

### **What is an At Home Ritual? Why should we do this?**

An At-home-ritual is an easy short opportunity to remember our faith each day. This year our faith formation program will be divided into 4 sections or 4 themes of about 7 weeks each. For each one of these themes we will provide you with an at-home-ritual. The family, in whichever configuration it happens, is the domestic church, the privileged place in which the gift of faith is received, accepted and nourished. These short easy rituals will help us come together as a family each day for a couple minutes to center our lives in faith. Ritual is extremely important in developing relationships and actually integrating something into our lives and the fabric of who we are. Simple rituals are our lifeline to faith and to what matters even in the hardest times. These at-home-rituals are essential in our formation in faith at all ages and in the passing on of the gift of faith to our children. Even in the busiest of days, we can all find two minutes to do this. We encourage you to make this a non-negotiable priority in your family life.

### **What is an at Home Sacred Space?**

This month as our at-home-ritual we are gifting you 7 elements to create a Sacred Space at home. We will be interacting more directly with one of these elements each week. It is true that God is everywhere and always, yet as human beings we experience reality through our senses, so designating certain spaces, places or things as sacred helps us to become aware of the reality of God's enduring presence and love. Our churches fulfil this purpose in a privileged way, yet creating a Sacred Space at home will help us to remember that the place where God walks with us and where our life of faith happens and grows is at home. At a time when we are not all able to come to church, creating this Sacred Space at home is even more important.

You will notice that all the elements provided for our Sacred Space are pretty simple, they are meant to be beautiful and meaningful, yet they are intentionally very simple. Some of you might experience some resistance to give such simple elements a central place in your home. You might desire fancier things yet this simplicity of the different elements and of the ritual actions is intended to be a clear way to point you to two core elements of our spiritual journey: 1. we must walk this path in humility, we must set aside all of our masks and pretense. Before God, in spiritual matters we are all children. The path of faith is more than a path of intellectual enlightenment and self-involved "growth", it is a relationship of deepening dependence on God and solidarity with one another 2. God always works in small, quiet, ordinary ways, in the simple things of our everyday life, not in extraordinary and flashy things or ways.

To create your Sacred Space you can identify a location at home where you could place a small table on which you can put the 7 things you are receiving or you can use your dining table, fireplace mantle, coffee table, dresser, counter, etc. Make sure that it is a place that you will all see every day and that you can all go to for a few minutes of prayer each day.

You are receiving a small cloth to use as the foundation for your Sacred Space, and 6 other elements to place upon it. You can place these elements on your at home sacred space in any arrangement you want with 2 exceptions: 1. We ask you to place the yellow starburst mat at the very center of your green cloth. 2. Those of you coming to the in person gatherings will receive the 7<sup>th</sup> element on that day, once you receive it we ask you to place it on top of the yellow starburst mat in the center of your sacred space. For those of you, who are not coming to our in person gatherings, you will receive your 7<sup>th</sup> element along with everything else, it will be marked #7, we ask you to keep this 7<sup>th</sup> element in the bag

until the 2<sup>nd</sup> week at least, ideally until the 7<sup>th</sup> week at which time you can place it on top of the yellow starburst matt.

Once you have set up your at home Sacred Space, if you want you can take a picture and email it to Dawn so we can share in our social media. You can just take a picture of the space or include your family and the space.

**This at home ritual: “*Discovering Our Identity in Faith*”** Columbus Day to Thanksgiving day 7 weeks

Our home ritual will be centered around our Sacred Space. We ask you on the Sunday (First Day of each week) to gather around the Sacred Space for 5-10 minutes to read what the at home ritual for that week will be and to do the ritual for the first time. On the following six days of that week we ask you to gather for 2 minutes each day around the Sacred Space to perform the suggested ritual. Each week our suggested ritual will focus on one of the 7 elements that compose your Sacred Space. This way we will also add meaning to those elements making them truly sacred for us.

**Week 1 (October 11):** This week we will be focusing on the **yellow starburst mat** that we have placed at the center of our sacred space. It creates an empty space. A space that longs to be filled. Yet instead of being dark and sad as emptiness tends to be this space is bright and shines. This week we are invited to look at the places of emptiness in our lives, and to look at them as an emptiness with purpose.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God’s presence
3. Take 20 seconds to check in with yourself, where is that emptiness in you, what or who are you missing? What do you really want today?
4. Take one of the small pieces of paper and write a word, draw a symbol or a little picture that represents that which you really want or are missing today.
5. Once all are done with step 4, place your little notes on the yellow starburst mat and together say the following prayer: **“Loving God, help me see the empty spaces in my heart and in my life, and to trust that you allow this emptiness for a purpose.”**
6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Do the Sign of the Cross, go on with your day or evening

**Week 2 (October 18):** This week we will be focusing on the **Green Cloth**. As you know the church has a liturgical year with different seasons. Each season is identified by a liturgical color (the color of the priests vestments and church decorations during that season). We are in a season called “Ordinary Time” the color of this season is green. Ordinary Time is the time in which there are no major

celebrations such as Christmas or Easter nor are we preparing for one of these major celebrations as we do during Advent and Lent. Ordinary Time reminds us that we are always in relationship with God and always called to grow in our faith even if it is not one of those celebration or preparation times. Green is the color of hope. For Christians hope means that we are certain that God will complete God's plan for each one of us (to transform us into the likeness of Christ) and for humanity and creation (to build a civilization of love). Hope also means that we are all called to collaborate with God in fulfilling God's purpose for us, for creation and for humanity. As this green cloth is the foundation of our Sacred Space, hope is the foundation of our Christian life, we are pilgrims that walk always firm on the certainty of God's victory and always focused in collaborating with God in accomplishing this victory.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Take 20 seconds to look at your green cloth, this field of hope. Use your imagination to see upon that field of hope, the signs of hope in our world. What is happening that gives you hope? What have you experienced today or yesterday that gives you hope? Also use your imagination to place in that field of hope the things in this world in the last 24 hours that are not right, that need to change. What has made you afraid? What would you like to help change, make better in your family, community, our world?
4. Briefly share with each other, one thing that gives you hope, one thing that you see is wrong, needs to change. If you live alone, share these things with Jesus, talk to him as you would talk to a friend.
5. Once all are done with step 4, together say the following prayer: **"Loving God, we know that you are working always to complete our creation so we can be holy and so that our world can be a world of love, help us to trust that you will complete the work and help us to use our time and our choices to help you make us holy and transform this world into a kingdom of love"**
6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Do the Sign of the Cross, go on with your day or evening

**Week 3 (October 25):** This week we will be focusing on the **Holy Water**. As we try to discover our identity we have realized that there are empty spaces within us, that there are empty spaces in our world, things that need to change and be better. We have also discovered that there are good things happening in our world and that we are called to help make ourselves, others and the world better. These elements already say a lot about who we are.

The empty space in us, the sense of longing, the sense of always missing something is meant to guide us to God. To teach us that we will always be lacking something until we find God. That emptiness at the center of our lives is filled with blessing and hope, it is a great gift that invites us to turn to God's love. Who we are at the core is this: Children of God. We are loved and we can only find happiness in God's unconditional love, in this relationship with our Father.

Part of this relationship is that God invites us to help God in making others and the world whole. At the core of our identity is this mission to help God transform us, others and the world through love and service. We are disciples of Jesus, helping in building His Kingdom, a civilization of love.

In the church we express, become aware of and celebrate our true identity through the Sacrament of baptism. We are God's children. We belong to a community: the church, called to transform the world into a civilization of love and in doing so we are not under the power of sin and evil but shielded by Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit that dwells in us and works constantly to defeat selfishness in us and make us holy so we can transform the world.

To celebrate and signify all this we have given each household a container with Holy Water, to remember our Baptism.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Open your Holy Water Container
4. Take turns to dip your fingers in the Holy Water and make the sign of the cross.
5. Once all are done with step 4, together say the following prayer: **"Loving God, help us be always aware that we are your beloved children, that we belong to your family the church, that we are called to be holy and to transform this world into a civilization of love by our choices, words and actions. Amen."**
6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Close your Holy Water container and go on with your day or evening

**Week 4 (November 1):** This week we will be focusing on the **Candle**. As we continue to discover our identity this candle, the symbol of light that is another of the symbols of Baptism will help us. Light is a very special thing. It exists completely for the sake of others. Think of a candle being lit in a completely empty space in which there is nothing and no one. That light would make no difference. Light makes a huge difference but never for itself, always for others. Light in a dark room allows those in it to find their way. Light on the road at night allows to see where we are going. Light in our world, nourishes plants and enables them to grow, etc. Light's existence only finds meaning and purpose in the service of others.

Human beings, like light have no purpose or meaning if it is not in the service of others. Our lives add nothing to this world and contribute nothing to God's plan when we live for ourselves. We only have meaning when we live for others. We are called to be the light of the world, we are so when we live for others and for God's glory and not for ourselves. This Sunday we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. This is what the saints discovered, this is how they lived, being intent on being light in the service of others.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space

2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Light your candle and remember: Like light we only have purpose when we live for others.
4. Take 20 seconds to think of one concrete, simple thing you can do today to make someone else's day brighter with love. Make a commitment to do that today.
5. Once all are done with step 4, together say the following prayer: **"Loving God, help us remember today that like light we only make sense when we are serving others. Give us the generosity and courage to make others day brighter with love today. Help us to think of ourselves less and to focus on serving others. Amen"**
6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Make the sign of the Cross and go on with your day or evening

**Week 5 (November 8):** This week we will be focusing on **Mary**. As we continue to discover our identity, we realize that living for others is not that easy. It is easy to become self-centered and selfish. It is easy to want all to be our way, and according to our plans. This week, with Mary and the Saints we are called to become aware of more of our identity. We do not only live for others, we live to do God's will, and in order to do this and to serve others, we need God's help, God's grace and God's guidance. We need the gift of faith.

Faith means that we are able to believe in God, in God's desire for a relationship with us, and in God's will to share with us the mission of creating us and others into the likeness of Christ. Beyond that faith means that knowing and believing these things and trusting in God's love we are willing to surrender our life, our being and our choices to God. The true act of faith is what Mary did. The angel shared with her God's love for her, God desire to give her a mission, God's desire to bring the world to fulfilment in love and Mary surrendered her life, being and choices to God's Will when she said: "May it be done to me according to your will". We all like Mary are called to be aware of the same and to surrender in the same way. This is the gift of faith that is offered to us and that is at the core of who we are and who we are called to become.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Focus on Mary and remember her story, how she became aware of God's love and God's plan and gave her life, being and choices to God.
4. Take 20 seconds to reflect: what do I feel that God is asking of me today? How is God inviting me to forgive, give, be generous, be loving? Make a commitment to do that today.
5. Once all are done with step 4, together say the following prayer: **"Loving God, help us to consult every choice with you today and like Mary may we want to do what you want and help you more than we want to just do our own thing. Help us to be generous and always say yes to your invitations in our heart, doing what will bring your love into this world. Amen."**

6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Make the sign of the Cross and go on with your day or evening

**Week 6 (November 15):** This week we will be focusing on the **Rosary beads**. The Rosary is a very common form of Catholic prayer. Even though it is a Marian Prayer, this is a prayer dedicated to Mary, it is all about Jesus. As we continue to try to discover our identity we do so with the help of the Saints, among whom Mary is the greatest. They are our models; they are human beings that discovered their true identity and lived it to the fullest. In the fact that the Rosary is a Marian Prayer, but it is ALL about JESUS, we get closer and closer to discovering the core of our identity. The Rosary is a prayer we offer to Mary as our Mother and the Mother of God, yet the idea of the Rosary is that as we pray the Hail Mary 50 times we reflect upon and contemplate different moments of the life of Jesus. In this way Mary brings us to Jesus as we pray to her we come to know and love Jesus more deeply. The Rosary is not about Mary, it is about Jesus. Our life is not about us, it is about Jesus. The other element of the Rosary that might catch our attention is its structure: it is long, we repeat the Hail Mary 50 times, these repetitions are broken up into 5 groups of 10. In the Rosary beads we begin at the Cross, and we end at the Cross. We begin with the creed and we end with the Hail Holy Queen, being reminded that our earthly life is only one part of the journey and we look forward to eternal life in heaven. In this structure we learn quite a bit about our identity and how it plays out. We are on a journey, we are a work in progress, our life, our path of holiness, the building of the kingdom takes time, it is a process. In this process it might feel like there is a lot of repetition as we also repeat the Hail Mary 50 times. We might feel like we are stuck, yet we are not, no matter what with each repetition we move one bead forward, God is always at work, slowly but surely. There will be some moments in our life where we experience more perceptible change and progress, such as when we move from one decade to the next in the Rosary, again we are always moving forward, God is working out our salvation in all things. The foundation and principle of our life is faith, this is our starting point and our certain refuge always, as we begin the Rosary with the Creed. Our life begins and ends in Christ. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end as we begin and end the Rosary at the Cross in the Rosary beads. The rosary can be prayer alone, yet it is so much more meaningful when we pray it as a family or with others and we can each take different parts. As we know by Baptism we are made for community and our life is much more meaningful when lived with and for others. This week if you have the time we invite you to pray the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary each day. If you cannot dedicate 30 minutes each day as a family then we invite to do the following.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Have one member of the family hold the Rosary Beads
4. Have another member select one of the Luminous Mysteries and say it out loud. Take a few seconds to think about this moment in Jesus' life.
5. Pray 3 Hail Mary's, while counting them on the Rosary Beads.

6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God
7. Make the sign of the Cross and go on with your day or evening

**Week 7 (November 22):** This last week we will focus on element #7, take it out of your bag and place it on the yellow sunburst mat in the Center of your Sacred Space. If you did not join us for the in person gathering you can take some time this week to decorate your Cross. The Cross is the fullness of revelation of our identity. WE ARE LOVED always and in an absolute way. God loves us always, at our best and at our worst. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. We are loved, no conditions, no questions asked, no limits...we are loved. We are loved in an absolute way, God loves us more than anything. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI teaches in *Deus Caritas Est*, God's passionate love for humanity is so great that it turns God against Godself. Jesus dies on the Cross because God loves us more than anything, because God's love for us is absolute. Jesus would have died for us, even if there was only one of us. God's love for YOU is ABSOLUTE.

So, who are we? WE ARE A BEING THAT IS LOVED ABSOLUTELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY BY GOD.

And what is the purpose of our existence? To become the likeness of Christ, to love as God loves, to lay down our lives in a sacrifice of love for the good of others just like Jesus.

Jesus is at the center of who we are, Jesus is the only answer to our emptiness and the unfinished things of this world. We will be filled only when we accept that we are loved absolutely and unconditionally. The world will be transformed into the civilization of love that God desires only when we each become the likeness of Christ. When we each live for others and not for ourselves. When we each lay down our lives each and every day and in each and every choice as a loving sacrifice for the good of others and the glory of God.

What is our identity? IT IS NOT ABOUT US, IT IS ABOUT CHRIST. Accepting God's love revealed to us in Christ and becoming the presence of that same love in this world.

The Cross is the answer.

Each day this week:

1. Gather around your sacred space
2. Take 10 seconds to become aware of God's presence
3. Focus on the Cross. Remember that God's love for you is unconditional and absolute. Remember that you are called to be the sacrificial presence of that love in this world like Jesus.
4. Take a moment to reflect on things that might be making you feel guilty, ashamed or like you are not enough. Lay those things down at the foot of the Cross and be reassured of God's love and God's forgiveness and God's commitment to help you. Take a moment to think of something you can do today, or that you have to do today that requires sacrifice, it is hard, you might not like it, it is a challenge, how can you do this lovingly, how can you offer this joyfully for the good of others and for love of God?

5. Once all are done with step 4, say the following prayer: “ **God, help us to remember always that you are proud of us and love us. Help us to love other like you love us, loving even when it is hard and giving all for other. Amen.**”

6. Take 10 seconds in silence to offer your day/ or give thanks for your day to God

7. Make the sign of the Cross and go on with your day or evening