

Small Groups Curriculum

Week of February 21, 2021

OPENING PRAYER

Shine in our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the proclamations of Your Gospels. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having trampled down all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer Before the Reading of the Gospel
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

For the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

SUNDAY EPISTLE

St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15

SUNDAY GOSPEL

The Gospel According to Luke 18:10-14

All readings are available at goarch.org or the Daily Readings app.

EPISTLE READING

Timothy, my son, you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconion, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL READING

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'

"But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Discussion

INTRO NOTES

1. Self-Preoccupation and Pride

- A. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us about a Pharisee who thought himself righteous but was actually too self-absorbed to be open to God
- B. He stood in the Temple and “prayed thus with himself,” not to God
- C. In the Epistle, St. Paul tells St Timothy to focus, not on his own successes, but on the example of St. Paul: “you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life...”
- D. He asks his spiritual son to stay grounded by following in the footsteps of his spiritual father rather than allowing himself to become self-absorbed and puffed up with pride

2. Self-Deception

- A. St. Paul cautions that “evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived”
- B. The Pharisee in the Gospel was deceiving, not simply others, but himself
- C. He proudly stood in the Temple and prayed loudly for all to hear of his goods deeds
- D. But he also deceived himself, convincing himself that he was righteous and has no need of repentance

3. Icons of Christ

- A. St. Paul points to his life as a living witness to Jesus Christ
- B. He passed on the faith to St Timothy, not just in an abstract or academic way, but by embodying what it means to be a Christian
- C. Similarly, in the humility of the Publican we see an icon of Christ’s humility
- D. The Lord does not puff Himself up but humbly accepted a humiliating death on the Cross

For more on this Sunday’s Gospel reading, watch:

[Live the Word #19 | Why You Need a Spiritual Father](#)

Discussion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are you feeling right now?
2. We often don't perceive ourselves accurately; it can take the perspective of someone else to keep us honest and grounded. Who do you rely on to help keep you grounded and on the right path? How does this person do this for you?
3. Life can feel like a movie where you are the main character. (Spoiler alert: it's not.) How do you deflect your focus away from constant self-preoccupation and towards others? Who are those you often consider "side characters" in your life? How can you put them in a more central starring role?
4. Who in your life is an icon of Jesus? How do you see the Lord in the life they lead? For whom in your life are you called to be an icon of Jesus?

If you don't get through all the questions, that's ok!

Discussion

WRAP-UP NOTES

Each Wrap-Up should be personal and based on your time together as a Small Group. These three questions can help you, as a Small Group Leader, wrap up your weekly meeting:

1. What are you grateful to have learned or heard in the conversation?
2. What simple statement or question from the conversation can you share again that would be most helpful to hear again three years from now?
3. If you could share up to twelve words on the topic of “pride” what would you say?

AT THE END OF MEETINGS

We give thanks to You, invisible King, Who by Your boundless power fashioned the universe, and in the multitude of Your mercy brought all things from nothing into being. Look down from heaven, O Master, upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have not bowed before flesh and blood, but before You, the awesome God. Therefore, O Master, make smooth and beneficial for us all, whatever lies ahead, according to the need of each: Sail with those who sail; travel with those who travel; heal the sick, Physician of our souls and bodies. Through the grace, compassion, and love for mankind of Your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer Following the Lord's Prayer
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom