About this journal
Each month will begin with a specific intention for our Archdiocesan Synod. We encourage all the faithful of the local Church to join us in praying together for that intention.

There will be a brief reflection for each week followed by a recommended Scripture passage for the day and a prompt to get you started. Since the Scripture passages will come from the daily Mass readings they can be found here: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings.

Please remember that this journal is a meant as an offering, not an obligation. We encourage you to use it in whatever way serves you best.

Why Pray?
The very first paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church begins:

> God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength (CCC 1)

God is drawing close to us. Are we willing to seek him, to know him, to love him with all our strength? We begin the journey of seeking, knowing and loving him in prayer.

What is prayer?

*God desires each of us to enter into a vital and personal relationship with him. This relationship is prayer (CCC 2558).* Just as each relationship between two people is unique, so is each relationship between a person and God. Consequently, there is not a given formula for prayer. It is more important *that* a person prays than *how* a person prays.

We have the gift, however, of being able to learn from one another, from the saints and from people in the church who are particularly gifted at prayer. Therefore we will be offering suggestions from the experts to help us get started.

We encourage each person to discover how God speaks most clearly to him or her. Feel free to try different forms of prayer, but do not feel pressured to try them all. In fact, if you find a particular way of prayer leads you to intimacy with God, continue to pray that way until God draws you in a new direction.

Finally, it is good for us to remember that prayer is God’s gift to us:

> “If you knew the gift of God!” The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: There, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (CCC 2560)

How to Pray?
Since prayer is going to flow from our unique relationship with God, it is up to us to discover how God wants to communicate with us. To do this we seek to learn to listen to his voice in our hearts. The following is one method that might be helpful for us as we begin:
Always begin by recalling that you’re in the Presence of God: It’s easy to launch into prayer without realizing that you are called to enter into a conversation with God. One priest remarked that for many people, prayer is just “worrying on one’s knees.” Take a moment to recall that God is always with you and that he desires this time with you even more than you do. Ask him to help and guide you as you pray.


Acknowledge: After you become aware of God’s Presence, it’s important to become aware of your own heart. Take some time to acknowledge your thoughts, feelings, and desires as you begin to pray. Acknowledge your physical and emotional needs (“I’m tired; I’m hungry; I’m worried; I’m excited; I’m lonely;” etc.), but try to also acknowledge the spiritual stirrings within you (“I want to be free from this temptation to sin; I feel God is leading me to do this; I want more of what God wants to give me;” etc.) If there is a particular grace you are seeking, write it down. Perhaps it will be answered immediately. Perhaps you will see over time that God is putting a certain desire into your heart to prepare you for what he wants to give you.

Relate: Once you have acknowledged the stirrings of your heart, relate them to God. It’s easy to just think about these things and assume God knows them, but he wants you to share them with him. Tell him what is in your heart. Ask him about anything that’s troubling you. Share your desires with him. He loves having a “heart-to-heart” with you!

Receive: After sharing your heart with God, allow him to share his heart with you. This is a time to quiet your own heart and mind and listen to God who loves you. Perhaps he will speak through a reflection you read, or a scripture passage, or simply with a “still small voice” inside you. (See 1 Kings 19:12-13)

Respond: To end your time of prayer, respond to God. Thank him for what you received; resolve to do what he asks of you; tell him how much you love him.

Journaling is a great way to conclude your prayer time. It often helps to process what took place during your conversation with God. It also can be very helpful to refer back to your notes in future times of discouragement or discernment. Many times God is doing a work in you that takes days, months, perhaps even years. Journaling can help you learn to recognize the subtle ways God is carrying out his good purpose in you. (See Romans 8:28)

A Word of Encouragement from Saint Ambrose

God’s temple is holy; you are his temple.

My Father and I will come and make our home with you. Let your door stand open to receive him, unlock your soul to him, offer him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the joy of grace. Throw wide the gate of your heart, stand before the sun of the everlasting light that shines on every man. This true light shines on all, but if anyone closes his window he will deprive himself of eternal light. If you shut the door of your mind, you shut out Christ. Though he can enter, he does not want to force his way in rudely, or compel us to admit him against our will.

... It is the soul that has its door, its gates. Christ comes to this door and knocks; he knocks at these gates. Open to him; he wants to enter, to find his bride waiting and watching.
Prayer Intention for February 2020:

That participation in the Archdiocesan Synod process will help families communicate more honestly and charitably with each other and strengthen the domestic church, we pray to the Lord.

Opening Reflection

This month we honor the **Holy Family**. Let us learn from them how to love and serve you as we love and serve those closest to us.
February 2-8, 2020: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29-30).

Today we celebrate the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. “For the People of God, the Temple was to be the place of their education in prayer: pilgrimages, feasts and sacrifices, the evening offering, the incense, and the bread of the Presence - all these signs of the holiness and glory of God Most High” (CCC 2581). But there were two people who spent much of their lives at the Temple looking for something more. Simeon and Anna were not content with a sign; they yearned for God himself.

Imagine their joy that day when a humble couple entered the Temple with their newborn son. This Temple, the prior version of which was the home of the Ark of the Covenant, where people would come to worship God and offer sacrifice, now received the perfect sacrifice – God Incarnate – in the flesh of a tiny baby boy.

God often comes to us in hidden and surprising ways. Most people in the Temple that day simply saw a couple presenting their firstborn son to the Lord, if they noticed them at all. Simeon and Anna saw the face of God! Let us follow their example and seek him fervently so that we too can say, “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

February 2: Lord, open our eyes and heart to see and receive you as we pray with Malachi 3:1-4.

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February 3: Lord, show us how you desire to rise up and save us as we pray with Psalm 3:2-7.

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February 4: Lord, bring healing and restored life to our Archdiocese as we pray with Mark 5:21-43.

February 5: Lord, thank you for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Show us where you desire to bring us forgiveness and freedom from guilt as we pray with Psalm 32:1-7.

February 6: Lord, reveal to our Local Church how you desire to send us out to our community as we pray with Mark 6:7-13.

February 7: Lord, help us to follow the example of John the Baptist who proclaimed the Truth rather than the example of Herod who sought to please the crowds as we pray with Mark 6:14-29.

February 8: Lord, in the midst of all the fullness of life, teach us how to seek out a deserted place to spend time with you each day as we pray with Mark 6:30-34.
February 9-15, 2020  “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16).

In the Apostle’s Creed we profess, “I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.” The Catechism 782 explains:

The People of God is marked by characteristics that clearly distinguish it from all other religious, ethnic, political, or cultural groups found in history:

- It is the People of God: God is not the property of any one people. But he acquired a people for himself from those who previously were not a people: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

- One becomes a member of this people not by physical birth, but by being "born anew," a birth "of water and the Spirit," that is, by faith in Christ, and Baptism.

- This People has for its Head Jesus the Christ (the anointed, the Messiah). Because the same anointing, the Holy Spirit, flows from the head into the body, this is "the messianic people."

- "The status of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple."

- "Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us." This is the "new" law of the Holy Spirit.

- Its mission is to be salt of the earth and light of the world. This people is "a most sure seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race."

- Its destiny, finally, "is the Kingdom of God which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it has been brought to perfection by him at the end of time."

Let us take our place in the Holy Catholic Church – let our light shine and glorify our Father in Heaven!

February 9: Lord, show us how to let my light shine brightly as we pray with Matthew 5:13-16.

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February 10: Lord, let us come to you for healing as we pray with Mark 6:53-56.

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**February 11:** Lord, as we pray with Psalm 84, increase our desire to live always in your Presence.

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February 16-22, 2020: “Blessed are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who observe his decrees, who seek him with all their heart” (Psalm 119:1-2).

As human beings marked with original sin we often balk at being told what to do. We see this disposition arise almost from the beginning of a person’s life. Think of how often parents hear their toddlers use the word “No!”

Unfortunately, the struggle with this disposition tends to extend to our relationship with God. If only we could see that our heavenly Father always wills our good. “The moral law is the work of divine Wisdom. Its biblical meaning can be defined as fatherly instruction, God’s pedagogy. It prescribes for man the ways, the rules of conduct that lead to the promised beatitude” (CCC 1950).

G.K. Chesterton in Orthodoxy puts it another way: “Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground. ... We might fancy some children playing on the flat grassy top of some tall island in the sea. So long as there was a wall round the cliff’s edge they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over; but when their friends returned to them they were all huddled in terror in the center of the island; and their song had ceased.” Let us seek not only to obey God’s law but also to be grateful for it, for it is given to us as a loving gift from our Father who wants the best for his children.

February 16: Lord, increase our desire for “what you have prepared for those who love you” as we pray with 1 Corinthians 2:6-10.

February 17: Lord, when we face trials, help us grow in perseverance as we pray with James 1:1-11.
February 18: Lord, increase our strength to withstand temptation as we pray with James 1:12-18.

February 19: Lord, help our Local Church to see ever more clearly what you desire for us as we pray with Mark 8:22-26.

February 20: Lord, help our Archdiocese to show no partiality but rather to treat all with dignity and respect as we pray with James 2:1-9.

February 21: Lord, show us what it means to take up our cross and follow you as we pray with Mark 8:34-9:1.

February 22: Lord, as we pray with Matthew 16:13-19, reveal yourself ever more fully to us so that we may respond with confidence when you ask, “Who do you say that I am?”
February 23-29, 2020: “Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God” (Joel 2:12-13).

This week we enter again into the powerful season of Lent. It is a time where we are encouraged to engage more intentionally in the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Throughout Sacred Scripture we find many examples of the People of God fasting. During Lent we focus in a special way on uniting ourselves to the fasting of our Lord.

“The evangelists indicate the salvific meaning of this mysterious event: Jesus is the new Adam who remained faithful just where the first Adam had given in to temptation. Jesus fulfills Israel's vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had once provoked God during forty years in the desert, Christ reveals himself as God's Servant, totally obedient to the divine will. In this, Jesus is the devil's conqueror: he "binds the strong man" to take back his plunder. Jesus' victory over the tempter in the desert anticipates victory at the Passion, the supreme act of obedience of his filial love for the Father” (CCC 539).

As we begin the sacred journey through the 40 days of Lent, let us set aside some time to pray and ask God how he wants to draw near to us – how he is inviting us to unite ourselves to the mystery of Jesus’ 40 days in the desert.

February 23: Lord, show us how to grow in holiness and love for our neighbor as we pray with Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18.

February 24: Lord, grant us the humility that comes from wisdom as we pray with James 3:13-18.
February 25: Lord, help us to follow your example and be “the servant of all” as we pray with Mark 9:30-37.

February 26: Lord, this Ash Wednesday, as we pray with Psalm 51, be merciful for we have sinned.

February 27: Lord, show our Local Church what we must do to “choose life” as we pray with Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

February 28: Lord, teach us how to fast as we pray with Isaiah 58:1-9.

February 29: Lord, as we pray with Luke 5:27-32, encourage us to be like Levi the tax collector and leave everything behind to follow you.