

# EVANGELIZATION

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AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## STUDY GUIDE

SESSION 1

**SAMPLE**



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

DR. MARY HEALY

*Nihil Obstat:* Dr. André Villeneuve, *Censor Librorum*

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# LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

## What Is LECTIO?

To read is to discover meaning from written symbols or text. Letters form into words, words into sentences, and sentences into whole paragraphs and pages that communicate our thoughts, teach new ideas, and narrate stories that we find amusing, sorrowful, imaginative, or deeply profound.

The Latin term *lectio* means “reading.” The tradition of reading Sacred Scripture for prayer and reflection was practiced by many of the early Church Fathers—St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Cyprian, and St. John Chrysostom, just to name a few. Benedictine monks later developed this practice into the tradition known as *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.”

*LECTIO* uses the practice of prayerful reading and study to help us dive more deeply into the truths of the faith and discover the profound meaning and purpose of Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and Church History. We combine engaging sessions led by Catholic teachers with practical guidance for living the faith and developing the disciplines of reading, reflecting, and responding.

By prayerfully reading and understanding the texts of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, we can come to discover the story of salvation into which our Baptism has united us, the history of God’s people through the centuries, and the depth of God’s love for each of us.



# WELCOME TO LECTIO

**Welcome to the LECTIO Study Series.** In these sessions of LECTIO, you will discover the profound importance, meaning, purpose, and beauty of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as seen through the eyes of the Church.

LECTIO studies are designed for Adult Faith Formation to help unveil both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Latin word *lectio* means “reading,” and often refers to a careful and prayerful reading of Scripture. These studies cover a wide variety of topics, including individual books or letters of the Bible, the lives and writings of the saints, Church teaching, and topics to help serve the formation of Catholics living out the call of the New Evangelization.

## A LECTIO SESSION

This Study Guide takes you step by step through each session, both the small group gathering and video teaching, as well as five days of personal follow-up study. The resources are carefully crafted to lead you through an opening of your heart and mind to God’s Word and the traditions of the Catholic Church.

**Here is what you will find in each LECTIO session:**

### CONNECT

- 1. Opening Prayer:** For this study on Evangelization, we have chosen the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.
- 2. Introduction:** We begin with a brief overview of the topic, including the key points for the session. This helps contextualize the topic, show its relevance for daily life, and inspire you to delve into a particular aspect of the faith.
- 3. CONNECT Questions:** After reviewing the verse and daily reflections from the previous session, you’ll share your thoughts on questions related to the new session.

### VIDEO

- 4. Video Teaching:** The video segments present teaching that delves into and makes relevant the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church. The video teachings for the study on Evangelization and the Acts of the Apostles are presented by Dr. Mary Healy, Associate Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. An outline of each teaching is included in the Study Guide.

### DISCUSS

- 5. DISCUSS Questions:** Each video segment is followed by questions that will help you personalize and take ownership of the topics of the session.
- 6. Memory Verse:** The Psalms encourage us to treasure God’s Word in our heart through memorization, saying, “I have laid up thy word in my heart...” (Psalm 119:11). You are encouraged to memorize and reflect on a Scripture verse for every session to help nurture your faith.
- 7. Closing Prayer:** The Closing Prayer has been chosen to reflect back to God an appropriate response to his loving action in the session.
- 8. For Further Reading:** For supplemental study, you are encouraged to refer to the additional reading resources.

**9. Quotes, Tips, and Definitions:** We have included throughout the study interesting quotes and excerpts from saints, Catholic documents, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and Catholic authors to enhance your understanding of each topic.

## **COMMIT**

The Study Guide includes five daily COMMIT reflections that will help you more deeply explore the main topics of each session and more firmly commit to following Christ in your daily life. These reflections include more information on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as topics such as geography, history, and art. Some of these reflections will also include times of prayer, including the practice of Scripture meditation known as *lectio divina*.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF *LECTIO DIVINA***

*Lectio divina* is an ancient practice of enhancing one's prayer life through the power of God's Word. The term itself means "divine reading" of the Sacred Scriptures. It is our hope that by using these simple steps each day as you study Sacred Scripture in LECTIO, you will develop an effective way to study and pray with God's Word and hear God's voice in your daily life.

- ***Sacred Reading of the Scriptures (lectio):*** The reading and rereading of the Scripture passage, paying close attention to words, details, themes, and patterns that speak to you.
- ***Meditation (meditatio):*** Meditating or reflecting on what you've read to gain understanding. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you spend time pondering what you have read and striving to understand it in meditation.
- ***Prayer (oratio):*** A time to bring your meditative thoughts to God in prayer. Talking with God about how the connections and implications of your meditation on the Scripture affect your life and the lives of those around you.
- ***Contemplation (contemplatio):*** A time of quiet and rest, we listen and await God's voice. Contemplation allows one to enter decisively and more deeply into the mystery of God—this is no small endeavor, so be patient as you engage this step and strive to be receptive to God's voice speaking into your life.
- ***Resolution (resolutio):*** A call for resolution and action, inviting you to respond to the things you have read in Scripture and have prayed about, and to put them into practice.

To learn more about *lectio divina*, refer to Dr. Tim Gray's book *Praying Scripture for a Change*, available at [www.AscensionPress.com](http://www.AscensionPress.com).

# SESSION 1

## WHY STUDY ACTS?



### OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit,  
fill the hearts of your faithful  
and enkindle 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.

Let us pray.  
O, God, who did instruct  
the hearts of the faithful  
by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
grant that by the same Holy Spirit  
we may be truly wise  
and ever rejoice in his consolation.  
Through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

### INTRODUCTION

The Church has been spreading the gospel for nearly 2,000 years, but people in our modern world seem to have closed their ears and hearts to the good news of Jesus Christ. The “signs of the times” show us a world that is in desperate need of the gospel, and yet a “New Evangelization” appears at times to face insurmountable difficulties. How do we go about effectively evangelizing the modern culture in which we find ourselves? Can stepping back and looking at how the first Christians turned the ancient world upside down give us a key for transforming our modern world? Let’s take a look.

*Christ appearing to his disciples at the mount of Galilee / Scala / Art Resource, NY*







# CONNECT

What do you think of when you hear the word “evangelize”?

Do you think that spreading the faith is a priority for the Catholic Church? What about for your parish, specifically?

# DISCUSS



## **PART 1: SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

*Watch the video teaching. The following is a brief outline of the topics covered.*

### **I. Reading the Signs of the Times**

A. *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World) (Vatican II) calls us to do just this

B. A “tsunami of secular influence”

1. Many baptized Christians are no longer living the Christian life
2. Many are living a “practical atheism,” living as if God did not exist
3. Many hold ideas of God that are alien to Christian faith
4. This secularism began with Enlightenment, when an outward framework of Christian society remained
5. But today, no longer a basic consensus in agreement with the gospel
6. Today, a new militant atheism and attempts to banish God

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## II. We Live in a Time of Biblical Illiteracy

- A. Biblical worldview helps us make sense of history
- B. Biblical worldview helps us make sense of our own lives

## III. The World Is a Spiritual War Zone

- A. Pope Francis: "The Church is a field hospital"
- B. If a field hospital, then bullets whizzing by
- C. Time has passed for business as usual
- D. Each of us is born for such a time as this



## DISCUSS

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an "aha" moment for you?

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2. In what ways have you experienced or witnessed the "tsunami of secularism" mentioned by Cardinal Wuerl? How might this make evangelization difficult?

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3. What is the difference between living according to a "practical atheism" and living according to a biblical worldview? What can we do to foster a biblical worldview in ourselves and in others?

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**PART 2: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE CHURCH**

*Watch the video teaching. The following is a brief outline of the topics covered.*

## I. Evangelization Is the Mission of the Church

- A. Pope Bl. Paul VI: "[The Church] exists in order to evangelize"
- B. Pope St. John Paul II: Time to commit to a New Evangelization
  1. No longer just to those in remote locations
  2. Re-evangelization of Western culture

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C. Pope Francis: Each Christian is to be a missionary disciple

## II. How Have We Been Responding So Far?

- A. Only 30% of baptized American Catholics practicing their faith
- B. Fastest growing category is “nones”—those who identify as having no religion
- C. Of those who are newly baptized into the Church, within a year, half or more stop attending Mass regularly
- D. Only 6% of Catholics feel that spreading the faith is a high priority
- E. Catholics scored lower than even atheists in knowledge of the Bible and Christianity

## III. Something More Needs to Happen

- A. Need to look at the First Evangelization
- B. Acts of the Apostles as a blueprint

# DISCUSS

4. We are tasked with evangelizing a society that was once largely Christian, but has abandoned the gospel. How is the need for evangelization today both similar to and different from the situation of the first Christians? What particular challenges do you think exist in evangelizing a post-Christian culture?

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5. Pope Francis has called for each Christian to be a “missionary disciple.” What does this mean? What can you do to live out this call?

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## PART 3: ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

*Watch the video teaching. The following is a brief outline of the topics covered.*

## I. St. Luke

- A. Author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles
- B. Only Gentile author of the New Testament
- C. Acts 16:10: “We” appears; first-person narrative showing St. Luke was an eye-witness

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- D. Excellent historian, but not a modern historian
- E. Shapes what he writes theologically

## II. The Opening of the Acts of the Apostles

- A. Gospel only tells what Jesus “began to do and teach”
- B. Jesus continues to act and teach through his Church
- C. Repeats Great Commission and the promise of the Spirit from end of gospel
- D. Evangelization is first God’s work

## III. Mary, Model for the Church

- A. Annunciation is a proto-Pentecost
- B. Visitation is the first Christian evangelization
  - 1. Mary can’t keep Jesus to herself
  - 2. The Spirit is contagious—John leaps and Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit
  - 3. Overflowing praise

## IV. We Need a New Pentecost



## DISCUSS

6. What does the opening of the Acts of the Apostles teach us about evangelization? How can we apply this to our evangelization efforts today?

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7. What are the similarities between the coming of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles (Pentecost) and the coming of the Spirit in the gospel (the Annunciation)? How does Mary set a model of evangelization for us?

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## MEMORY VERSE

*“These men who have turned the world upside down.”*

—Acts 17:6



## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
the first Christians  
turned the world upside down  
for love of you.  
By that same Spirit  
may we have the courage  
to live lives of missionary discipleship  
in order to share the gospel  
and transform our world  
for the glory of your name.  
Amen.

St. Luke, pray for us.

## FOR FURTHER READING

Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer)

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists (December 2000)

Pope Bl. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World)

*“Those who with God’s help have welcomed Christ’s call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world.”*

—CCC 3



# COMMIT—DAY 1

## ST. LUKE



Before studying any literary work, it is helpful to know something about the author. An author's background, credentials, and purpose impact our understanding of what he or she has written. The same is true in studying Scripture. Knowing the author of a particular book of the Bible gives us insight into understanding the work and the way in which it is written.

The Acts of the Apostles is attributed to St. Luke, along with the gospel that bears his name. The book of Acts is clearly written as a sequel to Luke's gospel, as the author begins both works by addressing a specific recipient, Theophilus (see Luke 1:1-3 and Acts 1:1), and Acts is specifically designated to follow the "first book" (Acts 1:1). Luke's gospel ends with Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension; and Acts opens with these same two events. In fact, Jesus' words at the Ascension recorded in Acts 1:8, "But you shall

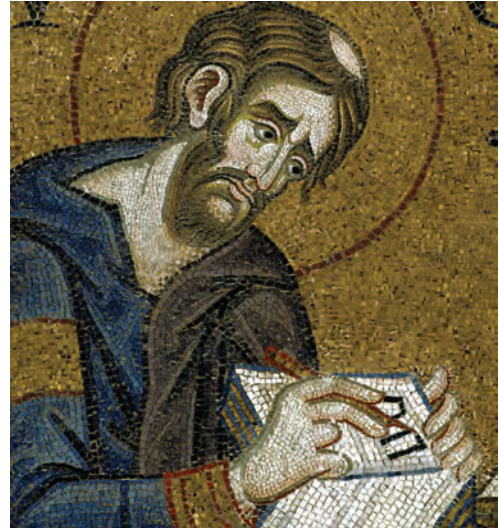


*St Luke the Evangelist writing his Gospel watched by his symbol, an ox / HIP / Art Resource, NY*

receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth," provide the structure for the rest of the book. Acts 1–7 describes Jesus' Ascension, the Apostles' reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and their immediate preaching in Jerusalem; chapters 8–12 describe the gospel spreading to Judea and Samaria; and in chapters 13–28 Christianity begins its spread to the rest of the Roman world, whose empire stretched to the reaches of the known world.

The story of Acts concludes with St. Paul being placed under house arrest in Rome. Interestingly, St. Luke doesn't include major events of the following years in the Acts of the Apostles—events such as the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD; Nero's persecution of the Christians, including the martyrdoms of Sts. Peter and Paul, following thereafter; and the conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Perhaps Luke had already written Acts by that time; or perhaps Paul's arrival at Rome, the capital city of the Roman empire, where Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly" (Acts 28:31), provided the matching bookend to Jesus' opening words in Acts 1:8, showing that the gospel had indeed spread to the ends of the earth. Regardless of Luke's reason for concluding as he does, his open ending of Acts moves us right into the rest of the history of the Church that follows the Apostolic Age.

St. Luke was a Gentile, and the only non-Jewish author of a New Testament book. Luke mixes the best of Hebrew and Greek styles of history in his writing. Like the Hebrew authors of the Old Testament, Luke records the theological sense of history as he shows how God is the author of all history and the power behind the events narrated in Acts. Thus, for example, Luke records the angel of God setting free the Apostles (see Acts 5), and later St. Peter (see Acts 12), from jail. Like his contemporary Greek writers, Luke also focuses on the moral lessons contained in the history of the early years of the Church. The very title of his second work, “Acts” takes its name from an ancient Greek literary genre focused on studying the deeds and acts—*praxis* in Greek—of great men so that these deeds were not forgotten and that others might imitate them and, in doing so, build up human civilization. In writing his account as an “Acts” or *praxis*, Luke is inviting his Christian audience to imitate the virtuous lives of the Apostles, who in turn are imitating Christ himself, not simply to build up human civilization, but to build up the Kingdom of God.



Saint Luke the Evangelist, about to write the Gospel / Alfredo Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY

By occupation St. Luke was a physician (see Colossians 4:14). After his conversion, Luke accompanied St. Paul on some of his journeys. In Acts 16:10, Luke switches his narrative from the third person to the first person. His use of “we” and “us,” here and in other passages, indicates that Luke was an eyewitness to many of the events he records in the Acts of the Apostles.

Look up Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; and 27:1–28:16. What are some of the events St. Luke witnessed or participated in? Why is Luke’s status as an eyewitness important to our understanding of Acts?

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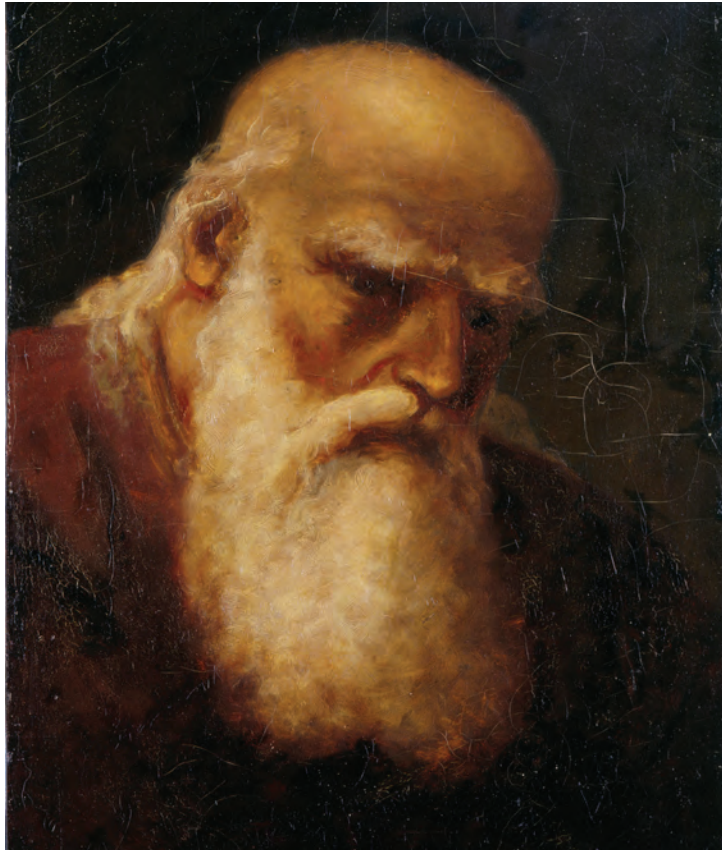


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Piecing together Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St. Paul, we get a fuller picture of St. Luke’s ministry. Luke remained in Philippi when Paul departed (Acts 16:40), most likely to continue preaching the gospel in that city. According to Philippians 4:15–16, the church at Philippi sent Paul monetary aid while he was in Thessalonica, and Luke probably arranged this support. Paul met Luke again when he returned to Philippi. Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians during this visit to Philippi, and according to St. Jerome, the “brother” mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:18 is Luke, and Luke was one of the messengers who took Paul’s letter back to Corinth. Luke returned to Jerusalem with Paul and remained with him through Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Caesarea and his journey to Rome. Luke was



present with Paul in Rome for at least part of his first imprisonment there, as he is mentioned in two of the three letters Paul wrote during that time (Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:24, but not in the letter to the Ephesians). Luke was also at Paul's side for his last imprisonment, as Paul states in 2 Timothy 4:7-11. Not much is known about Luke's life after the martyrdom of Paul. One ancient historian (Epiphanius) writes that he preached in Dalmatia, Gallia (or Galatia), Italy, and Macedonia. An ancient tradition says Luke died in Boeotia in Greece at 84 years old, unmarried and "full of the Holy Spirit."



*St. Luke / Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC / Art Resource, NY*

St. Luke is the patron saint of doctors, being a physician himself. An ancient tradition holds that he painted several pictures (icons) of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus, including the *Salus Populi Romani* preserved in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome. Because of this Luke is considered the father of Christian iconography and is the patron saint of painters. Drawing from the traditional symbols of the four gospel writers (described in Revelation 4:6-7—man, lion, ox, eagle), Luke is often represented by the ox, since he opens his gospel with the priest Zechariah in the Temple, and cattle were among the animals used for Temple sacrifice. St. Luke's feast day is celebrated on October 18.



# COMMIT—DAY 2

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

*“The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.”*

—*Gaudium et Spes*, 4

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the Church’s duty to read the signs of the times, not in order to conform to those times, as so many would have the Church do, but to better address the gospel message “in language intelligible to each generation.” In order to share the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that is relevant and inviting, we must know our audience—what are they searching for? What are their needs and fears? In order to show each new generation how the gospel answers such questions, we must read the signs of the times.

The signs of the our current times reveal a world that hasn’t simply turned away from Christianity, but one that has also turned toward secularism, relativism, and hedonism. In shutting God out of the picture, a vacuum opens up that must be filled with something. As the lyrics of one Bob Dylan song reminds:

*“But you’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed.  
You’re gonna have to serve somebody.  
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord,  
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”*

In abandoning a biblical worldview, modern society has opened itself up to a wide variety of alternatives. What are some of the secular worldviews you have encountered in your interactions with others? How have such interactions impacted your life?

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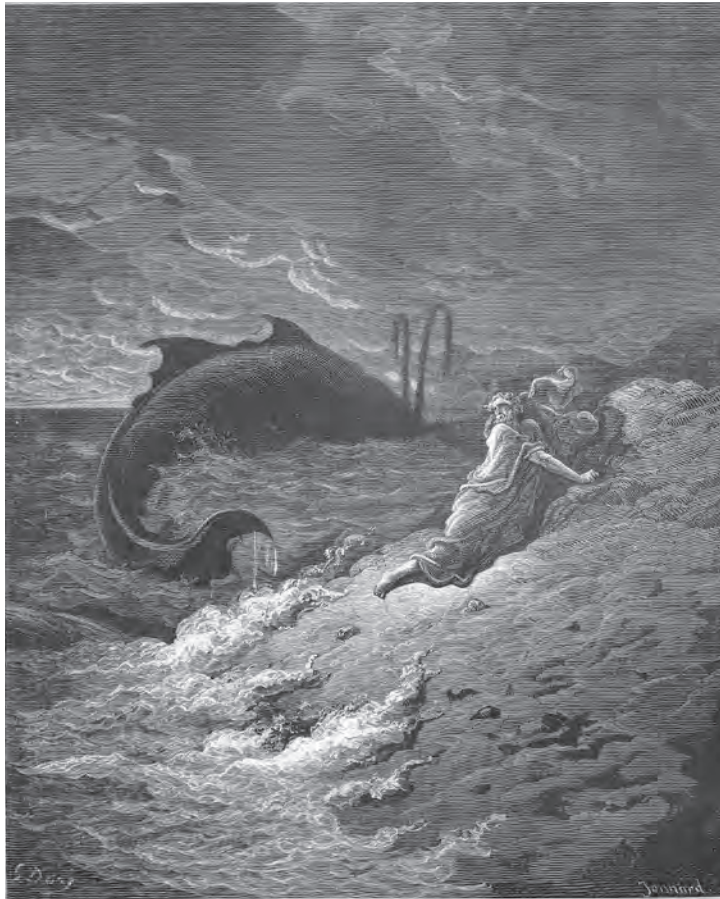
In many parts of the world today, Christians are experiencing intense persecution and even martyrdom—a fact that is often largely ignored by secular society. In the West this persecution is more subtle. As secularism gains power, Christians are expected to practice their faith in private and live their public lives according to rules of political correctness and “tolerance.” Letting one’s faith inform one’s business decisions or political activity is often seen as forcing one’s faith on others, rather than as a right to be protected. The signs of the times point to a world increasingly hostile to the Church. Have you or someone you know experienced persecution for your faith? What happened? How did you respond?

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The signs of the times also point to some causes of concern within the Church as well. Low participation in Mass and the sacraments, and a lack of understanding about even the Church's most basic teachings, are all too common among men and women who identify as Catholic.



*Jonah and the Whale, drawings by Gustave Dore © Nicku / shutterstock.com*

his people's wicked enemies. But Jonah was in for a surprise. The people of Nineveh heeded his message. They turned away from their wickedness, and God spared them, pouring out his mercy and bringing about a conversion of Israel's enemy.

As dark as these times seem, this isn't the first time in history that God's people have faced difficulties arising from a world in desperate need of conversion. Consider the story of Jonah. In the mid-8th century BC, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was facing threats from the neighboring Assyrian Empire. God called Jonah to travel deep into enemy territory to the Assyrian city of Nineveh and call the people of the city to repentance. Jonah didn't want anything to do with this mission to Israel's enemies and took off in the opposite direction. After a storm at sea followed by three days of darkness, distress and anguish in the belly of the great fish, God heard Jonah's prayer and gave him a second chance. He went to Nineveh and walked the city streets, warning the people that God would destroy their city if they didn't repent of their sins and change their ways. Then he set up camp outside the city to watch the impending destruction of

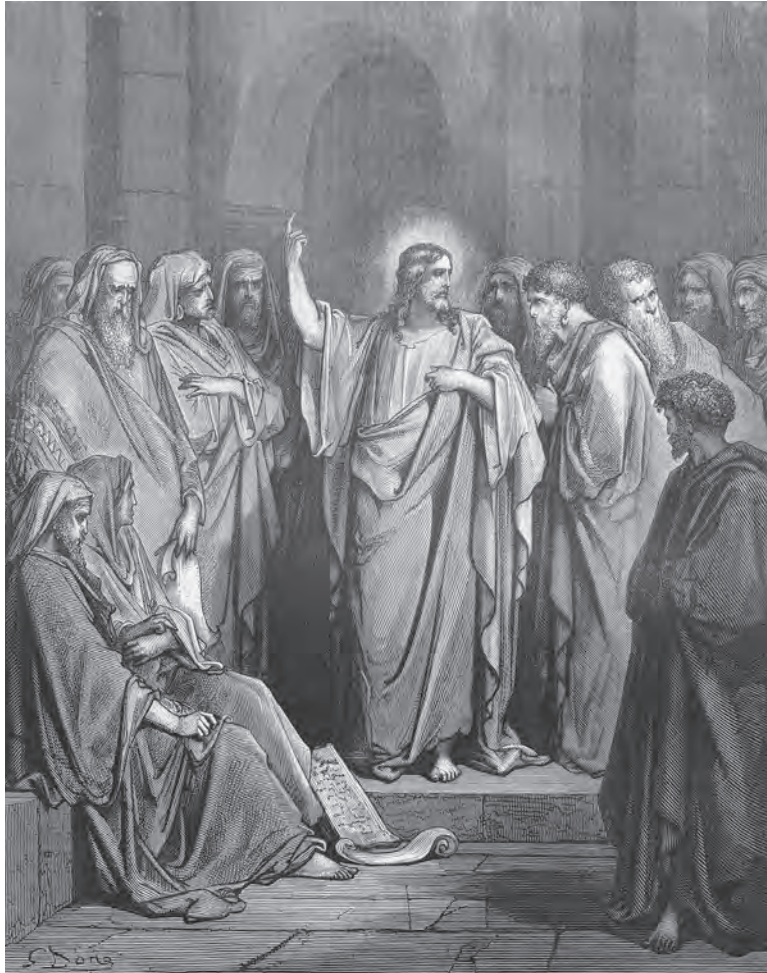
Scripture also gives us examples of internal reform and conversion of God's people during the reigns of two kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:31) and Josiah (2 Chronicle 34). Both kings, Hezekiah starting in the late 8th century BC, and Josiah three generations later, were faithful men of God in the midst of a nation that had largely turned away from God and forsaken his commandments. Both Hezekiah and Josiah worked to eradicate idolatry and renew the liturgical life of God's people centered on the Temple in Jerusalem. They repaired the Temple, renewed the nation's dedication to God's Law, and lived lives of faithfulness and trust in God. Although both Hezekiah and Josiah ascended the throne of a kingdom wandering far from God, both kings enacted radical reforms and under their rule Judah was once again faithful and enjoyed God's favor.

How do the stories of Jonah, Hezekiah, and Josiah apply to our own times? What encouragement and lessons can we draw from these stories?

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*Jesus Preaches in the Synagogue, drawings by Gustave Dore. © Nicku / shutterstock.com*

The times in which we find ourselves call for both our own deeper conversion and fidelity to Jesus Christ and his Church, as well as a creativity to apply the truth of the gospel to the questions asked by the men and women of the culture around us. As Dr. Healy shared in the video, the New Evangelization is still about proclaiming the gospel to those who have never heard it, but ever more often it is proclaiming the gospel to those who think they already know it and have rejected it. As Venerable Fulton Sheen famously said, “There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be.” For a New Evangelization to be successful, we must allow the Spirit to fill us with a new vigor and zeal for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We must

be willing to explore new methods of sharing the gospel, and we must share it with a new and fresh expression so that our jaded, post-Christian world will open their ears and their hearts.



# COMMIT—DAY 3

## LECTIO: THE VISITATION



St. Luke includes a beautiful symmetry between the beginning of his gospel and the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Both books begin with a coming of the Holy Spirit followed by an act of evangelization—sharing the love of God communicated by the Holy Spirit. Reading and praying through Mary’s visitation to her cousin Elizabeth allows us the opportunity to meditate on the first act of Christian evangelization and sheds light on our own call to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

**LECTIO:** The practice of praying with Scripture, *lectio divina*, begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the Scripture passage below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

*“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.’ And Mary said,*

*‘My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is on those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
he has put down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of low degree;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.’*

*And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.”*

—Luke 1:39–56



Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
© Zvonimir Atletic / shutterstock.com

What actions does Mary perform in this passage? What does Elizabeth do? What does the child (John the Baptist) do?

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What are Elizabeth and John's reactions to Mary's arrival? What emotions does Mary express?

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What are the themes of Mary's Magnificat (verses 46–55)?

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**MEDITATIO:** *Lectio*, close reading and rereading, is followed by *meditatio*, time to reflect on the Scripture passage, to ponder the reason for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the Scripture passage on page 15.

The following meditation is taken from Pope Benedict XVI's Address at the Conclusion of the Marian Month, May 31, 2008:

*“Let us imagine the Virgin’s state of mind after the Annunciation, when the Angel left her. Mary found herself with a great mystery enclosed within her womb; she knew something extraordinarily unique had happened; she was aware that the last chapter of salvation history in the world had begun. But everything around her remained as before and the village of Nazareth was completely unaware of what had happened to her.*

*“Before worrying about herself, Mary instead thought about elderly Elizabeth, who she knew was well on in her pregnancy and, moved by the mystery of love that she had just welcomed within herself, she set out ‘in haste’ to go to offer Elizabeth her help. This is the simple and sublime greatness of Mary!*

*“When she reaches Elizabeth’s house, an event takes place that no artist could ever portray with the beauty and the intensity with which it took place. The interior light of the Holy Spirit enfolds their persons. And Elizabeth, enlightened from on high, exclaims: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ...’”*





Visitation of the Virgin and Saint Elizabeth / Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali / Art Resource, NY

Consider the actions of each person in this passage. How is each action an appropriate response to the presence of the Holy Spirit? How do these actions present a model for evangelization?

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With whom do you identify most closely in this passage? Why?

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Our emotions often play a key role in our lives of faith. When has your response or reaction to the Holy Spirit been similar to that of Elizabeth or John? When has it been similar to the response of Mary?

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Which themes of Mary's Magnificat resonate most with you? Why? If you were to write your own Magnificat modeled on Mary's, what would it include?

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**ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO:** Having read and meditated on today's Scripture passage, take some time to bring your thoughts to God (*oratio*) and engage God in silence (*contemplatio*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolutio*) to respond to God's prompting of your heart in today's prayer.

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# COMMIT – DAY 4

## WAITING ON THE LORD



Technology in the hands of businessmen  
© violetkaipa / shutterstock.com

We live in a world of constant activity. Modern technology allows us to do more than ever. Smartphones and tablets allow us to constantly be in touch, working, and *doing* something. And society pushes us to take full advantage of every opportunity to be more productive, accomplish more, and fit even more into our already hectic lives.

In the midst of all of this busyness, waiting seems like a foreign concept and doesn't come easily to most of us. When there is a dream or a goal in sight, it can be downright painful

to wait for God's timing rather than pursuing it on our own schedule. Additionally, when we are called to begin our work in prayer it can seem, by the standards of the world, that we are simply wasting time without accomplishing anything. But God's plan is always worth the wait.

When have you tried to do something on your own rather than waiting for God? When have you waited for God's timing?

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The story of the Church begins with waiting. Jesus' instruction to his Apostles before his Ascension to remain in Jerusalem and "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4) almost seems to interrupt the momentum of the story. Jesus has risen from the dead and is preparing to ascend to the right hand of the Father. The New Covenant has been ratified, and the world is ripe for the message of the gospel. And yet the Apostles are told to wait.



The Pentecost / Scala / Art Resource, NY

The Apostles respond to this command to wait by asking what Jesus is going to do—will he now restore the kingdom to Israel? Jesus does not answer their question with "times or seasons." Instead Jesus announces that the Apostles are to be his witnesses, but only after they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. And so they wait. And they pray. And in due time Jesus sends the Holy Spirit upon his followers. Filled with this power from on high, their witness is such that they turn "the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). The Apostles could not have accomplished the evangelization of the ancient world simply with their own power or in their own time. It could only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit and

according to his schedule. Rather than interrupting the momentum of this first evangelization, waiting and praying gave them the grace and strength that turned the world upside down.

*"But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." —Isaiah 40:31*



If Jesus' first instruction for the first evangelization was to wait for the Spirit, then the same holds true for evangelization in our time. Both the promise and the precedent of Scripture are clear. By the power of the Holy Spirit and according to God's timing, ordinary people can accomplish great things for the Kingdom—just like Jonah, Hezekiah, and Josiah did. Trusting in human effort alone can have disastrous results. Look up Numbers 14:39–45 for an example of the Israelites trying to do something on their own power after God told them to wait. What happened?

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The lives of the saints also provide wonderful examples of the power of waiting on God's timing and the Holy Spirit. St. Monica, for one, is an excellent model of waiting on the Lord and persevering in prayer. By worldly standards her life was not one of great accomplishments, but thirty-three years of relentless prayer resulted in her spiritual legacy: the conversion of her son, St. Augustine, who was Bishop of Hippo and writer of numerous treatises on the faith, and who today is considered one of the most important early Church Fathers.

The Bible and the lives of the saints show us that God calls people from all walks of life to accomplish his will. The Old Testament prophets came from a variety of backgrounds: aristocracy, scribes, priests, and farmers. The first pope started out as a fisherman. The Church's history is full of slaves and royalty, scholars and uneducated commoners, skilled craftsmen and simple children who all answered God's call to holiness. There is a saying, "God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called." An important part of this equipping comes from waiting on the Lord in prayer. The more we unite ourselves to God and his will in prayer, the more open we will find ourselves to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of the beautiful things about the New Evangelization. We are each called to participate by virtue of our Baptism, but we don't have to rely on our own strengths, or fear our own weaknesses. Just as the first evangelization was accomplished only after the Apostles heeded Jesus' instruction to wait for the Holy Spirit, we also must wait and pray to allow God to inspire and direct our work. Waiting and prayer does not put off evangelization; rather it fuels our love of God and inflames our willingness to share the love we have encountered.

*"Finally, the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn."*

—Pope Bl. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24

The world needs to hear the gospel, and if we ask Jesus, "When will you bring about conversion in the world?" he will tell us, just as he told the Apostles, "You will be my witnesses."

In what areas of your life do you feel well-equipped to answer God's call to bear witness to him? In what areas do you feel inadequate? Which Bible stories or saints inspire you as you discern how to give witness to God and his love and work in your life?

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# COMMIT – DAY 5

## TRUTH AND BEAUTY

*The Annunciation*, Sandro Botticelli, 1489-90



*The Annunciation* / Alfredo Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY

The Second Vatican Council, repeating the words of St. Ambrose, reminds us, “The Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ” (*Lumen Gentium*, 63). This union is nowhere more wonderfully pictured than at the moment of the Annunciation, when “Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the ‘full submission of intellect and will,’ manifesting ‘the obedience of faith’ to him who spoke to her through his messenger.... This response of faith included both perfect cooperation with ‘the grace of God that precedes and assists’ and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who ‘constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts’” (Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 13).



The moment of this extraordinary encounter has filled the imagination of artists throughout the centuries, making the Annunciation one of the most frequent subjects of Christian art. One such work was commissioned in May 1489 to be placed in a family chapel in the church of Cestello (now known as Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi) in Florence, Italy. The artist was Sandro Botticelli, an Italian painter from the Florentine school during the Early Renaissance. By the time Botticelli produced this Annunciation scene, he had become a recognized artist, having painted numerous altarpieces as well as contributing to the frescoed walls of the Sistine Chapel. Botticelli's *Annunciation*, sometimes referred to as the *Cestello Annunciation*, now resides in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Botticelli sets the scene, not in the humble surroundings of a Palestinian home in Nazareth, but rather in a room Botticelli himself might have encountered in any nobleman's home in the city of Florence. The pale lines in the terra cotta floor make use of linear perspective to direct our gaze past the protagonists in the foreground, and out the open rear door of the room. Here we look past a small white-walled garden area, barren, in which nothing grows, and out onto a rich green landscape with a river running toward the horizon. Centered in the door's prospect is a slender tree. The view is not unlike what any noble Florentine might have seen looking out his own window onto the Italian countryside, but its simple elements—a garden, a river, and a tree—call to mind the story of Creation and the Garden of Eden, from which flowed several rivers and in which stood the Tree of Life, whose fruit was never tasted.

The stillness of the landscape stands in stark contrast to the graceful movement that appears in the figures of the Angel Gabriel and Mary. Barely visible on the left is the corniced edge of a second doorway, which not only provides a second source of light for Botticelli, who was known for his subtle coloring, but also provides the opening through which the heavenly visitor has just entered, a small portion of his robes still extending out the doorway and beyond our sight.

The centerline of the floor's grid marks an invisible threshold that separates the angelic messenger on the left and the young virgin on the right, and in some sense marks the divide between heaven and earth. Take a look at the painting. Who crosses this line into the other's space?

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Gabriel does not remain at the doorway's entrance to the room, but presents himself as close as possible to the center threshold, extending his hand across the threshold and toward Mary. His proximity and his leaning toward her who he has just announced as being "full of grace" acts as an earnest plea for Mary to say "yes" to the incredible plan of God which he has come to announce.

Read Luke 1:29. How does St. Luke describe Mary's response to Gabriel's greeting?

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Botticelli seems to use the movement of Mary's body to express the dialogue of the scene. The lower portion of her body gracefully bends away from the angel and his troubling greeting. But as the angel continues revealing God's plan (the key verse of which is recorded in the painting's original architectural-style frame: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall over shadow thee") and answering her questions, Mary's heart, already given entirely to God from her childhood, overflows with the desire to take her place more and more deeply in God's plan. As if to image her fiat, her "yes," Botticelli gracefully extends Mary's upper body, arms, and hands toward Gabriel.



*The Annunciation / Alfredo Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY*

But while the hands of Gabriel and Mary extend toward each other, they never touch, mirroring the virginal conception of the Incarnation that is about to take place in Mary's womb without the natural physical touch of husband and wife. The extended arms of Gabriel and Mary mark a diagonal across the painting. This first diagonal is intersected by a second that follows the branch of lilies Gabriel holds in his left hand—these beautiful white flowers a symbol Mary's purity.

In contrast to the barren garden visible in the picture's background, the pure virgin's womb will not be barren, but her "yes" to God's plan yields a supernatural fertility and fruitfulness when the Holy Spirit overshadows her. This divine fruit

of Mary's womb, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will undo the curse that exiled mankind from the Garden of Eden. The wood of his Cross will become a new tree of life, the water and blood flowing from his side will become the new river of life in Baptism and the new fruit given in the gift of the Eucharist.

When Mary gives her "yes" to God at the Annunciation, she could not fully see the joys and sorrows ahead, but "she will let herself be led by the hand by mysterious Providence and for her whole life, rooted in faith, she will follow her Son spiritually, becoming his first and perfect 'disciple' and carrying-out in everyday life the requirements involved in following Jesus according to his own words: 'Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:27)" (Pope St. John Paul II, Address at the Conclusion of the Marian Month, May 31, 1979). May we model her faith, charity, and union with Christ, and so also become perfect disciples.