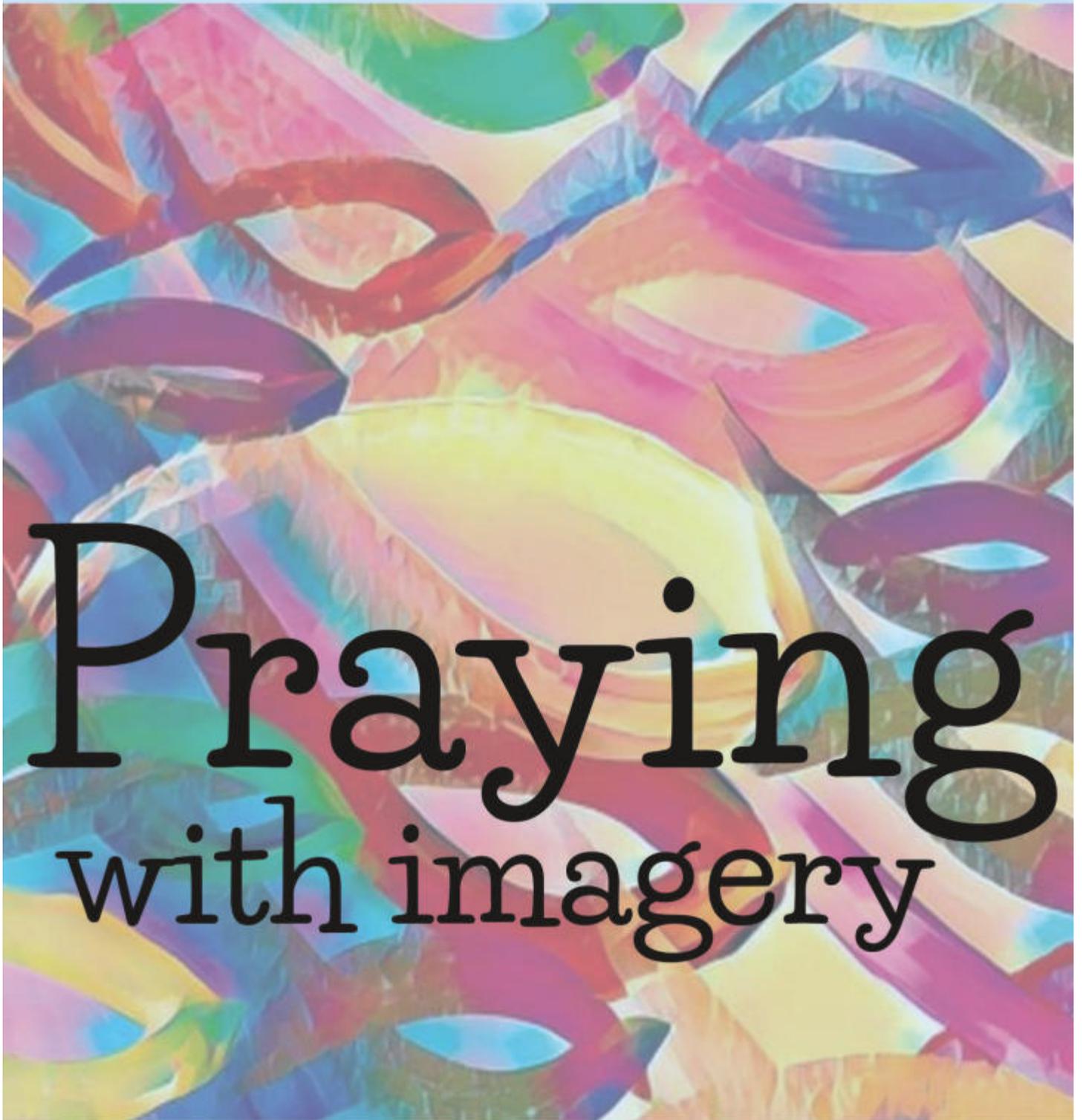


OUR PRAYER JOURNAL
THE MONTH OF MARCH



Praying with imagery

CHELMSFORD CATHOLIC COLLABORATIVE FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM

Praying with Imagery

INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote,

“Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful; for beauty is God’s handwriting—a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower, and thank God for it as a cup of blessing.”

Indeed, anything that is beautiful comes from God and the beauty of the world can lead us to God. This is the case whether the beauty is natural or the result of human hands. In fact, humankind is only able to create beauty because God has invited us into His creativity. This month we will be praying both by creating beauty and appreciating beauty through: Prayerful Coloring, *Visio Divina*, Scriptural Illumination, and Praying with Creation.

Prayerful Coloring

Oftentimes, focusing while praying can be a struggle. This is particularly true when trying to pray contemplatively. Coloring while praying can be a great tool to help with this struggle, and many prayer and scripture themed coloring pages are available today. Coloring while praying can help with focus by giving the hands something to do and the mind something to focus on, and keep it from wandering. It is important that when participating in prayerful coloring to NOT let the coloring become the focus of the activity; instead, the coloring should be like white [background] noise that helps to quiet the body and mind, making it easier to converse with God.

Visio Divina

While the more familiar *Lectio Divina* is a way of praying with Scripture, *Visio Divina* is a similar method of praying, but with the use of images. In *Visio Divina*, a person engages in thoughtful contemplation of an image. This image could be a painting, a photograph, a Biblical Illumination, a stained-glass window, a textile, etc. In *Visio Divina*, those praying are invited to reflect deeply on an image and see what God may be trying to say to them through it and their experience of it.

Scriptural Illumination

For much of Christian history, scribes and artists have added embellishments such as color, calligraphy, illustrations, etc. to Scripture as a way to adorn and expound on these sacred texts. This practice is known as *illuminating*, and has resulted in many famous works such as the Book of Kells. Whether a great artist or not, engaging in illuminating can help one to reflect on a particular Scripture passage, while exploring its meaning and discovering what God is communicating through it.

Praying with Creation

Psalm 95 begins by saying,

“Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; cry out to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with a song of praise, joyfully sing out our psalms. For the LORD is the great God, the great king over all gods, whose hand holds the depth of the earth; who owns the tops of the mountains. The sea and the dry land belong to God, who made them formed them by hand” (cf. Psalm 95:1-5).

Praying with Creation is a wonderful way to appreciate—with awe and wonder—the beauty and variety in the world God made and through this appreciation connect with our Creator.

WEEK ONE: PRAYERFUL COLORING

This week we will be praying using Prayerful Coloring. Suggested coloring pages can be found at:
www.chelmsfordcatholic.org/prayer-resources.

No modifications are included, but families should pick coloring pages that are appropriate for each member. Individuals can work on the same coloring page throughout the week or choose a new one each day.

General Directions

- Gather as a family, in your prayer space if possible.
- Make sure each family member has a coloring page (or a blank sheet of paper), materials to color with, and a surface on which to color. If planning on playing background music make sure music is loaded, buffered, etc. Light instrumental music is suggested.
- Choose a leader. The Leader is responsible for reading the directions and keeping time. If possible, rotate who leads so everyone has a chance to simply pray.
- Once everyone is gathered and ready with their materials the leader should guide the family through prayer using the below guide.
- **Leader:** Today we will pray while coloring. As you color, talk to God in your mind. You can talk to Him about your day, about things you are grateful for, about things you are worried about, about things you need help with, about your relationship with Him. You can talk to Him about whatever is on your mind and in your heart. Try not to become too focused on the coloring, but instead, use it to help you focus as you talk to God. We will begin with the *Sign of the Cross*, color and pray for about 10 minutes, then finish with an *Our Father*. Before we begin, does anyone have anything they would like us to pray for today?
- **Leader:** We begin in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- Allow about 10 minutes for prayer while coloring. At this point background music may be played. When there is about 1 minute left give everyone a warning to finish their conversations with God.
- **Leader:** As we finish our prayer today, let us thank God for this time that we were able to spend with Him and we ask Him to stay with us today and tomorrow as we pray. We close with the prayer that Jesus taught us...
- Pray the *Our Father* together and conclude with the *Sign of the Cross*.

WEEK TWO: VISIO DIVINA

This week we will be praying using *Visio Divina*. Suggested works of sacred art can be found at:
www.chelmsfordcatholic.org/prayer-resources.

However, families can use art from their homes or find other images in books, online, etc. No modifications are included, but families could adjust conversation according to ages of the family members.

General Directions

- Gather as a family, in your prayer space if possible.
- Find an image and accompanying scripture passage for today.
-suggested images/scripture referenced below can be found on our website...
www.chelmsfordcatholic.org/prayer-resources.

Sunday *Jump for Joy* by Corby Eisbacher • The Visitation... Luke 1:39-45

Monday *Nativity* by Newell Convers Wyeth • The Nativity... Luke 2:15-20

Tuesday *The Hand of God* by Yongsung Kim • Peter Walks on Water... Matthew 14:22-33

Wednesday *Magdala Encounter Chapel Mural* by Daniel Carriola

• The Women with the Hemorrhage... Mark 5:25-34

Thursday *Christ after the Flagellation Contemplated by the Christian Soul* by Diego Velázquez

• The Mocking & Scourging of Christ... Mark 15:15-20

Friday *The Resurrection of Christ* by Noël Coypel • The Resurrection... Matthew 28:1-10

Saturday *The Sepulcher* by Dan Burr • The Empty Tomb... John 20:1-10

- Choose a Leader and a Reader. The Leader will read the directions for each step. The Reader will read the scripture passages. If necessary, the Leader and Reader can be the same person.
- Pray Visio Divina using the below steps. For steps 3-6, the Leader should read the directions and then pause for ~3 minutes to allow others to silently pray and reflect before moving to the next step.

Step 1. Begin with the *Sign of the Cross*.

Step 2. Leader: Before we begin to pray with the image we will familiarize ourselves with the story shown in this picture. As we listen to the Scripture passage we should listen so we know what moment this picture is portraying.

Step 3. Reader: *Read the appropriate Scripture passage.*

Step 4. Leader: First we will look at the big picture. Spend a few minutes just taking the whole picture in. Pay attention to your initial thoughts and reactions to the picture. A good question to ask here is, *What is my first impression of this picture?*

Step 5. Leader: Next, we will look at the details. Spend a few minutes closely examining the picture and its details. Pay attention to what you notice. A good question to ask here is, *What little things jump out at me?*

Step 6. Leader: Finally, we will have a conversation with God about our experiences with the picture. Talk to Him about what thoughts and feelings you had while reflecting on the picture. Two good questions to ask here is, *What do I want to say to God about this picture? What might God be saying to me through it?*

Step 7. Close with the *Glory Be* and the *Sign of the Cross*.

Modifications

Instead of having each person reflect silently on their own for each step, have a family discussion about the picture, using the questions found below. For each step, the Leader should read the directions, ask the questions, allow time for sharing, and then move to the next step. Several questions are provided but not all need to be used, the Leader can choose which ones to use and should move the group on to the next step after a few minutes of discussion.

Step 1. Begin with the *Sign of the Cross*.

Step 2. Leader: Before we begin to pray with the image, we will familiarize ourselves with the story shown in in this picture. As we listen to the Scripture passage, we should listen so we know what moment this picture is portraying.

Step 3. Reader: *Read the appropriate Scripture passage.*

Step 4. Leader: First we will look at the big picture. Spend a few minutes just taking the whole picture in. Pay attention to your initial thoughts and reactions to this picture.

- *What are your first impression of this picture?*

- *Are these things you like? Things you dislike?*

- *How is this picture the same and different from how you may have pictured this scene before?*

Step 5. Leader: Next, we will look at the details. Spend a few minutes closely examining the picture and its details. Pay attention to what you notice.

- *What little things jump out at you in the picture?*

- *Are there things you noticed looking at the picture closer that you did not notice at first?*

- *Why do you think that detail/those details are included?*

Step 6. Leader: Finally, we will have a conversation about what God could be saying to us through this picture.

- *What do you think God might be saying to you or our family through this picture?*

- *Is there anything you would say to God about this picture?*

- *Does this picture make you think of anyone or anything to pray for?*

- *Does this picture make you think of something you should do?*

Step 7. Close with a *Glory Be* and the *Sign of the Cross*.

WEEK THREE: SCRIPTURAL ILLUMINATION

This week we will be praying using Scriptural Illumination.

Suggested biblical passages can be found at: www.chelmsfordcatholic.org/prayer-resources.

However, ANY Scripture passage may be used. The same passage may be used throughout the week, or a different passage may be chosen each day. There are no modifications, but children who are not yet strong readers should be paired with an older family member and work together.

General Directions

- Gather as a family, in your prayer space if possible.
- Make sure each family member has a printout of today's Scripture verse (or a blank sheet of paper), materials to write and color with, and a surface on which to write/color. If you are planning on incorporating background music, make sure music is loaded, buffered... in short, ready to go. We suggest that you play light instrumental music.
- Choose a Leader and a Reader. The Leader will read the directions for each step. The Reader will read the scripture passages. If necessary, the Leader and Reader can be the same person.
- Once everyone is gathered and ready with their materials, the leader should guide the family through prayer, using the below guide:

Leader: Today we will pray by illuminating a Scripture passage. Illuminating Scripture is an ancient practice where visual beauty is added to a Biblical text to highlight the beauty and importance of God's word. We will spend about 10 minutes illuminating and praying. We begin in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Reader: *Read the chosen passage.*

Leader: I now invite everyone to illuminate the passage according to what meaning you find in this passage. You may wish to highlight, underline, frame, or bold words or phrases that stand out to you. You may wish to draw illustrations or symbols for things you feel are important. You may wish to create calligraphy for phrases you find inspiring. You may wish to color code the passage, assigning different colors to different things, such as making everything that makes you think of love red and everything that make you think of joy yellow. Talk to God about what you are doing and why as you do it. See what He has to say to you. We will have about 10 minutes for this and then we will close with an *Our Father*.

- *Now allow about 10 minutes for illuminating. If desired, this is the point where your background music should be played. When there is about 1 minute left, give the others a warning to finish up.*

- *(optional)*

If desired, before the closing prayer, have people share what they did with their illuminations and why.

Leader: As we finish our prayer today, we thank God for the beauty of His words. We close with the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Pray the *Our Father* and conclude with the *Sign of the Cross*

WEEK FOUR: PRAYING WITH CREATION

This week we will be praying with Creation. Two options are given for this week. The first for if you are able to go outside for prayer and the second for if you need to pray inside. Families should choose whichever option makes the most sense for them on a given day.

Outdoor Directions

- Gather as a family outside, preferably where there is nature to appreciate.
 - You can pray in place or may choose to walk while you pray.
- Choose a Reader, the reader will read the Scripture passage and give brief directions.
- Begin with the *Sign of the Cross*.
- **Reader:** Read the Story of Creation [Genesis 1: 1-31].
 - Pause at the end of each of the following verses (5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) marking each day of creation.
 - During each pause, invite the family to look at and take in what of God's creation they are able to see, being aware to remember that God made everything in nature and made it good.
 - Pause for ~1 minute before moving on to the next passage.
- At the end of the scripture reading, each family member should share one thing that they noticed that they found particularly beautiful or awe-inspiring and why.
- After sharing, pray *A Prayer with Creation* [found on the next page] together.
- Conclude with a *Glory Be* and the *Sign of the Cross*.

Indoor Directions

- Gather as a family, in your prayer space, if possible.
- Pull up a Creation hymn.
 - A playlist of suggested hymns can be found in the Creation playlist on our YouTube page.
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChTy8t4Db1uoPtIvN9ZkHyg>
- Pull up a nature slideshow video.
 - A suggested video is included in the Creation playlist on our YouTube page.
- Choose a Reader, who will read the scripture passage and give brief directions.
- **Reader:** Read the Story of Creation [Genesis 1: 1-31].
- Play the nature slideshow video, using one or two of the Creation hymns as background music.
 - As the slideshow plays, reflect on all of the beauty in the world, remembering that God made everything, made it good, and gave it to us.
- At the end of the hymn(s), have each family member share one thing they saw in the slideshow that they found particularly beautiful or awe-inspiring and why.
- After sharing, pray *A Prayer with Creation* [found on the next page] together.

A Prayer with Creation

~ Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'**

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.

O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you! Amen.