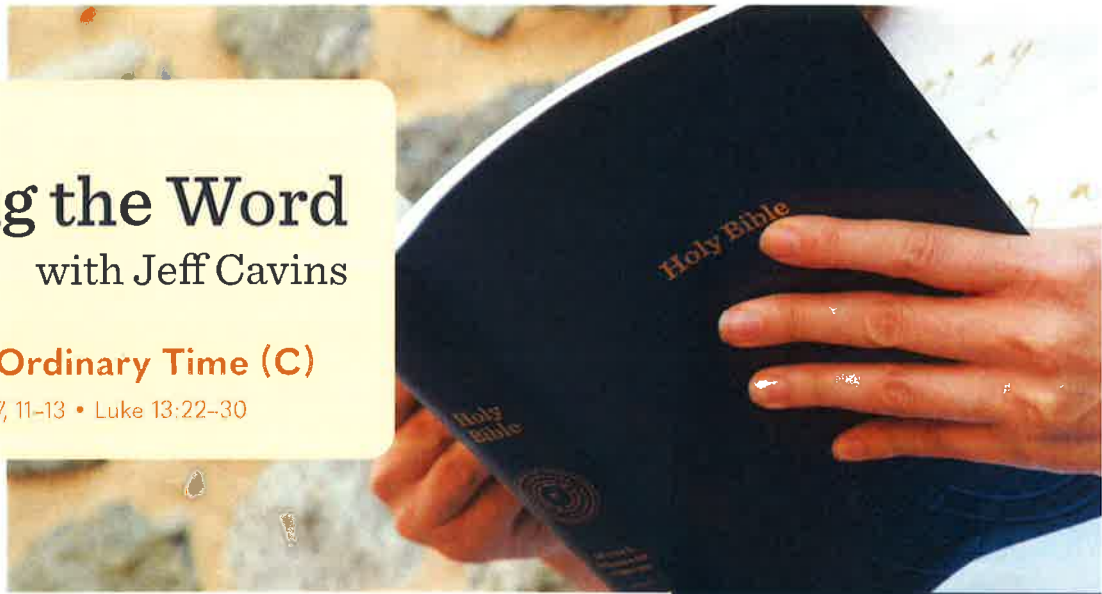


Encountering the Word

with Jeff Cavins

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Isaiah 66:18–21 • Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13 • Luke 13:22–30



Aim for the Narrow Gate

The readings for today confront us with a challenging yet essential question: Who will be saved? In Luke 13, someone asks Jesus, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” Rather than give a simple, easy answer, Jesus issues a challenge for all of us: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate.” This passage reminds us that salvation is not automatic—it requires obedience to Jesus and a life shaped by his teachings.

Our world often promotes the idea that simply being nice or doing the bare minimum is enough to reach heaven. But Jesus’ words reveal a deeper truth: The path to eternal life is narrow, and not everyone will choose to walk it. Life offers many choices, but eternity only offers two: life with God or separation from him. Our choices today determine where we spend eternity.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes that entering the narrow door means responding to Jesus’ teachings with obedience (see CCC 1970). Knowing what Jesus taught and entrusting ourselves to him daily is essential. This obedience doesn’t mean perfection, but it does mean a life committed to walking with Jesus, even when we fall short!



This reading from Hebrews reminds us that God’s discipline is part of this journey. Like a loving father, God trains and corrects us, guiding us back to the narrow path when we stray. While discipline may be uncomfortable, it ultimately brings joy and helps us share in God’s righteousness.

Take time to reflect on areas where you may need to let go of distractions or sin that keep you from the path. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Let go and let God.

Live the Gospel

Jeff Cavins says, “This week, reflect on two things as you recall the message of Our Lord to his disciples: ‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate.’ First, seek the narrow gate by aligning your actions with Jesus’ teachings. Second, if you are going through a difficult season, consider how God may be using it to shape and refine you. Eternity with God is the ultimate treasure, the best gift. Nothing on earth can ever exceed it.”

Dive Deeper

Scan this code to watch:



Or go to

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/twenty-first-sunday-in-ordinary-time-c/>

Ponder and Pray

» Where in your life do you need to be more aligned with Jesus' teachings?

» Are there habits or distractions that keep you from fully pursuing the narrow gate? How can you begin letting go of them this week?

» What might you change today to stay focused on the ultimate goal of heaven?

Make It Your Own

You and others in your household may use this space to write anything about today's Mass. It might be your view of Jeff Cavins' reflection, your priest's homily, your answers to the questions on this page—anything to help you and your household get the most out of today's Mass.

“

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.

—Luke 13:24

”

Jeff Cavins is the author of *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation* and the creator of the video series *Sundays with Ascension*, from which this reflection was adapted.

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Week 34



THE ROSARY IN A YEAR

WITH FR. MARK-MARY AMES, CFR

PHASE 3: MEDITATING ON THE MYSTERIES

The Joyful Mysteries in Art

THE NATIVITY

This week, we will meditate on a piece of sacred art depicting the Nativity (see Luke 2:1–20): Gerard van Honthorst's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, painted c. 1622 and located in the Pomeranian State Museum in Greifswald, Germany.

After taking a moment to collect your thoughts and lift your mind to God, prayerfully gaze upon the image, noticing what catches your eye and what intrigues you. Below are points of reflection to assist in your meditation.



Adoration of the Shepherds by Gerard van Honthorst (1622), Pomeranian State Museum

Reflection and Contemplation

- See how the light radiates from Jesus, illuminating the faces of those who look at him. How is this little baby the Light of the World?
- Notice how Mary presents Jesus to the shepherds. How does Mary always present her son to us? How has she done this for you in your life?
- What do Jesus' arms and hands convey to the shepherds?
- See the joy on the shepherds' faces when they observe Jesus. How would you have felt if you had been one of the shepherds who came to adore Jesus? See how Mary and Joseph look at Jesus. What do you imagine they were thinking? How do you think they would have felt upon seeing Jesus for the first time?
- The manger, where Mary laid Jesus, was a feeding trough for animals. At the bottom of the painting, on the left, a ram eats hay. What is the symbolism of Jesus being placed in a manger?
- The shepherds seem to be dressed in more modern clothing than would have been typical for the first century. Why do you think the artist depicted the shepherds in this way? Who would be our "shepherds" today?
- Jesus is so humble in these lowly surroundings. People do not seem to bother him.
- How is meditating on this image comforting?

Make It Your Own

What stood out to you about your Rosary experience this week?

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Scan the QR code to view *The Rosary in a Year* videos on the Ascension app. Download the prayer plan at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8s69yd>.

The Rosary in a Year is a daily podcast, produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mark-Mary Ames, CFR. It takes Catholics on a journey to form a lasting habit of prayer and gain tools to enter more deeply into meditation on the lives of Jesus and Mary through the Rosary. This bulletin was adapted from the podcast and materials that complement the podcast.

Sunday Q&A

Your Faith in Focus



ANSWERING THE BIG QUESTION

What is the point—the purpose and meaning of life?

Our Catholic Faith speaks directly to this central question. In one of their Ascension Presents videos, Jackie and Bobby Angel pose the query in a different way, asking, “What’s the point?” This reflection presents an answer.

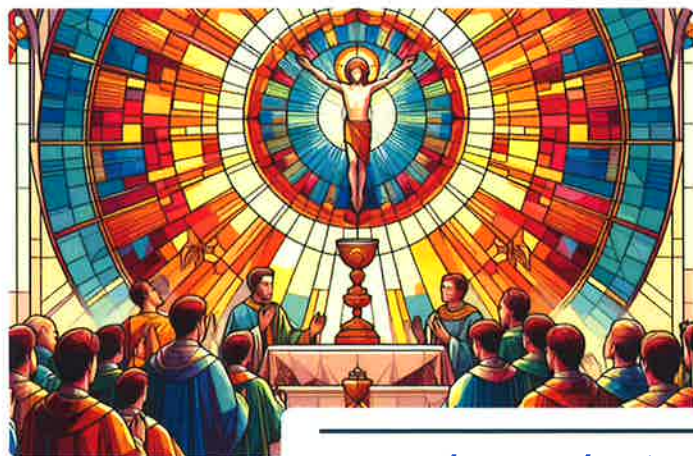
Written On the Human Heart

A survey conducted in 2023 reported that 58 percent of people in the United States (ages 18–25) felt that life was meaningless, purposeless.* In contrast, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that “the desire for God is written in every human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he is searching for” (CCC 27).

Most of the young people in that study sound hopeless, but that depressing point of view has no foundation. If we turn to God, we will find truth and happiness. We were created in God’s image, and our destiny is to spend eternity with God in heaven.

When Bobby taught in a high school, he was invited to graduation parties. The gift he gave was *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankel, a Holocaust survivor. Frankel, an Austrian Jewish psychologist, went to the

death camps and saw firsthand what happens when people give up hope, when they abandon meaning. They completely give up. The power of hope is born of the genuine belief that God is in control. Frankel’s book, set against the dark backdrop of a concentration camp, draws readers to that conclusion.



Pray to the One who gives meaning to your life.

We were made for more than what’s here and now. Since this isn’t your final destination, you *can* have meaning and purpose. God is the only one who can satisfy that ache and longing in your heart.

Ask the Lord to reveal to you what’s going on in your heart. Is this message of meaning and purpose stirring? Then let your prayer be, “Lord, help me know that you know me by name and that you are calling me to great things in this life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Make It Your Own

Much of humanity has pondered why God made us. St. Ignatius of Loyola's First Principle and Foundation from *The Spiritual Exercises* states his answer succinctly: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God, Our Lord, and by so doing save his soul." Look at your life, ask how you are accomplishing these three goals right now, and consider what you can do better.

Ponder and Pray

- How do you understand the purpose of life?
- How do your daily habits match up with that understanding?

Goal	How that is going:	Ideas for real growth:
To Praise God		
To Love God		
To Serve God		

Tip of the Week

Consider what habits you can develop to stay connected to your purpose in the midst of life. Is it journaling? Is it scheduling intentional prayer time? Is it a new habit of checking in with your spouse or family to talk about joys and hurts? Start something new or renew a commitment that you've fallen away from.

Dive Deeper

To watch the video on this topic scan the code

or visit the URL: <https://media.ascensionpress.com/video/whats-the-point-mans-search-for-meaning/>





AND GOD SAID, “WE ARE ONE!”



Isaiah 66:18–21 • Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13 • Luke 13:22–30

Family Car Talk

In today's Gospel, Jesus says something that at first doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. He says, *“For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”* Discuss these questions with your family on your way home from Mass today.



Is it hard to let someone go before you when you think you deserve to be first?



What are some ways you can help people who seem to be falling behind?



What are some small ways that you put other people before yourself the way Jesus asks us to?



WE GATHER TOGETHER

In today's first reading, God says: *“I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.”* Color the image of the children from around the world below and pray this prayer by Esther Lawson about how God cares for each one of us. This prayer is so true. Try to memorize it!

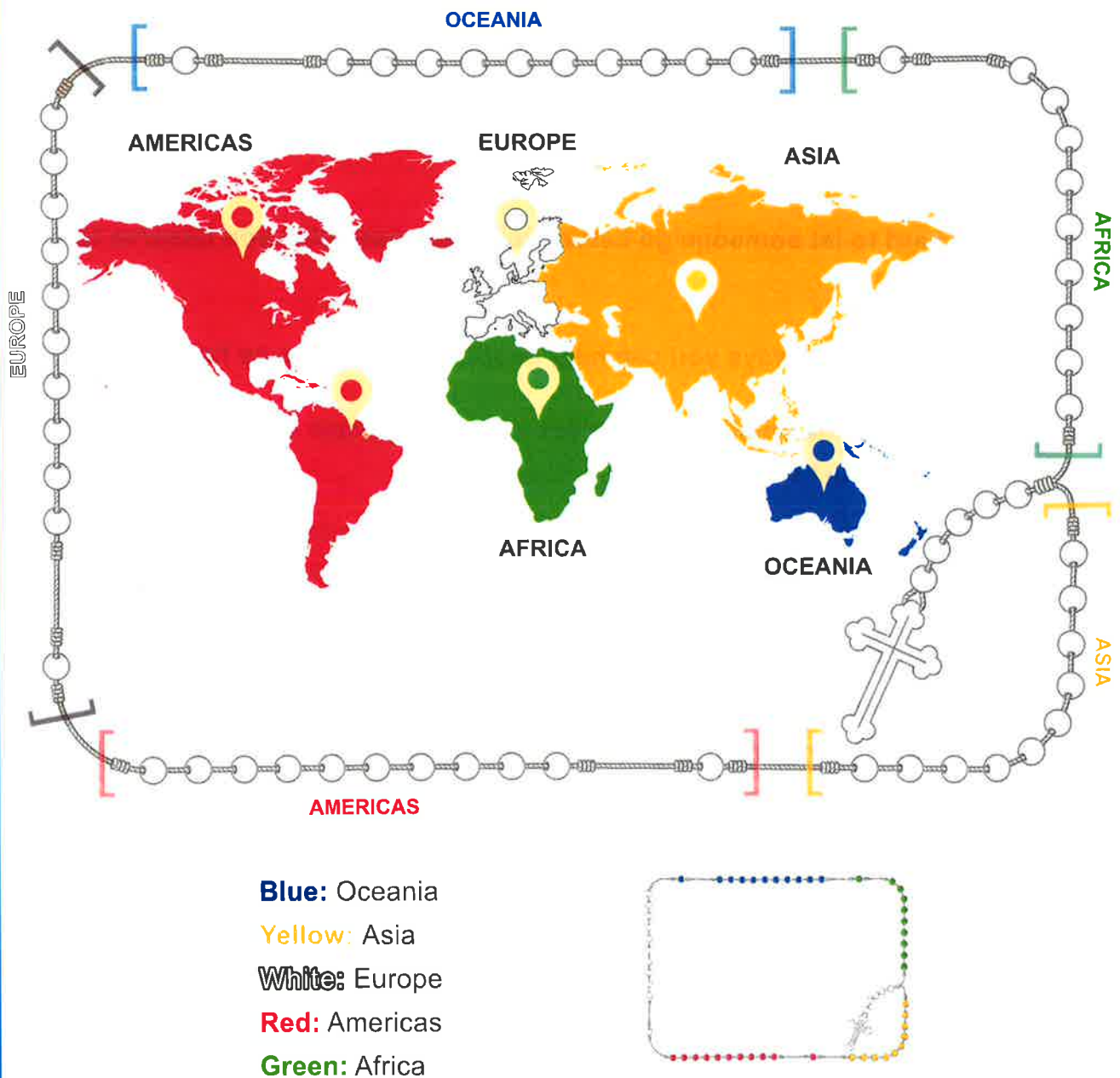
**Dear God,
He's the One who sees me through,
Jesus lives, I know it's true.
With loving kindness, he smiles on me.
Because he died, I am free.
Lord, for all, I thank you so,
I know you'll never let me go! Amen.**





A ROSARY FOR THE WORLD

In today's Psalm (Psalm 117), we hear: *"Praise the Lord, all you nations; glorify him, all you peoples!"* One way we can praise the Lord is by praying the Rosary. Below is an image of what is called the "World Mission Rosary." Each decade is a different color to represent a different part of the world. As you pray each decade, you are praying for that part of the world and all the people within it. Color the beads and say a prayer for that part of the world as you go.



Week Thirty-Four

Days 232-238



Exile Narrative: Jeremiah 9–21 | Supplemental: Ezekiel 39–48; Daniel 1–2; Proverbs 15:1–28

LISTEN! GOD WILL TEACH HIS CHILDREN WELL



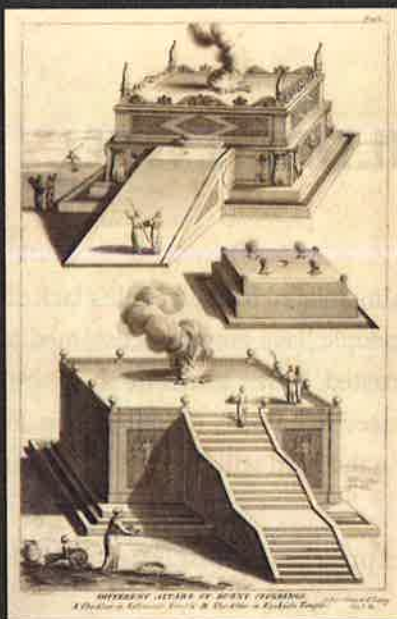
Jeremiah on the Ruins of Jerusalem
by Horace Vernet

Proverbs 15:9–12 touches on the virtue of docility, the ability to be taught. A person with a docile heart is open to whatever God wishes to teach him or her. Our readings in Jeremiah and Ezekiel repeatedly point out that this virtue is ignored and suppressed by the people of Israel. The people and rulers will not heed God's voice given through these prophets. That is why judgment comes upon the nation.

- Jeremiah speaks of something related to the people's lack of docility to God's will. The people have grown accustomed to falsehood and cannot be trusted. When someone shows he or she is not trustworthy, we need to be wary of that person. People who break their promises to the Lord will break their promises to others.
- In Jeremiah 11, the prophet preaches against Israel and Judah for violating the covenant.
- This condemnation leads to a plot against Jeremiah. People try to kill him.
- Jeremiah eventually is taken to Egypt, where he will die in exile.
- It may seem that Jeremiah dies a failure. He preaches for nearly fifty years and no one seems to listen. Like Jesus, he speaks the truth and is hated for it.
- Ezekiel's vision of God's glory returning to the rebuilt Temple contrasts with his earlier vision of the Lord's glory departing from it due to the people's idolatry.
- Ezekiel says those who enter the Temple through the north gate will exit through the south, and those who enter through the south gate will exit through the north. When one enters into the Lord's presence and worships him, he cannot leave the same way he came.
- It should be the same for us. We should leave Mass transformed.
- At the conclusion of Ezekiel is an image of water running from underneath the right side of the Temple to the east. This living water will bring life to the sea. This is a prophecy of how the Lord will both bring his people back from Babylon and life to the world in Jesus.

Dive Deeper

In prayer today, consider the way you view the Mass. Are you engaged and participating, or are you just going through the motions? Ask the Lord for the grace to be transformed by being in his presence and worshiping him at Mass.



TEMPLE ALTAR

This image shows an artist's rendition of the altar in the Temple of Solomon (bottom) and the altar as described by the prophet in Ezekiel 43 (top).

Bible Answers

What is the meaning of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2?

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he saw in a dream a statue of different materials (Daniel 2:31–35). Daniel's interpretation describes four successive world powers, followed by a fifth kingdom that will topple them all. The gold head is Babylon; the silver breast and arms are Persia; the bronze belly and thighs are Greece; the iron legs are Rome. It seems the feet of iron and clay are not a kingdom but rather the political fragmentation in the last days.

Daniel 2:44 concludes that God will establish an everlasting kingdom. This fifth kingdom is described as a stone "cut out by no human hand" that broke the statue to dust and "... filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:34–35). This refers to the Church of Jesus.



Scan the QR code to listen to the *Bible in a Year* podcast on the Ascension app, to get exclusive content, and to access transcripts for every episode. Download the reading plan at <https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/>

The Bible in a Year is a daily podcast, produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mike Schmitz, where we read the whole Bible following *The Great Adventure* Bible-study program created by Jeff Cavins. This bulletin was adapted from *The Bible in a Year Companion* books that complement the podcast.

Week 34

Paragraphs 1699–1782



THE CATECHISM IN A YEAR

WITH FR. MIKE SCHMITZ

How We Worship PART TWO: THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY

LIVING MORALLY

Jesus came to set us free from sin so we could live in eternal beatitude in heaven. Because we have been redeemed and God has poured out his Holy Spirit into us, we can live morally. We have been given an intellect, so we can know the good, the true, and the beautiful. Because we are rational beings with wills, we have the freedom to choose life or death.

Keep in Mind

- Jesus reveals who we are, where we are going, and how to get there.
- The Beatitudes reveal that we are made to know, love, and serve God in this world and be happy with him forever in heaven.
- True happiness is not pleasure or comfort but “beatitude,” the ultimate good to which God calls us.
- We have *intellect*, the ability to understand, know, and evaluate.
- We have *free will*, the freedom to choose between good and evil.
- Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we want but to do what we ought.
- While certain factors reduce culpability, freedom makes us moral subjects who have responsibility for our choices.
- Sin darkens our intellect and weakens our will; the more we choose sin, the more enslaved we become.
- Moral laws are guideposts that enable us to live with freedom and joy.
- The morality of an act is based upon three objective elements: “the object chosen” (the act itself), “the intention,” and “the circumstances of the action” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1750).
- All three must be morally good.



St. Paul in Prison
by Rembrandt van Rijn (1627)

Dive Deeper

Rembrandt painted this memorable work of art of St. Paul writing in prison. The Church reminds us that the real threat to human freedom is not physical chains used in prisons, but sin. In Christ, St. Paul is free (see CCC 1740).

Freedom is choosing to do what we *ought* to do, not doing whatever we want. How does this idea change your perception of freedom? How does our culture regard true freedom versus false freedom?

- “The end does not justify the means” that “one may not do evil so that good may result from it” (CCC 1753, 1756).
- If the object chosen is immoral, good intentions and circumstances cannot make the act moral.
- An immoral intention or circumstance can make the whole act immoral.
- Our passions are neutral, but our choices develop them toward vice or virtue.
- “The most fundamental passion is love . . . to will the good of another” (CCC 1765–1766).
- The goal is for our intellect to apprehend the true good; our will to choose it; and our passions to desire it.
- Conscience is “a judgment of reason” to determine right and wrong (CCC 1778).
- We are obligated to form our consciences so they will not be malformed, numbed, or deafened.
- The grace of God gives us the capacity to do what we ought to do.

Use the space below to reflect on this week's content.

Take It to Prayer

God our Father, the world offers so many alternatives to your truth. Please help us to choose you and live moral lives. We pray this through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.



The best place to listen along is the Ascension app. Scan the QR code to get exclusive bonus content and transcripts for every episode.

The Catechism in a Year is a daily podcast produced by Ascension and hosted by Fr. Mike Schmitz. It helps us understand what it means to be Catholic by reading the entire *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and allowing those truths to shape our lives. This bulletin was adapted from the books that complement the podcast: *The Catechism in a Year Companions* by Petroc Willey, Fr. Mike Schmitz, and Matthew Doeing.