Holy Spirit? Do you ever pray for God's Spirit to give you strength?

### Activities

- ◆ Are there places in the world where people still do not know the Good News of Jesus? Find out about this. Are there places in your own community where people have heard about Jesus but maybe don't entirely understand who he is and the power of his promise?
- ◆ Try living with a clear conscience for a week. How did you do? What kinds of actions did you have to take (or not take!) to keep your conscience clear?
- ◆ Brainstorm with one another and pick one teaching of Jesus that you can follow this week in a new or special way.

# May 21 or 24, 2020

## Ascension of the Lord

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. The First Reading is from the beginning of the New Testament book of the Bible called the Acts of the Apostles. Luke speaks to “Theophilus.” That word is Greek for “one who loves God.” Who is Luke addressing? A particular person? Any person who believes? Why do you think the Acts of the Apostles starts with Christ’s Ascension?
- ◆ St. Paul prays in a very heartfelt manner for the people in Ephesus. He hopes that they will be enlightened and know hope and that they will understand the rich inheritance in which they share. To be “enlightened” is to know something more fully. Is there anything about our faith about which you would pray to be more “enlightened”?
- ◆ Jesus goes up a mountain yet again, this time to give his followers a very important job. They are to “make disciples of all nations,” to baptize, and teach. Were all of your ancestors Christians? When in your family history did people first hear about Jesus and the Good News? Since you are a Christian, how can you help others come to know Jesus and become his disciples?

#### Activities

- ◆ In an interview, Pope Francis encouraged Catholics to understand the significance of the Ascension more deeply. He said, “Dear brothers and sisters, the Ascension does not point to Jesus’ absence, but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way. He is no longer in a specific place in the world as he was before the Ascension. He is now in the lordship of God, present in every space and time, close to each one of us. In our life we are never alone: we have this Advocate who awaits us, who defends us. We are never alone: the Crucified and Risen Lord guides us” (catechesis delivered during a general audience on April 17, 2013). Reflect on the Holy Father’s words as a family.
- ◆ Paul prays that the people may be enlightened and understand everything about the meaning of receiving the Lord into their hearts. At dinner this week, as you light your table candle, say these words together: “Jesus is the light.” Then have a moment of silence before you respond, “Amen!”
- ◆ Climb a hill, mountain, or even a tall building and look at the world below. Look heavenward. Imagine what it was like for Jesus and his followers in the stories we proclaimed today. Share your thoughts with one another.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ After Jesus ascends into heaven, the Apostles come down the mountain and return home. As an entire community of men and women, they devote themselves to prayer. What do you think they were praying about?
- ◆ Peter tells the people that to suffer for Christ is one thing; to suffer because we do wrong is another. Look at the list of things Peter does not want us to do. Another translation of “intriguer” is “mischief maker.” How might we do wrong in our families in these ways?
- ◆ Pray this special prayer that Jesus offers in the Gospel.

### Activities

- ◆ Praying as a community is the heart of being the Church. When you are at Mass, do you participate in the prayers? Why or why not? Discuss the prayers we say together as a body during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and pick one prayer of the Mass that you will pray from your heart this week with the community.
- ◆ This week, work on behaviors that do not follow Jesus’ model. See if you can make a good choice when you want to be dishonest or make mischief!
- ◆ Jesus prays a beautiful, mystical, and heartfelt prayer to his Father in today’s Gospel. Read it aloud together. What does this prayer tell each of you about the kind of relationship they have? What can we learn from it?

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The Solemnity of Pentecost reminds us that, although we are made of up of many people with many languages, we are all one in Christ Jesus. Are there people in your faith community who have a different primary language than yours? What languages do they speak? How are we the same even though we are different in some ways?
- ◆ The Holy Spirit brings us many special gifts that we receive in Baptism and Confirmation in a special sacramental way. Think about the “variety of gifts.” What does that mean? What gifts has God given you? What are our gifts for?
- ◆ Think about the story of Pentecost. Why do you think this day has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church (instead of Christmas or Easter)? Why is the sending of God’s Spirit to us so important?

### Activities

- ◆ Take the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Substitute the name of your town for “Jerusalem.” Then, substitute the names of cities and towns around you for the cities of Jesus’ day. Read this out loud. What is it like to imagine Jesus’ message coming to your town or region? How do we each carry his love to our world today?
- ◆ When the disciples see Jesus, he says “Peace be with you.” We say this to each other at Mass. Are you generous when you do this? Do you look people in their eyes? Do you give them a heartfelt handshake or hug? Or do you act like you’d rather not have to give someone a sign of Christ’s peace? Discuss this openly with one another. Perhaps you can start more meaningfully with sharing peace within the family and over time work on offering peace to people you do not know as well who sit around you at church.
- ◆ Pentecost is called the “birthday of the Church.” Bake a cake and celebrate this wonderful day!

# June 7, 2020

## Most Holy Trinity

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ In the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, God speaks his name three times: he is Lord. He describes his qualities. What are they? What is this story telling us about our God and our relationship with him?
- ◆ “Rejoice.” “Mend your ways.” “Encourage.” “Agree.” How are you doing with Paul’s instructions? How are you doing as a family?
- ◆ Can you imagine God’s love? The Gospel today tells us just how vast and unreasonable is God’s love for us. All we need to do is believe. Can you believe it?!

#### Activities

- ◆ Moses says that they are a “stiff-necked people.” Talk together about what you think this means. Are you ever stiff-necked? In what ways? Think of one way to be more flexible this week! Remember, God will receive you as his own!
- ◆ God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: The Trinity is a great mystery of our faith. Using the Internet or art books in your library, search for ways that artists have depicted the Most Holy Trinity. Talk about some of these images as a family; take turns sharing which ones seem most interesting to you. Better still, create your own images.
- ◆ Have you ever seen someone holding a sign that says “John 3:16”? Sometimes people do this at football games and other sports. Read this part of the Gospel together as a family and talk about what sort of images it inspires. Then make a John 3:16 sign and put it somewhere in your home to remind you that “God so loved the world . . . .”

# June 14, 2020

## Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ God provides the Israelites with miraculous food and water, and they are saved. Still, the people sometimes forget how good God truly is. Why do you think they are so forgetful? Do you ever forget God's goodness? When? What can you do about that?
- ◆ Paul asks the people of Corinth two questions. What do you think they would answer? What would you answer when he asks them of you?
- ◆ Jesus tells his followers that he is flesh for the life of the world. What does he mean? How is Jesus our food?

#### Activities

- ◆ God provides manna and water for the people in the desert. Draw a picture of this and talk about why food and water are so important for people. How would people who are always hungry or thirsty react to God's gifts?
- ◆ Some families keep a "blessing cup" that they use on special occasions. Consider adding this to your family's traditions. It looks like a chalice. Someone proposes a blessing and drinks from it, then passes it to the next family member. All pray and drink from the cup.
- ◆ Bread is sometimes called "the staff of life." In other words, it is central to our nourishment. Jesus used the image of "living bread" for a reason! Bake bread together, and savor it.

# June 21, 2020

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ In the First Reading we hear Jeremiah telling how desperate he feels because he has so many enemies. Yet he manages to trust in God to deliver him. When have you (each member of the family) felt that everyone had turned against you? Were you able to trust in God to deliver you? What helped you do that?
- ◆ Adam and Jesus are the main subjects of today's Second Reading. What do you (each member of the family) know about these two, either from this reading or from other Bible stories?
- ◆ Jesus says that what he tell his disciples in private (in the darkness) he expects them to speak about openly to everyone. He wants all of us to help spread his teachings. How could you (each member of the family) do that?

### Activities

- ◆ Take turns reading the verses of today's Responsorial Psalm and let everyone join together on the refrain. Talk about whether this might be a good prayer for someone who is feeling desperate and abandoned.
- ◆ Paul explains in the Second Reading that even though Adam (and Eve) sinned and ever since then all people have struggled with sin, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. Jesus was obedient to God. He sacrificed his life on the cross so that all of our sins could be forgiven. Using pencil, pen, crayons, or markers, let everyone in the family draw a picture of the part of this reading that interests them the most: the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, or the thankfulness and joy we feel because our sins are forgiven.
- ◆ Take turns reading aloud the lines about the sparrows and every hair of our heads being counted by our heavenly Father. How does this help you (each member of the family) overcome your fears? Pretend you are an artist who has been asked to illustrate these lines. How would you do it? (Go ahead and create the illustration if you want to.)

# June 28, 2020

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The woman and her husband in the First Reading wanted to make a special room in their home for Elisha, the holy man of God so that he would be their guest often. Have you ever prepared a guest room for a visitor? Was it exciting looking forward to your guest coming? Did you, like the woman, think about what your guest might need and how to make your guest comfortable? Did you ever suspect that you might be welcoming someone sent to you by God who would strengthen your faith?
- ◆ In the Second Reading, Paul explains that when we are baptized in the waters of the font we join ourselves to Jesus by dying with him so that we can also rise with him. Our Baptism makes us “dead to sin.” What could it mean to live as if we were “dead to sin”?
- ◆ Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel about those who love “father or mother” or “son or daughter” more than Jesus being unworthy of him can seem puzzling for families. But the truth behind these words is not threatening: no one and nothing can be more important to us than Jesus Christ. We live and love each other through his loving presence. Our prayers and our efforts to lead faithful lives together help us keep that in perspective. By placing Christ at the center we encourage each other to carry our individual crosses with hope and trust. What are the different ways you experience Christ’s presence in your family life (in good and challenging times)?

### Activities

- ◆ Talk together about someone very special to the family—someone you all think would bring a sense of love and holiness if you could host her or him. (This could be someone you know or a character from the Bible or another story.) Draw a picture of the imaginary guest room you would like to provide and let each person in the family draw something in the room that would make the person feel welcome.
- ◆ Throughout the week, pray this week’s Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 89:2–3, 16–17, 18–19), taking turns reading the verses. For the refrain (2a), if you can remember what you sang on Sunday, sing it together between the verses. If not, say it together.
- ◆ At any given time each person in the family is trying to carry some sort of personal cross. Trace crosses on paper, one for each person, and let each cut one out for themselves to represent a difficulty or suffering they are trying to bear this week. Some may wish to talk about their cross and some may not. Place the crosses in a basket for the center of the table and throughout the week pray for strength and hope and trust for each person as they bear those crosses.

# July 5, 2020

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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### Families

#### Questions

- ◆ Do today's readings seem out of place? We are hearing stories that are also part of our Advent celebrations. What kind of king does Zechariah foretell? Is he less or more powerful because he is humble? Why?
- ◆ Jesus says a prayer to his Father. To whom has God willed a special understanding? Who are the "little ones"? Why do you think they can more readily understand as compared to the "wise" and the "learned"?
- ◆ The last paragraph of this reading is so beautiful. Jesus wants us to come to him when we feel burdened. He will give us rest. Do you ever feel burdened? How? Do you bring your burdens to Jesus? How might you do that?

#### Activities

- ◆ This past week, we celebrated the founding of our country with fireworks and parties. Have you ever shouted for joy about the Messiah? Think of a way you can "rejoice heartily" and "shout for joy" about God's goodness this week!
- ◆ The Gospel has three parts. The first part is a prayer. Jesus says that the "little ones" understand things that the wise don't understand. What does this mean? Do you have any experience in your family where the "little ones" had special insights? Share stories.
- ◆ Read the final paragraph of the Gospel aloud as part of your prayer. Think of people who would find rest in Jesus, and pray for them by name together.

# July 12, 2020

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ This section of the Book of Isaiah is a beautiful poem that describes how God’s Word produces good things in us. What kind of things would be the right return to God for that life-giving Word?
- ◆ All creation will “share in the glorious freedom of the children of God,” says Paul. The entire universe is God’s! When you think of God’s promise reaching out to all of creation, what images come to mind?
- ◆ Jesus says that seed will only grow if it is put in rich soil. What do you think this story means? Isaiah says God’s Word is like seed. Are you rich ground to receive it? What can you do to be better “soil”?

### Activities

- ◆ Do you know what a simile is? It’s a poetic phrase that compares things using the words “like” or “as.” As an individual or family, compose a simile about God’s Word.
- ◆ We are given the “firstfruits of the Spirit,” but sometimes we only give the leftovers back to God. Learn about firstfruits this week. What do you have that you can give to God first rather than yourself first? Discuss this and try it out.
- ◆ Draw a picture of the sower and the seed, and show the seed falling on the three types of ground.

# July 19, 2020

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The Book of Wisdom offers us many insights into human nature and God. Here, we find out that God is strong, but also merciful and just. Do you know anyone with these qualities? Why do you think a God like this would expect us to be kind?
- ◆ We can be comforted because the Spirit is always with us, and knows our hearts. God's Spirit will intercede for us and help us pray. Do you feel like you could use help praying? Can you ask the Spirit to be your guide?
- ◆ Jesus is a great story teller! Read the three parables. What do you hear? What do you think God is saying about his Kingdom through Jesus? Are you a weed or wheat? Or both?

### Activities

- ◆ Today we learn that “those who are just must be kind.” Have you heard of “random acts of kindness”? Find out more, and do one this week.
- ◆ Do you ever feel funny when you pray? Do you worry you don't have the right words? Good news! The Spirit will be there to help you. This week, try saying a spontaneous table grace rather than a scripted one, with each family member, no matter how young, leading one night each. For example, “Thank you, God, for our food and our family” is a great prayer!
- ◆ Experience the parables this week. Take a look at an actual mustard seed, then imagine the bush Jesus describes. Or place one measure of yeast and three measures of flour in a bowl. Place three measures of flour in another bowl. Add warm water. What happens in each bowl? What does this experiment tell you about the woman and the leaven, and God's Kingdom?

# July 26, 2020

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ King Solomon was a great and wise king who is revered to this day as a great leader. Notice how young he is in this story. What does he pray? What does God do? Are you ever too young to ask God for his blessing and help?
- ◆ Can you imagine that God knew you even before he created you? Why do you think God made you as the unique person you are? In what ways are you like his Son, Jesus? In what ways do you need to be more like his Son?
- ◆ More vivid stories this week about the Kingdom! What do they tell us about the value of God's Kingdom? To what lengths do people go to receive God's Kingdom? How big is God's net? How would you answer the final question that Jesus asks, "Do you understand these things?"

### Activities

- ◆ Solomon had faith that God would answer his prayer for wisdom and understanding, and God did! Ask God to give you "an understanding heart" that knows "right from wrong" in your morning or bedtime prayers this week.
- ◆ Paul tells us that we are the brothers and sisters of Christ. Do you have brothers or sisters, or people who are like brothers and sisters to you? How do you treat them? What can those relationships tell you about how to be in relationship with Jesus Christ? Share your thoughts with one another.
- ◆ Make a table centerpiece that reflects these and the other parables. Take a large plate and place objects that represent each of the parables: a piece of netting, a pearl-like bead, treasure, yeast, a mustard seed, and so forth. Enjoy this reminder of what we've learned about God's Kingdom in recent weeks.

# August 2, 2020

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah is talking to people who are in exile and who are poor, yet their God has not forgotten them. The Lord speaks of a great banquet to which even people without money will be invited. What do you think this message meant to them? What do they need to do to “have life”?
- ◆ Do you ever feel like you will lose God’s love? Paul says that nothing will separate us from Christ, even times of great sadness or great danger. Can you think of people who relied on God and trusted in his presence, even when things were very challenging?
- ◆ Jesus is sad about the death of his cousin and goes away for a short time. But soon people need him again, and he teaches and heals them. He even feeds them when they are hungry. What do you think of this amazing miracle in which so many people are fed by Jesus? Can you think of a time you have seen Jesus feed many people?

### Activities

- ◆ This week, volunteer where people who have limited resources are fed.
- ◆ Most of us have someone very special who loves us very much, like a parent or grandparent. Can you imagine that they could ever stop loving you? Paul tells us that there is absolutely nothing that will keep Christ from loving us. Do you believe this? Or do you think it’s too good to be true?! Talk together about God’s limitless love.
- ◆ When the people are hungry, the first thing Jesus does is to tell his disciples to feed them! They complain that they don’t have enough. Think about this. Is your table open to others? Do you have enough food to share? This week, make a meal that is the right amount of food for your family. Then, invite a friend to join you. While this is not a miracle like the one Jesus performed, it is a good reminder that often we have more than enough to share!

# August 9, 2020

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Ancient people often saw the power of the divine in significant natural happenings, such as great wind or fire. We no longer think that, and here Elijah reminds us. What do you think of the images in this story? Where do you hear God's voice when you are facing stormy chapters of life?
- ◆ In Psalm 85, we sing of God's goodness, and ask him to show us his kindness. Where do you see the goodness and kindness of God in your life?
- ◆ Jesus sees that his friends are struggling. He goes out to meet them, walking on the water. Peter is so excited by this he asks to come meet Jesus. When does he start going under the water? What do you think this story tells each of us?

### Activities

- ◆ Draw a picture of Elijah's experience of the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the "tiny whispering sound." Have you ever heard the still, small voice inside you? Do you listen to it when it encourages you to do good?
- ◆ Why do you think it's important for us to be good and kind just as God is? How might you be good and kind this week?
- ◆ Jesus invites us to have faith in him even when we are in the midst of storms. What kinds of storms can people face beyond storms of nature, such as rain or snow? Has your family ever faced a storm? What can you do if you are in a storm of some sort? Share your thoughts with one another.

# August 16, 2020

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah tells the people of Israel that foreigners, too, will receive what God has promised. What do these people have to do to be included?
- ◆ Paul says that those who have disobeyed God can still receive God's mercy. What does this mean? Do you ever disobey God's laws? Do you ask for God's mercy? If you have received your first Sacrament of Penance how often do you return for it?
- ◆ The Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus for his help, even though she is not a Jew. His friends want him to send her away. She keeps asking for what she needs. What happens? What does Jesus finally say to her? And what happens after that?

### Activities

- ◆ Have you ever had an experience where somebody was "in" and somebody was "out" of a group? Does God exclude people? Think about someone who you know who is left out sometimes. What is one way that you could include that person this week?
- ◆ Paul tells the people that God never takes back the gifts he has given. He loves the Jewish people, with whom he has a special relationship. Do you know what the covenant is? Find out more about that this week.
- ◆ The words in our Bible today don't always convey what they meant in Jesus' time. Here the word "dog" is better translated as "pets" or "puppies." Read this way, we experience Jesus' interaction as one that is more gentle than we might otherwise think. This woman is not left out by Jesus, even though she is not Jewish. What does it mean to have faith? Why is faith so important here? What happens when the woman has such unstoppable faith in Jesus?

# August 23, 2020

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah is irritated with Shebna, and so is God. Shebna is very sure of his status with God, but the Lord corrects him. The Lord will give the key of the house of David to Eliakim. Do you know who the key of the house of David is? Why is it important to serve God in a worthy way?
- ◆ Paul praises God in a beautiful way, and reminds us about the mystery of God's action. Have you ever thought God was mysterious? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Why is it important for us to never think we completely understand God?
- ◆ Jesus loves Peter. He is true and faithful. Jesus trusts him so much that he declares that he is the "rock" upon which the Church will be built. How did Peter do? Did he help build the Church? Who continues to lead us in building the Church? Who is in the place of St. Peter today?

### Activities

- ◆ Paul offers us a great refrain for a prayer: "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God." Have each family member write down something they are grateful for. Read each one, and have the family respond with this hymn of praise. Enjoy your litany of thanksgiving!
- ◆ This week, we have readings that speak of "keys." What do keys do? Who has keys? Are there people who have special kinds of keys? Have you ever heard of someone getting an honorary key to a city? Find examples of this. What would it mean to be given the keys to the Kingdom?
- ◆ Find pictures of the coat of arms of Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope John Paul II. What do they have in common? Why do they each feature keys?

# August 30, 2020

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ People are mocking and rejecting Jeremiah, who is speaking God’s word to them in a way that is very challenging. And yet he does not stop. What do you think about this? Could you keep proclaiming God’s message if your friends, family, and fellow citizens rejected you? Is Jeremiah brave? Is he faithful? Is he crabby? Do you feel sympathy for him? Why or why not?
- ◆ Paul tells us that we have to be transformed. We cannot give in to the pressures of “this age.” What pressures are part of this age that children face? That adults face? Do we still need to be transformed to be good followers of Jesus?
- ◆ Jesus says that we must take up his cross and follow him. What does this mean? Do you ever find it hard to follow Jesus? When? If you could think of facing that hard thing as taking up his cross, would it be a little easier for you?

### Activities

- ◆ What kinds of things try to take the place of God in our lives? What pulls our attention away from him? Cut some pictures out from magazines and make a collage of what could distract us. Where would you want to put God?
- ◆ Draw a picture of yourself. What is burning in your heart? Pray as a family that your faith in God will grow this week.
- ◆ When do you hear the words “this holy and living sacrifice”? Listen for this prayer at Mass this week.

# September 6, 2020

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ God tells Ezekiel that he must speak to the people who are exiled in Babylon and call them away from their ways. He is a prophet of God. What is a “watchman”? What did a watchman do for the city? In what ways is a prophet a watchman?
- ◆ Do you know the Ten Commandments? Why would Paul tell the Romans that they can all be summed up in the direction, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”?
- ◆ Jesus offers us a pattern for staying in loving relationships with one another. What is it?

### Activities

- ◆ The readings this week are all about being responsible for one another. Every one of us is responsible for the others, no matter how young or how old. In what ways are parents responsible for children? What kinds of things are children responsible for? Prophets speak on behalf of God. In what way are parents like the prophets? Discuss your answers to these questions together.
- ◆ Who are your neighbors? Do you show them love? What would it mean to love a neighbor in the same way you love yourself? Do an act of kindness for a “neighbor” this week as an individual or a family.
- ◆ Where do you go when a member of the family hurts or upsets you? Do you run to a third party, like Mom or Dad, or do you try to work it out with the person you are upset with first? Try that this week!

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ As a parent, give some thought to the powerful psychological insights in the First Reading and how they operate in family life. How easy is it to hug anger and wrath tight? Would your child recognize this insight? How can we help each other let go of the anger?
- ◆ Paul says that whether we live or die we are the Lord's. He holds onto us on both sides of the grave. For many of us that is an amazing concept. Yet parents certainly feel such all-encompassing love for their children. How would you explain Christ's complete love for us to your child?
- ◆ Clearly Peter wasn't understanding the lesson about God's endless mercy. He wanted a concrete rule by which to measure his performance of mercy. He wanted to know when he could safely say, "I'm done here!" What insights about being merciful has life as a parent given you?

### Activities

- ◆ The psalms are one of our greatest treasures. Teaching your child to love and pray them is a great gift for their future faith. Today's psalm about God's fathomless mercy is full of imagery and provides a wonderful portrait of our heavenly parent. Pray it together, taking turns reading. Help them enjoy the language, explaining the harder words.
- ◆ Jesus was a skillful storyteller who knew how to make a point. Alone, with other parents, or as a family, read the Gospel parable carefully. Notice how it sets up and then reverses our expectations, how it builds our sense of outrage at the injustice of the unforgiving servant, how it lets the community of workers recognize and report the injustice, and finally how it ends with chilling justice. Do you think the story is as effective with modern audiences as with ancient ones?
- ◆ A good way to let a child savor the parable of the unforgiving servant is to read it together and then let her or him choose a moment in the story to illustrate. Such art work can stimulate some genuine theological reflection. Be sure to talk about the pictures when they're finished.

# September 20, 2020

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah tells us again about how forgiving the Lord is. What does he want us to do? Does God ever really hide from us? If we can't find God, what is the real issue?
- ◆ Jesus tells us a story about how generous God is to us. Who is God in this story? What does he do? What do you think about that?
- ◆ Jesus says, "the last will be first and the first will be last." Have you ever been in first place? In last place? What does that feel like? How would this message have felt to those who were listening to him?

### Activities

- ◆ Have you ever played hide and seek? Do so as a family. What do you think it means to seek God?
- ◆ Have you ever said, "That's not fair!"? Why is fairness important? Is God fair in this story? Why or why not? Have a conversation!
- ◆ Do you ever feel jealous of people because of things they have or things they do? Talk about this as a family. Practice asking God for help if you feel jealous of someone this week, seeking him in that moment.

# September 27, 2020

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The people are claiming that they do what they do because of their parents. Do you ever blame others rather than taking responsibility for your actions? When? What would God like you to do?
- ◆ Paul says that we should not be selfish or act out of “vainglory.” What does that mean for you personally? For your family?
- ◆ In the Gospel, we hear a story about people who were quick to believe and people who were slow to believe. Who are the people Jesus says were quick to believe? Slow to believe? What is the lesson for all of us?

### Activities

- ◆ God asks us to turn from things that are wicked and instead do “what is right and just.” What are the “wicked” things you must turn from? What would be a “right and just” thing to do? Discuss your answers to this question, and take action this week.
- ◆ Has anyone ever said to you, “You need an attitude adjustment”? How has your attitude been lately? What behaviors are part of having a bad attitude? What kind of attitude would God like us to have toward one another? Pray the Hail Mary together this week.
- ◆ In the Gospel, two sons are asked to do their father’s will. What do they do? Who does the father’s will? How do you react when your mother or father asks you to do something? Read the Fourth Commandment together. How are parents acting with the authority God gave them?

# October 4, 2020

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Isaiah is telling a parable. Parables are stories that reveal greater truths. Look at Isaiah's story. Who is the "friend"? Who are the vines of the vineyard? Why would God be upset with the people?
- ◆ Paul says, "Don't worry at all!" Why would we not need to worry? What can we do to feel Christ's peace more fully in our hearts?
- ◆ Jesus tells the people who are listening a very sad and powerful story. To what length will the vineyard owner go to get his produce? Whom does he send? Whom do each of those people represent in the story?

### Activities

- ◆ Visit a vineyard or look at pictures of one together. What do you notice about the vines? Why is a vineyard a valuable thing?
- ◆ God wants good fruits! What are the "fruits" in our lives? What kind of "fruit" do you produce each day for God? Make a "fruit salad" this week: Each family member should notice something they have done that is good fruit, draw a picture of a fruit, and label it. Make a collage and celebrate what you've done for God!
- ◆ We can sometimes take for granted all the good gifts that God has given to us. We can forget that we are given the vineyard so that God can receive a return. Do you ever think about how to give back to God? Discuss this as a family, and decide one thing you can do this week together to give back to God through service or other action.

# October 11, 2020

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Our life with God is like a banquet, filled with wonderful things to eat and drink. He will take away all that separates us, and we will be completely happy in his presence. This is something that will bring great joy! Have you ever been to a banquet? What was it like? Where do we join God's heavenly banquet?
- ◆ Paul is saying how grateful he is to the people in Philippi. They have shared in his suffering, and have supported him financially. Paul says that he knows how to live in circumstances that are lean and circumstances that are abundant. Think about that. Could your family say the same thing?
- ◆ Can you imagine throwing a wonderful party, and having your guests refuse to come? Would you be mad? What is Jesus trying to tell all of us here? When does he invite us to the banquet? What is your attitude toward that?

### Activities

- ◆ Plan a pot luck dinner with friends or family. Invite everyone to bring one dish that they love to eat. Afterward, talk about what it was like to have so many yummy choices. Why is a banquet a good description of God's love for us?
- ◆ This week, if you feel scared or unsure, pray the powerful prayer of Paul: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."
- ◆ Do you ever give someone a hard time about going to Mass? Why? Would Jesus be happy that you are not receiving his invitation? What kind of attire do you wear in terms of your attitude when you are there? Are you open and grace filled? Discuss your family's experience with these things and how you might become more worthy guests of Jesus.

# October 18, 2020

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Cyrus was a king. He also was a pagan. Still, the Lord is going to do great works through him. Can you think of non-Christians or non-Jews whose lives demonstrate that God was working through them, even though they may not share our beliefs?
- ◆ The Pharisees had a very big problem. Their country was occupied by Rome, and they had to live under terrible taxation. They ask Jesus a tricky question. Do you think they were really interested in the issue of the taxes? What other motivations might they have had in asking him this question?
- ◆ Jesus can see right away that the Pharisees are putting him to the test. He says give your Roman money to the emperor to pay your taxes. But give what's made in God's image to God. What is made in God's image? What are we called to give to God?

### Activities

- ◆ Learn about King Cyrus and other people who have lived holy lives, even though they did not know the fullness of God in Christ Jesus. Pope Paul VI named Mahatma Gandhi in his 1976 World Day of Peace message. Who else can you think of?
- ◆ Do you think there is a separation between God's world and Caesar's world, either then or now? Share your thoughts with one another.
- ◆ Jesus says give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's. Talk this week about paying taxes. How do our taxes serve our values? Work against them? What are we called to do? How do we as a family live as faithful citizens of our country?

# October 25, 2020

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Do you know what a widow, an alien, and an orphan are? Why would the Lord call on the people to treat them with justice?
- ◆ The people in Thessalonica are great examples of their faith to all the people they meet. What would people who meet you experience? People who meet your family?
- ◆ The Pharisees are asking Jesus to pick the greatest commandment, but he adds another commandment as the second most important. Why do you think he tells them both?

### Activities

- ◆ Does your family know someone who is like one of the people mentioned in the First Reading? Do something kind and just for such a person this week.
- ◆ Listen to the song “Light of the World” from *Godspell* this week.
- ◆ Read the two commandments together. Discuss ways in which you live them each week.

## Families

### Questions

- ◆ Where do you see the poor in spirit, those who prize the love and justice of God's kingdom over the riches of the world? Where do you see the meek, the merciful, the pure of heart, and the others whom Jesus calls blessed?
- ◆ Which of the Beatitudes presents the greatest challenge for you? Why do you think this is so difficult for you? What steps can you take to begin embracing this virtue?
- ◆ How are you like Jesus? How are you unlike him? How clearly do you think you see God? What can help you see him more clearly?

### Activities

- ◆ As a family, sing the Litany of the Saints or an abbreviated version. Learn what the Church teaches about the Communion of Saints. You might read paragraphs 954–962 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is available online at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm>.
- ◆ Make a space in your home to spend time with the saints. Include books or videos about your family's patron saints to share this month.
- ◆ The day after All Saints Day is the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, or All Souls' Day—the day we pray for all who have died. Display holy cards from funerals of loved ones, photographs, or other mementoes of family members or friends who have gone before you. Read the Beatitudes often this month, and think of your deceased loved ones who exemplified them. Clean up the area around the graves of deceased loved ones and place flowers on the graves if weather permits. Pray for the souls of all who have died, especially those who have no one to pray for them. Bake soul cakes, which are little spice cakes about the size of a biscuit (recipes can be found online). According to tradition, these cakes originated during the Middle Ages in Wales, Ireland, and England, and were given to children and the poor who went door to door as they prayed for the dead on All Souls' Day. Folklore held that each cake eaten represented a soul freed from purgatory. It is believed that our custom of trick-or-treat grew out of this tradition.

# November 8, 2020

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ After reading the First Reading together, ask each person in the family where he or she has found wisdom recently. When and where was she waiting? What help did she give you? Have you ever searched for her as a family—asking God to send her to you? Does she sometimes wait for you in books? In the advice of a friend? In a nearby park?
- ◆ Paul believed the Second Coming (sometimes called the *Pauousia*) would take place in his lifetime and the Second Reading describes his understanding of how it would unfold. In this vivid scene Christians living on earth are swept up to “meet the Lord in the air.” Your child might find these details interesting. Of course, no one knows precisely what will happen, but Paul’s simple trust that Christians “shall always be with the Lord” is a good foundation.
- ◆ Parables—teaching stories—are carefully constructed plots with symbolic characters and objects intended to lead the listener to certain conclusions. Your child might be interested in trying to figure out what all the symbols and actions mean. What could the oil mean? Who is the Bridegroom? What is the banquet hall? As a family, you could try out various suggestions, considering many possibilities, and letting each person draw his or her own conclusions. The next time the reading comes around, perhaps interpretations will be different.

### Activities

- ◆ How does wisdom look and where does she wait for us? Using today’s First Reading as a guide, your child could draw or paint a picture of her waiting for us in one of the places described in the First Reading. Or perhaps she could be three-dimensional: a clay figure or a puppet who moves from place to place in a stage set.
- ◆ If your family enjoys art projects, consider drawing or painting your interpretations of today’s Responsorial Psalm, Paul’s description of the Second Coming, or those wise and foolish virgins. Spend a little time reading the passages in preparation for the art.
- ◆ Discuss as a family how to be wise rather than foolish virgins. How can we prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom? How can we be storing up good oil, learning to be merciful, loving, and just, and how to be faithful servants?

# November 15, 2020

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ The Book of Proverbs tells us about a wonderful woman who is a worthy wife. Is she capable? What does she do? Is she rewarded for her good works? How?
- ◆ Paul continues here to speak of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ. He tells the people in Thessalonica not to be worried, but not to ignore it either. What do you think of that? What does it say to us today?
- ◆ In the parable of the talents, three servants are given money by their master. What do they do? What happens? What is the master's reaction? Why might it sometimes be right for us to take risks?

### Activities

- ◆ This week, let's appreciate women who are worthy wives! Celebrate a wife you know—perhaps your mother! What tasks does she do? Do something to say “Thank you” and praise her!
- ◆ The word *Parousia* is a new one you can add to your faith vocabulary! Find out more about it. Practice pronouncing it!
- ◆ Although a talent is a form of money in the time of Jesus, we often think of our talents—things we are gifted at—when we hear this story. How are you using your talents? Do you use your talents for God? How? Discuss this.

# November 22, 2020

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

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## Families

### Questions

- ◆ We think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, but the image of the Lord as our shepherd is one that was used by the people of Israel too. Why is this such a great way to describe God? What do shepherds do for the sheep? Do the sheep trust and follow the shepherd?
- ◆ Do you see images of a shepherd in each of the readings? Where? Where do you see images of a king? How are those two things connected to each other? Similarly, have you noticed that almost always our Sunday readings connect to one another? How do these readings connect?
- ◆ Sheep and goats were among the first domesticated animals. What did each provide? Do you think one was more valuable than another? What do they represent in Jesus' story?

### Activities

- ◆ Find or draw a picture of God as our Shepherd and God as our King.
- ◆ What things do the followers of Jesus do? Do you ever feed the hungry? Give water to the thirsty? Find out about what Catholics call the Corporal Works of Mercy and do one this week.
- ◆ Are you a sheep or a goat? Jesus says that some of the people that join the Son of Man in his glory didn't even realize they were doing the right thing! Is this possible? Do you know someone who lives their faith so fully they aren't really even aware of it? Discuss this.