

Gifts of the Visitation Project by ACCW, 2021
Based on the book, *Gifts of the Visitation* by Denise Bossert

Session #11: Gift of Grace

Opening Quote:

“God’s grace is not something we deserve, but he gives it to us anyway. ... Everything is grace. Our salvation is grace. Our holiness is grace. By giving us grace, he gives us more than we deserve.” Pope Francis, 09-20-2020.

Scripture: *The Magnificat*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Lk 1:46-55

Written Reflection:

Absolutely EVERYTHING Mary and Elizabeth experienced was grace—the Holy Spirit, alive and active, working in their lives. The angel’s visit to Mary, asking if she would be Jesus’ mother, was grace; her ability to give consent and say, “yes” was grace. Elizabeth, bearing a son in her old age, was grace; her faithfulness during the many years of being barren was grace. Mary visiting Elizabeth in her time of need was grace; Elizabeth’s confirmation of God’s work in Mary as the Mother of our Savior was grace. Grace abounded in Mary and Elizabeth’s lives and friendship. Filled with grace, Mary proclaims the greatness of the Lord. Our spiritual friendships, and each step we take on the journey of faith together, is grace. God works through every experience in our lives for His glory! And we are never too late, too young, or too old to encounter God’s amazing grace.

Video Witness:

Gift of Grace by Nicole Baumgartner, Raegan Reid, Lindsay Firzlaff, and Kim Schmidt, all of Holy Spirit Parish in Dubuque.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

You've got to love these four, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, experience grace on every step of their friendship! After introductions, Nicole recognizes grace—the Holy Spirit—as the driving power within their friendships. “CEW was the catalyst for our friendship, but it’s really through grace that we’ve been able to grow in our friendship. The Holy Spirit kept us bonded together.” Discuss: How has the Holy Spirit helped a friendship in your life?

Kim told of the time when she wrote down Raegan’s name—for no apparent reason—during her morning prayer. Later, Raegan called asking for Kim’s prayer. This was grace working within their friendship. Discuss: Has the Holy Spirit ever revealed to you the unspoken needs of another friend? When? How?

Lindsay told of arriving at a momentous anniversary, and without saying a word, each of these friends “showed up” for her. “Grace is knowing what someone else needs from you without having to ask.” She also recognized the importance—the grace—of friends simply “holding space” for one another until ready to talk. Discuss: Have you experienced friends showing up without asking? When? What does Lindsay mean by “holding space” for a friend?

Raegan builds on Lindsay’s insights: “It’s also being vulnerable with each other ... even though it’s really hard to give up your comfort zone.” She reflects, “These friends stepped in when I couldn’t do things myself. To know I can always be vulnerable and honest with them is a huge relief.” Discuss: Vulnerability is essential for a deep friendship, but it’s difficult. When have you been vulnerable? Was it honored by a friend? How is honored vulnerability a relief?

Nicole reflects further on vulnerability: “There have been times I’m not being who I need to be, who I should be, or who God is leading me to be. ... But I know these ladies to be truthful and honest with me in a good way—always supported and lifted up and I’m fueled, my faith is fueled. ... I can tell my deepest, darkest secrets and they’re not going to walk away. There’s no judgment. It’s grace ...” Discuss: What does Nicole mean by “being honest in a good way”? How does true friendship help you to be your truest self?

Lindsay supports Nicole’s statements, “We realize we’re imperfect. We’ve all made mistakes—we aren’t perfect. That’s the power of grace—we are so loved by each other and we are loved by God.” Discuss: What is your definition of grace? How does grace ultimately lead us to God’s love?

Nicole concludes their testimony as she voices how these women honor each other and have one another’s backs, as “we’re all just walking each other home.” Discuss: Who has your back? Have you ever thought of friendship as a way of “walking another home”? How does this affect your view of friendship?

Let’s lift a glass and give thanks to God for the grace of this foursome’s friendship! Cheers!

Challenge:

Take a few moments each day to recognize God's active presence—grace—at work in your homes and your friendships. Think of one way you will be grace for another person today—and then act on it!

Closing Prayer:

“Lord, give me a spirit of grace in the world. Help me to be a source of God's grace for my family and friends. Help me to recognize the moments you are present and working all things for the good. Give me the grace to proclaim your greatness and to rejoice in all you are doing in my life. Help me to be like Mary—filled with your grace. For your glory.”

Adapted from *Gifts of the Visitation*, Bossert.

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.