

**S³ Leadership
Joy of the Gospel Study Guide**

The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus

Reflected in The Joy of the Gospel

(Living The Joy of the Gospel as a S³ Jesus-like Leader)

**A 6-week Study, Reflection and Discussion
Guide for Individuals and Small Groups**

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The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus Reflected in The Joy of the Gospel

Discover the vision that Pope Francis finds
in the gospel for you and your Church



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Introduction

In the beginning

In 2009 we introduced [*The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus*](#), which outlined the model of S³ Leadership – Servant, Steward and Shepherd – as the key to understanding how Jesus led his disciples and told them how to lead others when he would no longer be with them and would entrust them and their work to the Holy Spirit.

Since then we've shared this model in our flagship one-day Encounter experiences. They're a rich mix of videos, music, live presentations, small and large group discussions, and self-discovery exercises. We've received feedback on that experience from participants all across the U.S., as well as in Canada, Haiti, Uganda, Tanzania and India.

We like to think we helped ignite a revolution in how Catholic leaders and members the world over understand and exercise leadership in their homes, workplaces, parishes, neighborhoods, regions and the world. Yet, we know that the vision of Leading like Jesus did not originate with us. It is rooted in the Gospels – both in Jesus' own leadership and in his instruction to his disciples about how they should lead if they want to be true disciples. More recently, we see that same kind of leadership taught and lived by Pope Francis, who was doing it long before the Yeshua Institute began its ministry.

Even before that, when we began digging deeply into the Gospels and church tradition to write the book on Jesus-like leadership, we found that church leaders had been teaching fundamentally the same approach over the centuries in many times and places – but most evidently at the Second Vatican Council and in the words of popes since that council of church fathers was convened: John XXIII, Paul VI, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

At the same time, our Christian sisters and brothers in the ecumenical Lead Like Jesus movement, especially co-founders Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, shared with us much of the work they have done to develop a deep understanding of what it means to Lead Like Jesus, and they encouraged us to share it with other members of the global Catholic community. So our job was not to create anything as much as to discover and proclaim it.

That sense came to the fore again as we read Pope Francis' work, [*The Joy of the Gospel*](#) (*Evangelii Gaudium*). Officially known as an "apostolic exhortation," that term doesn't begin to capture the joy, exuberance and incredible vision of church and discipleship that virtually bursts from between its covers. As I read the document, available [free for download on the Vatican's website](#), I found my heart soaring at the vision Pope Francis has for us – all of us, laity and clergy – in the church.

Since being elected pope on March 13, 2013, Pope Francis has spoken at various times of leadership using all three of the terms which we use to outline Jesus' own leadership: servant, steward and shepherd. We could not have found a pope more affirming of our work if we had been asked to pick one ourselves.

Nevertheless, when Msgr. Tom Cahalane, pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Tucson, AZ, suggested in the winter of 2014 that we prepare a study guide on S³ Jesus-like Leadership through the lens of [*The Joy of the Gospel*](#), I was stunned. The suggestion was both so creative and yet so obvious that for an instant I wondered why I hadn't thought of it. But then my heart filled with gratitude for the good monsignor's insight, and for his generosity in sharing it with me. *All of us are smarter than any of us. And all of us are at our best when we let ourselves be instruments of God's grace in the world.* Msgr. Tom has been doing that for over 50 years as a priest, so it should have come as no surprise that he would be a herald once again in this instance.

From time to time we note that we do our work at the Yeshua Catholic International Leadership Institute "for the glory of God and the good of His people." That's certainly our motivation in developing this e-book study guide. We hope and pray it will serve you as you work to become ever more an S³ Jesus-like Leader in your home, at your work, in your church, in your community and in the world – wherever God calls you.

Owen Phelps
January, 2016

I. How to use this guide

This guide is intended to be used as a companion to Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). Copies of it can be downloaded free from the [Vatican website](#) or purchased from your local Catholic bookstore or from many online sources. It is essential that all participants in study groups have a copy of *The Joy of the Gospel*. As regards this study guide, it is essential only that the group leader have a copy -- although other group members may want to have their own copy so they can reflect on the questions before group meetings.

On the title page we call this "a 6-week study, reflection and discussion guide for individuals and small groups." What do we mean by that? We mean that we've written this e-book to serve three purposes in two settings:

- The purposes are study, reflection and discussion.
- The settings are alone or with others.

Of the two settings, we have a strong preference for using this study guide in a small group, if only because discussion is something that people do best together. The benefits of studying, reflecting and sharing our reflections in a small discussion group are too numerous to mention. Suffice to say, the benefits nearly always far outweigh the hassles of publicizing, organizing and moderating such a group. And that should come to no surprise to us, since one of the core teachings of our larger Catholic and Christian community is that together we are the body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:4-13:13). Surely the body of Christ can accomplish things that none of us can achieve on our own.

However, if there's no way for you to form or access a small group, the next best option is not to toss this guide in the recycle bin and turn your attention to something else. You can still find it a valuable tool for personal study and reflection – and for discussion in prayer with Jesus. Just go through the guide on your own, at your convenience, and then turn your thoughts and questions over to our Lord in prayer. It is absolutely clear in the Gospels that Jesus wants each and every one of us to be an S³ Leader no matter what our circumstances in life. So even lacking a group with which to discuss the material here, you can learn and grow in holiness (or "wholiness," if you prefer) by reading and reflecting on the material in this guide on your own.

If you are blessed to be using this guide in the company of a small group, here are some basic tips for how to get your group organized and keep it on track. If you are an experienced group leader, you may prefer to skip past this section and go immediately to Session 1.

II. Tips for small group leaders

It is not necessary, but it would be very helpful if the group leader or leaders have read both *The Joy of the Gospel* and *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus* before the group begins to meet. Having this background will occasionally prove helpful when questions arise. At the same time, the group leader's purpose is to serve as a facilitator of interactive learning, not as a resident expert and even less as a lecturer.

The group leader's focus should be on the dynamics of the group, gently moving it to greater levels of trust and discovery through a basic structure of hospitality, prayer and sharing. It is not essential that every question in this study guide gets asked and discussed. Rather, the questions are tools to facilitate discussion and learning. To that end, we suggest a simple format of:

- Convening and welcome
- Opening prayer
- Introduction
- Key Teachings and Discussion
- Implications for S³ Leadership
- Personal takeaway (everyone participates)
- Preview for next gathering
- Closing prayer
- Optional post-meeting socialization

The leader's first task is to *design an experience* for participants consistent with the small group's purpose and/or the participants' goals. If the primary goal of the group is *study*, socialization activities can be minimal – but never completely eliminated. If the primary goal of the group is *building community*, socialization activities will take on greater importance.

The leader's second task is to *prepare* – both for the overall series of group meetings and for each individual meeting. By preparation we do not mean developing a tightly-structured script and then adamantly hewing to it moment to moment. Instead, a well-prepared leader is at home enough with the material that he or she can be *flexible* in letting discussions develop, moving discussion along, and encouraging more reticent participants to engage while gently assuring that one or two people do not dominate the discussion.

The leader's third task is to *listen* – to the discussion at hand, of course, but also to the nonverbal communication occurring, as well as to verbal clues regarding emotional needs and interests. Are some people troubled or confused? Is clarification called for, or does inquiry seem like a better approach to draw people out and help them grow from the experience? It is not the purpose of the small group, or its leader, to psychoanalyze anyone or to listen to someone psychoanalyze themselves.

It's important to be sensitive when intense emotional responses materialize, but it's also important to be faithful to the group's purpose as the gatherings unfold. When one person's participation begins to take the group off track for any reason, it is good to remember that leaders are not constrained by the choices of indulging or quashing. Indeed, the best approaches are often *deferring* and/or *referring* – suggesting that the issue be pursued later, after the gathering, either with the group leader (if he or she is comfortable with that), a member of the parish team, or an expert in the appropriate field.

The leader's fourth task is to *lead* – gently discerning the momentary interest level of group members, drawing them into the discussion, and moving the discussion along so as to keep interest and engagement as high as possible. Of course it's necessary to be a good steward of the time allotted for the gathering – always beginning and ending on time out of respect for the commitment participants have made to the group and to the many other commitments they have in their lives.

III. Better too much than too little

The Joy of the Gospel is packed with great vision and insight. Although it is usually easy reading, it is *dense reading* – packed with meaning in every paragraph. In preparing this study guide, we have tried to include as much of that vision and insight as possible. Some will say we have included too much. And perhaps in your groups that will prove to be the case.

However, in preparing this guide, we have been guided by the axiom that *it is better to have too much than too little*. It is, of course, not possible to have just the right amount of content for every situation. Some groups will meet for an hour, some for an hour and a half, and some for two hours. Some groups will consist of participants who are eager and willing to discuss virtually every sentence of Pope Francis for hours on end. In other groups participants will be much less forthcoming, content to spend only a moment or two on each question.

Whatever the situation, whatever the dynamics of the group using this study guide, clearly it's better to leave some questions unasked than to run out of discussion material partly way through a gathering. So if we have erred -- and in some contexts if not all we think that's inevitable -- we have erred on the side of overabundance.

Leaders should feel free to skip sections as he or she -- or the group -- prefers and as time demands. Perhaps some people will find it profitable to privately reflect on the materials that there isn't time to discuss in small groups. Or perhaps others will find it helpful to gather in smaller groups of two or three to review the material that couldn't be used in the regular group session.

In any event, we're confident that you won't run out of material to discuss no matter how long your group's sessions are or how difficult inspiring energetic discussion proves to be.

IV. Two parts to the small group experience

There are two parts of any small group experience, and for the experience to be a benefit to participants, both parts must be taken into account by the group leader.

- **Preparation/Study** – if participants don't read the material before the group convenes, it will be hard for them to follow the discussion and even harder to contribute to it. This is true whether or not they realize it. Some people are attracted to small groups primarily for the opportunity to meet and socialize with people. This interest can be an asset to group dynamics. But everyone should be encouraged to do their "homework" so that the sessions are, in fact, helpful to all participants and true to their purpose. Leaders should pay attention to how well-prepared participants are to discuss the material at hand, and when appropriate gently encourage greater preparation.
- **Interaction/Dialogue** – if a participant never speaks up – or never shuts up – it detracts from the group experience and inhibits the learning and growth of group members. Of course, some people are naturally more reticent and some more voluble. An effective group leader discerns and respects these tendencies even while gently working to foster an environment where everyone is comfortable both contributing and listening to others' contributions.

V. Conclusion

A leader who is lovingly committed to the people in the group and the material which has brought them together and who pays attention to the dynamics of each gathering will find the leader's role in contributing to the growth of others very satisfying. As the sharing and discovery process unfolds, it is important for the leader to be grounded in prayer.

Share your joys and sorrows, your difficulties and doubts, your highs and lows with the Lord – and turn them over to him. Your ultimate role is to do your best to serve Him with the gifts He has given you. That's all He asks or expects. That's all you need to do to please Him, the ultimate audience for all that we do.

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Session 1

Convening and welcome

Opening prayer

Read together from ¶ 3, beginning with the words “Now is the time...”

Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”.

Introduction (*Leader reads*)

In this session we focus on the introduction to Pope Francis’ letter. The section is titled: A Joy Ever New, A Joy Which is Shared. It includes ¶ 1-18.

In this section Pope Francis links the notion of joy to sharing. He says that when something fills us with joy, we naturally want to share it. So when the Gospel fills us with joy – which is his hope and purpose in writing this book – we naturally want to share the Gospel with others, even more in our deeds than in our words.

The dynamic power of the Gospel to change lives has been dulled, even from the beginning, by people who profess to be Christians but whose behavior is not consistent with the values expressed in Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels. The crowds who embraced Jesus when he entered Jerusalem were soon mocking him. Even all but one of his disciples abandoned him on his journey to the cross. Today many live estranged from Jesus’ body. And many others have rejected and turned away from it. Polls show their reasons are many, ranging from more inertia to angry righteousness. But one of the major reasons they give for their rejection is that the Christians they know are hypocritical. *We do not live up to the faith we profess.*

Pope Francis’ hope for a new day in the church and in the world is grounded in his call for us to develop a new and deeper personal relationship with Jesus. He calls us to have such a profoundly intimate experience of Jesus’ love that we ache to love him back – and in doing so we become and remain determined to live unselfish and caring lives that affirm everything Jesus taught in the Gospels.

S³ Jesus-like Leadership (*Leader reads or asks for volunteers*)

In [*The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus*](#), we speak of the role of the laity. Many of us grew up being taught that our primary roles were to “pray, pay and obey.” But we quote several recent popes who say our role is much larger and more important. It is nothing less than “sanctifying the world.” That means it is our job, our vocation, to help shape the world we live in to ever more closely conform to God’s plan for it – and to ever more reflect God’s unconditional love for all creation, and most especially humanity.

That's a huge task! But Jesus believes we are up to it. At the Last Supper, he told his disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12 NABRE) Imagine, he believes that we can accomplish some things that he had not yet accomplished when his ministry was drawing to a close. That's setting the bar very high, isn't it? But who else is there to carry on his work now that he has ascended into heaven? As Jesus' mystical body, we are called to be his hands and feet to a world still badly in need of him and his love.

In the beginning of [*The Joy of the Gospel*](#), Pope Francis shares his vision of the church as the People of God and the Body of Christ – a community of believers so moved by the joy of Jesus' love for us -- as he expressed it in his life, death and resurrection – that we are on fire to share this "good news" with everyone else we encounter. As we shall see in his letter, the pope knows we are a long way from his vision and Jesus' vision for us. But he has great confidence in our abilities to grow and serve, and in the loving activity of the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us, as we seek to *sanctify the world*.

Key Teachings and Discussion

¶ 1. "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus."

- Have you ever encountered Jesus in such a way that you felt this kind of joy?
- Do you know or know of anyone that you think has encountered this joy Pope Francis speaks of?

¶ 2. "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience ... Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless."

- When Pope Francis speaks of "the grave danger in today's world," he identifies its expression in four manifestations. Do you see signs of "complacent yet covetous hearts" in our society today?
- Can you think of some examples of "frivolous pleasures" that we might have difficulty justifying in God's eyes – especially if pursuing them becomes the purpose of our lives?
- What sort of things in today's society might contribute to "blunting our conscience"?
- Do you see many people today who are resentful, angry or listless? If so, why do you think that's the case?

¶ 3. "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them."

- In her book *Forming Intentional Disciples, The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (2012), Sherry Weddell cites a survey that says only 48 % of Catholics think it's possible to have a personal relationship with God. Among men of all ages, its only 43%. And among young men and women between 18 and 29, only 40% think such a relationship is possible. What do you think? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? Do you think having one is even possible?
- How do you suggest people go about forming and deepening a relationship with Jesus?

¶ 3. "God never tires of forgiving us."

- How does reading that sentence make you feel? Have you ever thought about it before?
- A Catholic author once said, "God wants to forgive us even more than we want to be forgiven." How does that make you feel?

¶ 5. "The Gospel ... constantly invites us to rejoice."

- When you hear or read the Gospels, do you hear this invitation? Why or why not?

¶ 6. "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter."

- What does Pope Francis mean in this analogy?
- Do you know or know of fellow Christians who fit this description? Might you be one of them?
- Why do you think this sort of Christians concern the pope?

¶ 6. "Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures..."

- In talking about how joy can adapt, change and endure, Pope Francis seems to have something else in mind than happiness, which can come and go as our circumstances change. What does it take for us to be truly joyful?

¶ 7. "... our technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy."

- Here Pope Francis distinguishes between "occasions of pleasure" and "joy." How would you distinguish between "pleasure" and "joy"?
- Which do you think is most important – and why?

¶ 8. "Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption."

- Is it your experience that God’s love liberates you from these things?
- Why do you think God would want to liberate us from these things? Do you think that someone who is narrow-minded and/or self-absorbed can be a true disciple of Jesus?

¶ 9. “Goodness always tends to spread ... any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others”

- Can you explain in your own words what Pope Francis is getting at here?

¶ 10. “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort.”

- Pope Francis gives us a paradox here. In your experience, how can life grow by being given away?
- Recall that Pope Francis rejected living in the papal apartment – not primarily because it was luxurious but because it would have left him alone, isolated from others. How can life weaken because of isolation and comfort?

¶ 10. “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!”

- What is the danger Pope Francis sees in Christians whose demeanor is always sad?

¶ 11. “A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization.”

- How important is it for you to hear a “good homily”? How does it make you feel?

¶ 12. “Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord’s work ...”

- When we roll up our sleeves and make a conscious effort to share the Gospel with others in what we do and say, it requires a lot of effort and even some self-sacrifice. Why does Pope Francis insist that the Lord receive the credit?

¶ 13. “The believer is essentially ‘one who remembers.’”

- What does Pope Francis mean when he says this?

¶ 14. In this paragraph Pope Francis turns his attention to “the new evangelization.” He says it is designed to reach out and engage three groups:

1. “the faithful who regularly take part in community worship ...” and “members of faithful who preserve a deep and sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship.”
2. “the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism.”
3. “those who do not know Jesus Christ or have always rejected him.”

- Notice that Pope Francis puts those who actively participate in the church and some who do not in the same group? Why do you think he does this? What do they have in common that holds them together?
- What are some ways we can influence people in all three groups?
- What are some ways we might reach out to people in each specific group?
- What can one person like yourself do to help people develop a relationship with Jesus? Are you comfortable doing it?

¶14. “Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselyting that the church grows, but ‘by attraction’.”

- When Francis speaks of the Christian life as sharing joy rather than “imposing new obligations,” is this a new way for you to think about your Christian vocation?
- What are some ways we can share our faith “by attraction”?

¶ 16. Pope Francis talks about his own role as pope and the “need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’” that respects the role of local bishops in the teaching and activity of the church.

- How does his call for “decentralization” of church authority make you feel?
- What are some things you would like the pope and his curia to leave to the discretion of local bishops?

¶ 17. In this paragraph Pope Francis lists seven areas he wishes to discuss at length in his “apostolic exhortation.”

- Which of these do you think are most important – and why?

¶ 18. Pope Francis speaks of “a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt *in every activity* which you undertake.”

- Are you comfortable with the idea of adopting any “style of evangelization” in your everyday life?

Implications for S³ Leadership

Near the very start of his teaching (¶2) Pope Francis warns of “the grave danger ... of a complacent yet covetous heart.” At the very foundation of S³ Jesus-like Leadership is the need for a servant’s heart, devoted to serving God first and foremost, rather than a self-serving heart. ““The issue is the primacy of God,” said Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*. “If a [person’s] heart is not good, then nothing else can turn out good either.”

As we also note, an S³ Jesus-like Leader also needs to properly align his or her Head, Hands and Habits – and it all begins with developing a personal relationship with Jesus. Pope Francis urges this and says that as a result of our encounter with God’s love, which “blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.

As we note when we talk about S¹ Servant Leadership, our first realization about life must be that *it is not about me*.

Personal takeaway (everyone participates)

As today’s gathering draws to an end, please share one thought you have as a result of today’s reading and discussion that you would like to take with you when you leave today.

Assignment for next gathering

Read the 30 paragraphs that make up Chapter 1 (¶ 19-49), “The Church’s Missionary Transformation.”

Closing prayer

Together say *The Lord’s Prayer*.

Optional post-meeting socialization

Session 2

Convening and welcome

In this session we'll be focusing on Chapter 1, ¶ 19-49 (30)

Opening prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction (*Leader reads*)

In this chapter, Pope Francis elaborates on his theme that we are all called – as individuals and as members of his Church – to be missionaries, “to go forth,” to reach out and to evangelize. In many parts of the world, lay Catholics have seldom seen their role as having anything to do with evangelization. The assumption is that if evangelization is the proper work of the Church, our clergy will do it.

Pope Francis offers us a different vision – one which he attributes to Jesus himself in this chapter's very first paragraph (¶ 19), when he quotes Jesus speaking to his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew (28:19-20). A key part of our role as Christians, lay and Catholic alike, is “to make disciples of all nations” – beginning, no doubt with ourselves.

As you read Chapter 1 of *The Joy of the Gospel*, reflect on it and discuss it, keep in the back of your mind two very important questions:

- Am I a disciple of Jesus?
- How can I “make disciples” if I am not yet myself a disciple of Jesus?

Key Teachings and Discussion Questions

¶ 21. “... the drive to go forth and give, to get out of ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present.”

- Do you feel this urge? Have you ever felt it?
- How do we sow good seed in our everyday lives?

¶ 24. “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives?”

- How does our parish get involved in people's daily lives?
- Could we, should we be doing more?

¶ 27. “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, time and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”

- In your own words, describe what Pope Francis has in mind when he speaks of “a missionary impulse.”
- How might our parish be different if all of us were impelled forward by “a missionary impulse” to evangelize the world?

¶ 28. “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. ”

- How might our faith community use its flexibility, openness and creativity to be more focused on missionary activity – that is to say, evangelization?
- In this paragraph Pope Francis adds that his vision of an evangelizing parish “presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few.” To what extent can we presume that about our own faith community? How might we improve our parish’s outreach to people in the parish – both members and non-members?

¶ 29-33. In these paragraphs, Pope Francis discusses the kind of reform that he would like to see at all levels of Church, from small communities through the papacy – even speaking of “a conversion of the papacy” (¶ 32).

- When you read these sections, how did they make you feel?
- Does any particular statement by Pope Francis stand out for you?

¶ 34. Pope Francis begins a new section called “From the Heart of the Gospel.” He could just as well have called it “First Things First.” Here he expresses his concern that “the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects ... aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message.” When this happens, much of the “meaning, beauty and attractiveness” of Gospel is lost on the world and its people. As always, he speaks frankly.

- What do you think he is referring to when he speaks of “the heart of Christ’s message”?

¶ 35. “Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed.”

- In your experience of Catholicism, has the focus been on a “disjoined transmission of a multitude of doctrines” or “on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary”? Can you give some examples without hurting others?

¶ 36. Here Pope Francis describes the “basic core” of the Gospel as “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.” Is that the basic core of your faith?

- If not, what is?

¶ 37-39. In these paragraphs, Pope Francis turns his attention to morality. He says “the Church’s moral teaching has its own ‘hierarchy,’” and that “what counts above all else is “faith working through love” of one’s neighbor. He also quotes St. Thomas Aquinas in insisting that “mercy is the greatest of all virtues.”

- Have you ever heard that – or thought about it – before?
- Now that you have heard it, what do you think about it?

¶ 39. “Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, or self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or a catalogue of sins and faults.”

- If it is not any of these things, what is it?

¶ 40. Pope Francis begins a new section, “A Mission Embodied Within Human Limits.” Here he makes the point that the Church and its members need to keep learning in order “to grow in her interpretation of the revealed word and in her understanding of truth.” God has given the Church the fullness of revealed truth, but our understanding of it is far from complete. As the future unfolds and there are “differing currents of thought in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice, the Church will come “to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word. For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel.”

- How does Pope Francis’ insistence that the church can and should grow in its understanding of Jesus’ teaching affect you personally? Are you surprised? Are you pleased? Are you troubled?
- Are you uncomfortable with the notion that the church and its leaders don’t already fully know everything that Jesus has to teach us in the fullness of time?

- Can you think of an example where church teaching has changed over the centuries in response to a new understanding of some truth of faith and/or an increase in our human knowledge? How did that or how does that make you feel?

¶ 41. “...today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness.” In this paragraph, Pope Francis quotes Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council that “The deposit of faith is one thing ... the way it is expressed is another.”

- Are you comfortable with this distinction between “the deposit of faith” and “the way it is expressed? Why or why not?

¶ 41. “With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian.” Here Pope Francis describes the problem of “hold(ing) fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance.” Arguing that “this is the greatest danger,” he quotes St. John Paul II: “Let us never forget that ‘the expression of truth can take different forms.’”

- Can you think of an example of where the expression of a truth has taken more than one form?
- Under what circumstances do you think one form of expression can be better than another?

¶ 43. “The Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated ... At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives.”

- How do you feel about change in the Church? Are you generally comfortable with it or do you tend to resist it. Why?
- Would you say that the changes that have occurred in the Church in your lifetime have generally helped you or hindered you embracing and practicing your faith? Can you give some specific examples?

¶ 44. “Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God’s saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.” In this section, Pope Francis suggests there is a hierarchy of truths that must be respected in accompanying people on their “journey of openness to God.” The first thing they must experience and accept is “God’s saving love” in their lives, and this takes precedence over correcting their beliefs or trying to make them conform to Church teaching and practice.

- Are you comfortable with the notion that we must first share with people the experience of “God’s saving love” by loving them ourselves before we can hope to share other aspects of our Catholic faith with them?
- Without mentioning names, do you know of any examples of this happening in your personal experience?
- How can we share “God’s saving love” with our own personal circles of family and friends?

¶ 46. Pope Francis begins a new section he calls “A Mother with an Open Heart.” This is a term he uses to describe the Church, or at least his vision of the Church. His vision does not involve a frantic quest for new or more active members. Instead, he urges patience and attentiveness to the needs of others, explaining: “At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open ...” In this spirit he urges that we keep our church doors open as much as possible. But he also argues that we should do all we can to keep our doors open to reception of the sacraments.

¶ 47. “... nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself ‘the door’: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a medicine and nourishment for the weak ... frequently we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.”

- How do you feel about Pope Francis’ vision of the sacraments, including the Eucharist, being available to everyone?
- Do you think there should be any restrictions on receiving any of the sacraments? Why or why not?

¶ 48. “If the whole Church takes up this missionary impulse, she has to go forth to everyone without exception. But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbors, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked ... there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor.”

- Do you see the “inseparable bond” that Pope Francis describes?
- How can we, here in this room, reach out to the poor and the sick in our own community?
- Do you think it is an “essential of our faith” that we help the poor and sick, or just as option for those who are especially holy or devout?

¶ 49. “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

- Do you share Pope Francis' preference for our Church? Why or why not?
- How can the Church become "unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security"? Without naming names, can you think of some examples from your own experience?

¶ 49. "More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: 'Give them something to eat.' (Mk 6:37)"

- Pope Francis contrasts the "fear of going astray" and the "fear of remaining shut up with structures" that lead to all sorts of problems. Speaking personally, which fear concerns you more? Why?

Implications for S³ Leadership

S³ Jesus-like Leaders acknowledge that living a Christ-centered life involves answering a call to do more than just "pray, pay and obey." When we are baptized, we are called to *sanctify the world*. Pope Francis put it this way in his homily for World Youth Day on the beach in Rio de Janeiro in July, 2013:

Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole church and that includes you ...The life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service.

If this commission applies to the youth who were the pope's intended audience, how much more does it apply to Catholic adults?

Personal takeaway (everyone participates)

As today's gathering draws to an end, please share one thought you have as a result of today's reading and discussion that you would like to take with you when you leave today.

Assignment for the next session

Read and reflect on Chapter 2 (¶ 50- 109) where Pope Francis addresses "the crisis of communal commitment."

Closing prayer

Please say the *The Lord's Prayer* together.

Optional post-meeting socialization

Session 3

Convening and welcome

In this session we'll be focusing on Chapter 2, ¶ 50-109

Opening prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction (*Leader reads*)

In Chapter 2 of *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, Pope Francis takes up the topic of a "Crisis of Communal Commitment." Here he outlines in broad terms the "signs of the times" in today's world and indicates how we, as members of Christ's body, should respond to them. Since the chapter is a long one, it's helpful to look at it in outline form:

Chapter 2: Amid the Crisis of Communal Commitment (¶ 50–109)

1. Some Challenges of Today's World (¶ 52–75)
 - No to an Economy of Exclusion (¶ 53–54)
 - No to the New Idolatry of Money (¶ 55–56)
 - No to a Financial System Which Rules Rather Than Serves (¶ 57–58)
 - No to the Inequality Which Spawns Violence (¶ 59–60)
 - Some Cultural Challenges (¶ 61–67)
 - Challenges of Enculturating the Faith (¶ 68-70)
 - Challenges from Urban Cultures (¶ 71-75)

2. Temptations Faced by Pastoral Workers (¶ 76–109)
 - Yes to the Challenge of a Missionary Spirituality (¶ 78-80)
 - No to Selfishness and Spiritual Sloth (¶ 81-83)
 - No to a Sterile Pessimism (¶ 84-86)
 - Yes to the New Relationships Brought by Christ (¶ 87-92)
 - No to Spiritual Worldliness (¶ 93-97)
 - No to Warring Among Ourselves (¶ 98-101)
 - Other Ecclesial Challenges (¶ 102-109)

In addition to breaking down the chapter into two parts, Pope Francis addresses three kinds of considerations:

- Features of contemporary culture which we as Christians should renounce (say “No to”).
- Opportunities in contemporary culture which we should embrace (say “Yes to”).
- Challenges in contemporary culture to which we should respond.

As you go through the chapter by looking at particular paragraphs, please keep in mind how he has categorized each one.

Key Teachings and Discussion Questions

¶ 52. “In our time humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields ... We are in an age of knowledge and information, which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power.”

- Pope Francis lists several advances that have been made globally, but also some problems that are growing. Which of the ones he lists do you think are most important – and what other things might you add to either side of the ledger that he does not mention?
- What “new and often anonymous kinds of power” do you see arising in our world today? Can you name some positive and some negative ones?

¶ 53. “... we have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality.”

- Why does he call the economy today one of exclusion and inequality? Can you give examples?
- How can we say “thou shalt not” to these things so that our voices are heard?
- What does the state of the world’s economy have to do with our own Christian discipleship?

¶ 55. Speaking of “our relationship with money,” he says “we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies ... (and) We have created new idols.”

- How do we accept money’s dominion over us and our societies? Can you offer examples?
- How does our attitude about money create “new idols”? Can you offer examples of these idols?

¶ 56. In one of the more controversial sections of the pope’s letter, he says “the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially” to enlarge the gap between rich and poor, and adds that “this imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged

with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born ...”

- Should the growing global gap between rich and poor be a concern of Catholics and other Christians? Why or why not?
- Do you see any signs of new ideologies that reject the rights of states (meaning “governments”) to serve the common good? Can you give some examples?

¶ 64. “The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal ... (this has) led to a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood.”

- Can you cite some examples of how our faith and Church has been pushed out of the public forum and considered as having only “private and personal” significance?
- Do you think this has a special effect on the young? Why or why not?

¶ 67. “The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favors a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds ... our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds.”

- Can you provide some specific examples of what Pope Francis describes here?
- What can we do personally to foster the communion of which the pope speaks?

NOTE: In ¶ 76-109 Pope Francis addresses the topic of “Temptations Faced by Pastoral Workers.” But he makes it clear that his audience includes “bishops down to those who provide the most humble and hidden services.” If you are helping or have helped with any sort of service to others, this section has relevance for you.

¶ 76. “The pain and shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love.”

- As a Church, the body of Christ and the people of God, we must remember that the good we do can never fully offset the bad we do, so we must be mindful of both realities at the same time. How do you personally come to grips with both the good and bad in our communal life? Does awareness of the bad motivate you to do more good – or to pull back from greater involvement and service?

¶ 78. “...spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization.”

- How can we avoid narrowing down our spiritual life to a few things that give us comfort but do not help connect us to others or to events of the world, or increase our passion to evangelize? Can you give us some concrete examples?

¶ 80. “It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission.”

- Jesus was clearly “a person for others.” What do you think holds us back from really loving, living and leading like Jesus?
- What are some concrete things we can do to help ourselves become better disciples and missionaries?

¶ 84. “The evils of the world – and those of the Church – must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor ... our greater realism must not mean any less trust in the Spirit or less generosity.”

- How do you think the evils of the world and of the Church can eat away at our commitment to serve God and humanity, and to trust the Spirit as we serve?
- What are some things we can do to revive and renew our commitment and our trust?

¶ 88. “Many of us try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends ... just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ ... Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others ... True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.”

- Why do you think that Pope Francis is calling us to step out beyond our comfort zones to show our love for God? Why do you think that’s important to him and to Jesus?
- What’s lacking in a faith that involves “just me and Jesus?”

¶ 93-97. In these paragraphs Pope Francis warns us of “spiritual worldliness,” which he says “consists in seeking not the Lord’s glory but human glory and personal well-being.” In this section he uses many terms drawn from philosophy and psychology that may not be familiar with you. Don’t let that trouble you. In ¶ 95-97 he describes the

problem in more down-to-earth terms as one where people are driven by self-centered motives even when they profess to be focused on serving God.

- Do you think it's commonplace for people to be self-centered?
- If so, why do you think it is so?
- Pope Francis says this "stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit?" How do you think someone can do that?

¶ 99. "Our world is being torn apart ... be a widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being. .. Beware of the temptation of jealousy! We are all in the same boat headed to the same port. Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all."

- Why do you think individualism can lead to jealousy?
- Have the achievements of others ever made you think less of yourself?
- Is it hard for you to take joy in the accomplishments of others? If so, does it matter how personally close they are to you?
- Do you feel that your personal gifts "belong to all?" Why or why not?

¶ 104. "The reservation of the priesthood to males ... is not a question open to discussion ... but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general."

- In your own words, what do you think he is driving at in this paragraph?
- In several places in this letter and in his other statements, Pope Francis warns about the dangers of clericalism. Here he suggests that a problem for the Church is clerical abuse of power. Do you agree with him?
- Without naming names, can you recall some occasions where you have felt abused or have observed others being abused by clerical power?
- What do you think the Church can and should do about it?

¶ 106. In this paragraph the pope speaks of "the urgent need for the young to exercise greater leadership" within the Church.

- Do you agree that there is such a need? Why or why not?
- How do you think that parishes and dioceses can responsibly encourage greater leadership in the Church by young people?

Implications for S³ Leadership

When we speak of becoming an S³ Jesus-like Leader, we begin with the importance of being a Servant (S¹) Leader. That involves the alignment of four things; our:

- Hearts
- Heads
- Hands
- Habits

In this chapter, Pope Francis addresses all four of these facets, as well as the need for us to be good Stewards (S²) of the Gospel and good Shepherds (S³) of God's people, most especially young people.

With respect to being true Servant (S¹) Leaders, he warns us that our culture today in many ways encourages us to be self-centered, but Jesus' teachings and example in the Gospel call us to put the glory of God and the good of His people first. That is to say, we need a *servant's heart*. In not putting ourselves first and devoting our lives to indulging our every whim, we are called to have a *servant's head*.

Pope Francis also calls us to develop *servant's hands* by reaching out beyond ourselves and our small circles of friends to serve the whole Church and, indeed, the whole human community. And he urges that we cultivate a *servant's habits* so that it becomes our second nature to love and serve as Jesus served.

In this chapter he returns again and again to the dangers of living a self-centered life and urges us to strive mightily to avoid the temptations of pride and fear that are all too common in the world and in the Church today.

Personal takeaway (everyone participates)

As today's gathering draws to an end, please share one thought you have as a result of today's reading and discussion that you would like to take with you when you leave today.

Assignment for the next session

Read Chapter 3, "The Proclamation of the Gospel, ¶ 110-175.

Closing prayer

Together say The Lord's Prayer, especially mindful that it begins "Our Father," not "My Father."

Optional post-meeting socialization

Session 4

Convening and welcome

In this session we focus on Chapter 3, “The Proclamation of the Gospel, ¶ 110-175.

Opening prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction (*Leader reads*)

A large section of this chapter, called “The Proclamation of the Gospel,” is addressed to how priests should prepare and preach their homilies. But the first section is titled “The Entire People of God Proclaims the Gospel.” We will focus our discussion on that part, which is explicitly addressed to lay people. However, you may find it interesting – and sometimes surprising – to learn what Pope Francis has to say about how priests should prepare and preach their homilies. No doubt that’s a topic that is sure to engage the interest of priests and lay people alike and get them talking. So we encourage you to read through that section of the chapter too, and if there is an opportunity, discuss this section with your pastor and other priests in small groups.

Key Teachings and Discussion Questions

¶ 111. “The Church ... is more than an organization and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way toward God.”

- Have you ever thought of the Church as “a people”?
- Have you ever thought of the Church as a collection of people in motion – “advancing on its pilgrim way toward God”?
- Does this sense of the Church have any impact on your overall image of the Church?

¶ 112. “The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift.”

- Is this teaching new to you?

- If this teaching is true, why even try to be good or do good?

¶ 113. “The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone ... Jesus did not tell the apostles to form an exclusive and elite group ... The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”

- How does it make you feel to reflect on the fact that the Church’s mission is to everyone?
- How do you think we are doing with respect to building a community where “mercy is freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel”?
- What other things might we do as Church to inspire such feelings in everyone?

¶ 116 and 117. Here Pope Francis says, “Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression,” and he quotes St. John Paul saying: “every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached and lived.” Then he adds: “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous.”

- Have you ever seen Christianity expressed in another culture? If so, how was it different and how did it make you feel?
- How do you react to the notion that not only does the Gospel enrich our human cultures, our human cultures enrich the Gospel?
- What does the incarnation – the Son of God becoming human – have to do with the value of the variety of human cultures?

¶ 120. “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples ... The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized ... anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”

- How do you react to Pope Francis’ declaration that we are all “missionary disciples”? Are you comfortable with that expectation of you? Why or why not?
- Have you experienced “God’s saving love” in your life? Can you briefly explain where and when?
- Does the experience of God’s love in your life make proclaiming that love to others easier? Why or why not?

¶ 121. “Of course, all of us are called to mature in our work as evangelizers ... All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite

our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word, his strength, and gives meaning to our lives.”

- How do you feel about receiving the call “to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord”?
- What are some ways we can do this?
- What are some things that hold us back?
- In *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus*, we say leadership is not a choice because we are always influencing others – even when we are unaware of it. What are some ways we do and do not offer “explicit witness” to the presence of the Lord’s saving love?

Implications for S³ Leadership

In *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus* we devote considerable time exploring what the Church teaches about the role and mission of the laity. In this chapter of *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis does the same thing.

Many of today’s adult Catholics grew up believing that they had only three obligations: pray, pay and obey. While all three of these responses to God’s love are appropriate, *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus* and *The Joy of the Gospel* also proclaim that it is our responsibility to do all we can make God’s love more present in every human heart and, indeed, every human culture around the world. In *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus*, we note that this effort is often called “the sanctification of the world.”

In this chapter, Pope Francis uses the term “evangelization” to describe the effort we should make. He says each of us is called to evangelize by being “an explicit witness” to God’s love in the world.

In *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus*, we are also asked to consider the implications of the fact that we are all part of the Body of Christ. In an organism such as the Church is, two things are necessary: *diversity* is necessary to have life, and *feedback* is necessary to sustain life. In the same vein, Pope Francis opens this chapter by talking about the need for the Church to reach out to and embrace every human culture (*diversity*), and to enrich itself by interacting with all cultures (*feedback*).

Thus, our discussion of this chapter began with Pope Francis’ own reflections on the importance of embracing, respecting, listening to and trying to influence every human culture. That is what we do when we resolve to be effective Jesus-like Leaders.

Personal takeaway (everyone participates)

As today's gathering draws to an end, please share one thought you have as a result of today's reading and discussion that you would like to take with you when you leave today.

Assignment for the next session

Read Chapter 4, "The Social Dimension of Evangelization."

Closing prayer

Together say The Lord's Prayer, especially mindful that it begins "Our Father," not "My Father."

Optional post-meeting socialization

Session 5

Convening and welcome

In this session we focus on Chapter 4, ¶ 176- 258.

Opening prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction (Leader reads)

In this session, we discuss what Pope Francis calls “The Social Dimension of Evangelization.” Here we look beyond ourselves and our faith community to consider how the process of evangelization can and should occur in the world at large. Two things are central in this portion of the letter as the pope asks us to look at the lives we live in the larger world: the poor and peace.

NOTE: In ¶ 177, there is a word with which you may not be familiar: *kerygma*. It means “to proclaim the Gospel,” in contrast to providing instruction about its meaning or its moral implications. But as Pope Francis notes, “the first proclamation (kerygma) has an immediate moral implication centered on charity.”

I think this will become clearer as we move through the chapter.

Key Teachings and Discussion Questions

¶ 178. Pope Francis begins by reaffirming a pillar of our faith: That because God loves each and every man and woman, each of us has “an infinite dignity.” But then he goes beyond the individual implications of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection” and adds: “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men. To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds.”

- Most of us usually think in terms of God saving individual people. How can God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – redeem “the social relations existing between men” and women? What does that mean to you?

¶ 178. Pope Francis says: “Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.”

- When you say “yes” to God’s love for you and decide to love him in return, do you think that automatically inspires you to “desire, seek and protect the good of others”? Why or why not?

¶ 179. Pope Francis warns that the “inseparable bond” between “acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love” for others is something we often “take for granted.” Then he warns: “How dangerous and harmful this is, for it makes us lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice!”

- Do you think many Christians feel amazement, excitement and zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice – or do you think many are inclined to see it as just one more duty or task we have to do because it is required of us?
- Do you think there’s a danger we might focus on living a “Gospel of self” rather than a “Gospel of fraternity and justice”?

¶ 179. The pope says: “... the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being.”

- How important do you think it is to your faith to have a generous heart and support the Church’s works of charity? Do you see it as “an indispensable expression” of your faith as it is of the Church’s “very being”?

¶ 180. Pope Francis says we “our loving response to God” should not “be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need.” Because “the Gospel is about the *kingdom of God*, “the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity.”

- What does it mean to live our Christian vocations as members of society, as citizens of municipalities, states, nations and the world?

¶ 181. The pope says: “Our mandate is to ‘go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’ (Mk 16:15).”

- How can we do that? Should we all get soapboxes? Should we preach on street corners? Should we go up and down the street knocking on doors? Should we

get megaphones and head to the mall? Or are there other ways we can “proclaim the good news to the whole creation?”

- What are some ways we can *be* the good news to creation?

¶ 182. In our society many say that religion is “a private matter,” something that should be restricted to our homes and churches and never considered or discussed in any public forum. Pope Francis is not one of them. He writes: “It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven.” Rather, “God wants his children to be happy in this world too,” so Christians have to be concerned and express themselves about “those areas of this life (quoting St. John Paul II) ‘related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good.’”

- Do you agree with Pope Francis’ and St. John Paul’s view that religion is not a private matter and that we have to speak up as Christians about matters of justice and the common good?
- There is the old adage, “God helps those who help themselves.” Many think this is a quotation from scripture, but it is not. It originated in Aesop’s Fables. Nonetheless, some people summarize their sense of Christian ethics this way. What do you think Pope Francis and St. John Paul would say in reply?

¶ 183. “An authentic faith -- which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”

- Why do you think Pope Francis says “an authentic faith ... is never comfortable or completely personal”?
- Does your faith inspire in you “a deep desire to change the world”? If so, how?

NOTE: In ¶s 186-216, Pope Francis focuses on “The Inclusion of the Poor in Society.”

¶ 187. “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.”

- How can we individually be God’s instruments “for liberation and promotion of the poor”? Do you see that as an integral part of your faith and life?
- How can we collectively, as members of our parish, be God’s instruments “for liberation and promotion of the poor”? Do you see that as an integral part of our faith community’s expression of faith and life?

¶ 188. Pope Francis says our call to be followers of Christ “means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.”

- How can we, individually or collectively, work to eliminate “the structural causes of poverty”?
- How important is it that we do that?

¶ 188. Pope Francis calls for “a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”

- Do you think that’s the mindset of most Christians in America? Why or why not?

¶ 190. “Sadly, even human rights can be used as a justification for an inordinate defense of individual rights or the rights of richer peoples ... we must never forget that the planet belongs to all mankind and is meant for all mankind ... To speak properly of our own rights, we need to broaden our perspective and to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country.”

- How might an argument for human rights be used to justify “an ordinate defense of individual rights or the rights of richer peoples”? Can you think of an example where this has happened?
- How important to your faith is it “to hear the plea of other peoples and other regions than those of our own country”? Can you think of an example where we might be challenged in this way?

¶ 194. Pope Francis cites “biblical exhortations which summon us so forcefully to brotherly love, to humble and generous service, to justice and mercy toward the poor. Jesus taught us this way of looking at others by his words and his actions. So why cloud something so clear? We should not be concerned simply about falling into doctrinal error, but about remaining faithful to this light-filled path of life and wisdom.”

- How can we cloud Jesus’ teaching about love, service, justice and mercy? What are some ways we can rationalize indifference to his call for loving action?
- Do you think that some Catholics are more concerned about avoiding “doctrinal error” than about “remaining faithful to (Jesus’) light-filled path of life and wisdom? What are the dangers of such a perspective?

¶ 196. “Sometimes we prove hard of heart and mind; we are forgetful, distracted and carried away by the limitless possibilities for consumption and distraction offered by contemporary society.”

- How do you think “the limitless possibilities for consumption and distraction” in our lives today affect our hearts and minds? How can they dilute our religious convictions and commitment?

¶ 198. “I want a Church that is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us ... in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.

- Is our Church today “poor and for the poor”? Why or why not?
- If not, what changes would be needed to fit that description?
- What do the poor have to teach us?
- How can the poor evangelize the rest of the Catholic community?

¶ 199. Pope Francis sounds much like Blessed Mother Teresa when he writes: “True love ... permits us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but rather because he or she is beautiful above all and beyond mere appearance.”

- Is it difficult for you to see the beauty in others – especially the homeless and destitute poor?
- Some Christians are better at doing this than others. How do you feel about those who are able to selflessly love and serve the poorest of the poor?
- What might we do to become more aware of the beauty and value of those whose appearances are marred by the various effects of poverty?

¶ 200. Pope Francis says, “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care ... Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.”

- What does Pope Francis mean by “spiritual care”?
- How can we, individually or collectively, improve the spiritual care of the poor?
- What would our parish look like if we were providing “privileged and preferential religious care” for the poor?

¶ 201. Pope Francis challenges us directly when he writes: “No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas ... none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.”

- How has Pope Francis walked the talk and modeled in his own life what he teaches here?
- Which challenges you more to help the poor – his words or his deeds?

- How might we adjust our lifestyles to have more time and money to serve the poor?

¶ 202. Pope Francis throws down a gauntlet when he writes: “The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed ... As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, for any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills.

- Do you agree that we have to reject “the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation.” Why are these things the roots of the problems that beset the poor?
- What do you think Pope Francis is referring to when he speaks of “the structural causes of inequality”?
- In the U.S. one of our nation’s core values is equality of opportunity, we don’t generally expect equality of outcome because some people are smarter, harder working, stronger or luckier – in the right place at the right time. Should we be striving for equality of outcomes or focusing on doing a better job of providing equality of opportunity?

¶ 203. Pope Francis teaches: “The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.”

- Do you agree that these concerns “ought to shape all economic policies”? Why or why not?
- What other concerns do you think should shape economic policy? Are do you think they are more or less important than the concerns mentioned by the pope?

¶ 204. “We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market ... the economy can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded.”

- If we can’t trust “the unseen forces and invisible hand of the market” to develop a just economy, who or what can we trust to do this?
- For many years we have seen employers lay off employees as a way to end losses and keep the employer from going out of business, but in more recent decades we have seen profitable companies lay off workers not to avoid financial ruin, but to increase their profits. How do you feel about this?

- Are you comfortable investing in profitable companies that pare their work forces to increase their profits?

¶ 205. In this paragraph, Pope Francis turns from economics to politics and expresses a view that goes against the grain of a lot of popular opinion. He writes: “Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good ... I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor!”

- Do you think of politics as “a lofty vocation”? Would you think more of politics and of politicians if you thought more politicians really did “seek the common good”?
- If they are not seeking “the common good,” what are they seeking?
- Do you raise your voice with the pope when he begs the Lord “to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people (and) the lives of the poor”?

¶ 205. “I am firmly convinced that openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society.”

- Do you share the pope’s optimism?
- How do you think an “openness to the transcendent” could bring about a new mindset – and what do you think that mindset might look like?

¶ 208. “I am interested only in helping those who are in thrall to an individualistic, indifferent and self-centered mentality to be freed from those unworthy chains and to attain a way of living and thinking which is more humane, noble and fruitful, and which will bring dignity to their presence on this earth.”

- Why do you think the pope is concerned about helping people with such a mentality? Is that the proper concern of a religious leader such as the pope?
- Why do you think he refers to “individualistic, indifferent and self-centered ways of thinking as “unworthy chains”? Who do they imprison and how do they do it?

¶ 210. The pope turns to another controversial issue, especially in the U.S. and Europe, and writes: “Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all.”

- How do you react to the pope's call for "for all countries to (have) a generous openness" to migrants?
- Does your faith influence how you feel about the issue of your country being open to accepting immigrants – especially refugees (immigrants whose lives are in danger in their native lands)?

¶ 213. "Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us ... this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right."

- How does your faith influence how you feel about the issue of abortion?
- What are some steps we can take, individually and collectively, to reduce or eliminate abortions?

¶ 216. "... all of us as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples."

- In 2015 Pope Francis wrote an encyclical, *Laudato si'* (*Praise be to you -- On Care For Our Common Home*), devoted to our God-given stewardship of the Earth. Do you think there is a connection between our Catholic faith and our concern for the environment? Why or why not?
- What can we do, individually and collectively, to improve how we care for the welfare of this planet that has been entrusted to us by God?

NOTE: Beginning with ¶ 217 and continuing through ¶ 237, Pope Francis takes up the theme "The Common Good and Peace in Society." Here he introduces four principles which he says are essential for building peace, justice and fraternity. In some places his presentation may strike you as complex, even philosophical. If something is difficult to understand, move on and see if the material becomes clearer as you proceed. Over and above its complexity, the pope urges us to take a long-term rather than a short-term view of events both in our lives and in the world, trusting in God that all things eventually move toward the good, no matter how impossible that may seem in the moment.

¶ 218. "The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges."

- Do you agree with the pope's teaching?

- What kind of choices might we have to make between “the dignity of the human person and the common good,” on the one hand, and our “privileges,” on the other hand?

¶ 221. “Progress in building a people in peace and fraternity depends on four principles related to constant tensions present in every social reality.” The principles are:

- Time is greater than space (¶ 222-225)
- Unity prevails over conflict (¶ 226-230)
- Realities are more important than ideas (¶ 231-233)
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts (¶ 234-237)

Referring to the relevant paragraphs, briefly discuss each of these principles using the following questions:

- What does this principle mean?
- How does this principle relate to my faith and the life of our faith community?
- What, if anything, does this principle require from me and my faith community?

NOTE: Beginning with ¶ 238, Pope Francis turns his focus to “Social Dialogue as a Contribution to Peace.”

¶ 238. “For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not a part of the Catholic Church.”

- The principle of “separation of church and state” is an important provision in American political thought. Why do you think Pope Francis says the Church has to be in dialogue with states – and can that be done while maintaining the “separation of church and state”? (*Refer to ¶ 238-241.*)
- Why do you think it’s important for the Church to dialogue with cultures and the sciences? What topics do you think would be included in this dialogue? (*Refer to ¶ 242-243.*)
- Why do you think the pope urges the Church to be in “dialogue with other believers who are not a part of the Catholic Church”? What should we talk about with other believers? What do you think it could accomplish? (*Refer to ¶ 244-258.*)

Implications for S³ Leadership

This section of the pope’s letter is grounded in an awareness of God’s infinite and unconditional love for all men and women. As he writes near the start of Chapter 4: “To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removed any doubt about the boundless love

which ennobles each human being.” When we aspire to Lead Like Jesus, we are really aspiring to also live and love as Jesus did.

Jesus, as we know, put his love for – his father -- and his commitment to serve him -- above all other considerations – even his own life. It is from his God-centered heart that he led his disciples and taught them how to lead. Jesus’ teaching and example challenges us to put self-centeredness aside and to faithfully follow the two great commandments: to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Thus, we strive to be always mindful of and committed to the common good.

Yet, as Pope Francis warns in several places in this chapter, a host of other considerations constantly compete for our loyalty: comfort, pleasant distractions, a hunger for worldly riches and praise. None of these things are bad in themselves, but when they become the prime values in our lives, we cannot hope to be effective Jesus-like Leaders. That’s why it’s good to develop an array of sound habits that help keep us on track as we seek to grow as Jesus-like Leaders.

Assignment for next gathering

Read Chapter 5, “Spirit-Filled Evangelizers,” which includes ¶¶259-288

Closing prayer

Say together *The Lord’s Prayer*.

Optional post-meeting socialization

Session 6

Note: Please be sure to bring your copy of *The Joy of the Gospel* to this session so that we can all read together our closing prayer, which is found at the end of Pope Francis' letter.

Convening and welcome

In this session we focus on Chapter 5, ¶259-288.

Opening prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

1.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction (*Leader reads*)

In this concluding chapter, Pope Francis focuses on our interior relationship with the Holy Spirit and with Jesus' mother, Mary, as we seek to live out Jesus' commission to all of us: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

Key Teachings and Discussion Questions

¶ 259. "Spirit-filled evangelizers mean evangelizers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit ... without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence."

- How can we be "fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit"?
- Describe some of your favorite prayer practices. Do you have a way of praying that you find especially helpful to you?
- Have you ever had a special prayer experience? If so, describe it.
- What does "a life transfigured by God's presence" look like? Have you ever known anyone who seemed to have a life like that?

¶ 261. "How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!"

- Do Pope Francis' words in this letter help "stir up enthusiasm" in you for "a new chapter of evangelization" in your own life? Why or why not?
- What can we do, individually and collectively, to help usher in this "new chapter of evangelization" that the pope longs for?

¶ 262. Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work ... What is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity."

- Have you been able "to cultivate an interior space" where you sense that the Spirit abides and which gives meaning to your commitment and activity?
- What things might we do, individually and collectively, to cultivate and expand such space in our lives?
- What might be some signs that people have cultivated such a space in their spiritual lives?

¶ 264. Introducing a subsection he has titled "Personal Encounter with the Saving Love of Jesus," Pope Francis writes: "We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence."

- How important do you think it is to implore Jesus' grace each day?
- Do you ever have the sense that your own heart is "cold" or that your existence is "lukewarm and superficial"? If so, what are some ways we can increase our passion to serve God and increase the meaning in our lives?

¶ 266. "Unless we see (Jesus) present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigor and passion."

- Do you ever feel your enthusiasm for spreading the Gospel wane and your sense of purpose as a disciple wither?
- What are some ways we might increase our passion to serve God by sharing the Gospel with others?

¶ 267. "In union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what he loves. In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father ... we need to leave behind every other motivation ... Beyond all our own preferences and interests, our knowledge and motivations, we evangelize for the greater glory of the Father who loves us."

- Here Pope Francis sets the bar regarding our motivations very, very high. He says we must be single-mindedly moved by our desire to reciprocate the Father's

love and give all glory to him. What other kinds of motives do you think commonly come to bear even in our desires to serve God?

- How can we, individually and collectively, become more single-mindedly focused on serving and thereby glorifying God?

¶ 268. “The word of God also invites us to recognize that we are a people ... we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy ... without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity.

- Echoing a persistent theme in the New Testament, Pope Francis teaches that we are more than just individuals; we are also part of a people, integral parts of the body of Christ. Do you feel “a spiritual taste for being close” to others, and do experiences of this closeness bring you joy?
- What do you think Pope Francis is getting at when he says that if we do not experience a “sense of belonging” to God’s people “we cannot understand our deepest identity”?

¶ 272. “We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in (our) own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide.”

- Why do you think we are tempted to “flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in (our) own comforts?” What are the apparent rewards from doing so?
- Why does Pope Francis think that pulling back from engagement with other people and seeking primarily our own comforts is a form of “slow suicide”? What part of ourselves does the pursuit of comfort threaten to kill?

¶ 273. “We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessings, enlivening, rising up, healing and freeing ... once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people.”

- Today in popular culture we hear many voices talk about the benefits of separating our work from the rest of our lives. We are told it’s healthy to leave our work at work. Obviously, Pope Francis has another perspective. Why do you think our lives become grey and we become more concerned about receiving recognition or asserting our own needs when we draw a curtain between our work and our personal lives?

- Is there a common and consistent element or principle that should guide both our behavior at work and our behavior in our personal lives? What does the pope think that should be for Catholics?

¶ 274. “If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving ... because they are God’s handiwork, his creation ... Appearances notwithstanding, *every person is immensely holy and deserves our love* ... It is a wonderful thing to be God’s faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!”

- Do you really think that “every person” is truly “worthy of our giving” – or do you find some people more worthy than others? If so, what criteria do you use to separate the worthy from the unworthy?
- Do you ever feel that “it is a wonderful thing to be God’s faithful people”? If so, when does it happen?
- In your experience, does your faith community ever break down walls? If so, can you describe the circumstances? When it happens, do you feel a sense of fulfillment either individually or collectively?

¶ 275. Pope Francis seems to strike an uncharacteristically harsh note when he says that some people “do not commit themselves to mission because they think that nothing will change and that it is useless to make the effort. They think: ‘Why should I deny myself my comforts and pleasures if I won’t see any significant result?’ ... It is only a malicious excuse for remaining caught up in comfort, laziness, vague dissatisfaction and empty selfishness. It is a self-destructive attitude.”

- Why do you think Pope Francis is so critical of people of put their comforts and pleasures ahead of the mission Jesus has given them?
- Do you think the attitude of hopelessness he describes – there is no point trying to be an evangelizer because it won’t make any difference – is widespread today?
- Do you think an abiding interest in maintaining or enhancing our own personal comfort is widespread today?
- Why is it “self-destructive” to make our comfort and pleasure the primary purpose of our lives? What could be wrong with that?

¶ 276. “...in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit ... However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads ... human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed.”

- Do you think there's a connection between Pope Francis' faith and the optimism he expresses here?
- Do you share his optimism about how things will turn out in the long-run? Why or why not?
- What can we do, individually and collectively, to foster the sort of optimism the pope expresses?

¶ 278. "Faith also means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity."

- Pope Francis says here that Christian faith involves more than just believing in the *existence* of God. It involves believing that he has a relationship with us – one of love – that he is actively involved in our lives and is always looking after us. Does that describe your faith?
- One of the biggest impediments to faith is not understanding why, if a good and all-powerful God is ultimately in control of events, why so many bad things happen so often to good people. What are your thoughts about this?

¶ 279. "Because we do not always see these seeds (of God's love) growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks ... This certainty is often called 'a sense of mystery.' It involves knowing with certitude that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit. This fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We can know quite well that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, or where, or when."

- Pope Francis is dealing with a complex reality here: certainty in the midst of uncertainty. He says the believer needs an interior certainty of faith in the midst of life's uncertain circumstances. He describes how the believer is certain of God's activity even when he or she cannot be certain of how, or where, or when God is acting. Does this describe your faith to any extent? Why or why not?
- Do you have confidence that your life will be fruitful even if you can't see how that is the case at this moment or how it will be possible in the future?

¶ 280. "... there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills."

- How does letting ourselves be governed by the Holy Spirit make us more free?
- Is it a bad thing to "attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail"? What kind of problems can it cause?
- How can a relationship with the Holy Spirit lead us to renounce our attempts to plan and control everything?

NOTE: In ¶s 281-283, Pope Francis speaks of the purpose and power of intercessory prayer – not just for ourselves but for others.

¶ 282. Pope Francis says of the habit of turning to God to ask him to intercede for oneself and others: "This attitude becomes a prayer of gratitude to God for others ... It is constant thankfulness ... When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others."

- Do you ever feel more freed from anything when you rise from prayer? If so, please describe the experience.
- Is your faith characterized by a sense of gratitude to God for others in your life? Why do you think a prayer that starts with asking God for things ends up an experience of gratitude?

NOTE: Beginning with ¶284 through the end of his letter with ¶ 288, Pope Francis focuses on "Mary, Mother of Evangelization." He describes her as "Jesus' Gift to His People" and "Star of the New Evangelization," and ends, as we will, with a prayer to her.

¶ 285 and 286. "Jesus left his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that 'all was now finished' ... he did not want us to journey without a mother ... She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives."

- What role does Mary play in your own faith life?
- What does Mary's role as our mother, given to us by Jesus on the cross, say about his love for us?
- Have you ever thought of Mary as "the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives"? What do you think Pope Francis is getting at when he describes Mary this way?

¶ 288. “There is a Marian ‘style’ to the Church’s work of evangelization. Whenever we look at Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness.”

- Do you believe in “the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness”?
- How might we, individually and collectively, deepen our faith in the power of love and tenderness to transform individual lives and the whole human condition?

Implications for S³ Leadership

In the *Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus* we speak of leadership as an “influence process,” and the power to influence lives always arises – with trust -- in relationships. The persons who most profoundly shape our lives are the persons we *invite* in to have an influence on us because we *trust* that they truly care about us. For example, if we had a healthy relationship with our parents, it is likely that we invite them into our lives to help guide us even long after they have died. In the same way, if we want our lives to be influenced by God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we have to invite each person of God into our lives in prayer. As their influence grows, we find it easier and more “natural” to give witness to our trusting relationship with them by serving both God and others, who are God’s loving creatures – and, indeed, by serving God’s whole creation. Thus, as Jesus-like Leaders we grow as Servants, Stewards and Shepherds.

Personal takeaway (everyone participates)

As today’s gathering draws to an end, please share one thought you have as a result of today’s reading and discussion that you would like to take with you when you leave today.

Closing prayer

Read together the prayer – in italics -- that comes at the end of ¶ 288.

Optional post-meeting socialization

Where do we go from here?

If we are to continue to have our lives enriched by the *Joy of the Gospel*, we have to nurture our relationships with all three persons in the Trinity, as well as with our faith communities.

How might you resolve to nurture these relationships – and to love and serve others -- in the days ahead?

An invitation

Good company on your journey

We heartily yet humbly invite you to visit our website (www.yeshualeader.com) and browse its resources -- both printed and video -- offered to accompany you on your pilgrim's journey to being a disciple.

While there, we especially invite you to subscribe to our free e-newsletter, *The Catholic Leader*. It's a great source of information and inspiration about how to *Live, Love and Lead Like Jesus* – and a wonderful reminder to continue that journey all the days of your life.