**Opening Prayer Service**

**First Reconciliation Parent Meeting 2015**

Leader: Welcome! Let us all begin with the World Meeting of Families Prayer found on the colored half sheets in front of you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

**[All: make the sign of the cross and recite prayer from handout]**

Reader: Please stand for the Gospel reading.

**[All: Stand]**

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according Matthew *18:1-5, 10, 12-14*

The disciples approached Jesus and said,
"Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"
He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said,
"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children,
you will not enter Kingdom of heaven.
Whoever becomes humble like this child
is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones,
for I say to you that their angels in heaven
always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.
What is your opinion?
If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray,
will he leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray?
And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over
it than the ninety-nine that did not stray.
In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father
that one of these little ones be lost."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.
**All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Leader: You may be seated. Please take a moment for silent reflection and think what the Lord may have been trying to speak to you in that reading. It might be just one word that stood out to you or an image that came to mind when you heard the reading.

[Pause for silent reflection.]

Leader: We will now listen to the reading again once more, slowly. If you didn’t have anything come to mind the first time you heard the reading, pay extra attention this time. For those who did notice something the first time, see if what you noticed changes or deepens. You may remain seated. Please close your eyes for this reading.

Reader: [Read previous reading again.]

Leader: You may open your eyes. Every table should have about 5 people sitting around it. If you don’t, please move to a table now where you are near others for discussion. [Pause.] Take note also of the picture found in the center of each of your tables. You may also want to refer to this during the discussion; it is an image created to reflect this reading from scripture. Take a moment to introduce yourself to the people you are sitting with. Then share at least one thing you felt the Lord was trying to say to you through this reading. It could just be one word that stands out to you, or maybe it’s a picture in your mind. We will take about 10 minutes now to discuss.

[All: Round table discussion.]

Leader: Do I have any volunteers who would like to share one thing that their table discussed? What significance did this reading have for those at your table?

[All: Share responses.]

Leader: This is a simplified version of a very old tradition in the church called *lectio divina*, Latin for “divine reading.” This is a good way to approach any reading of the bible, and you are encouraged to incorporate this method into your own personal or family prayer time. In *lectio* divina, we prayerfully open our minds to what the Lord might be trying to say to us at a particular time with a particular passage from the bible. You don’t have to discuss your experiences with another person, but sometimes discussion or journaling can help bring more depth to your prayerful reading of scripture. If there is one thing I would like you to take away from this experience, it’s that scripture is the living word of God which is applicable in all our lives today, and we can all benefit from spending time with Our Lord in the sacred text.

As you walk with your children this year preparing them for the sacraments, foster in them a love for Jesus in the sacraments and in the word of God in scripture. They will all have a friend in Jesus. Tonight we will learn about how Jesus can be our dearest companion in the confessional.

**Closing Prayer**

Reader: Lord, be with us in our meeting tonight.

Help us to open our hearts to what the Lord is inviting

Each of us to in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In a special way, let your Holy Spirit rest over Emily

And Fr. Jim and guide their words tonight that they

Might speak the truth to us in love. Help us to

Encourage our children to be their very best this year

And guide us as we prepare them for the Sacrament

Of Reconciliation.

**All: Amen.**

Reader: Our Lady of Good Help,

**All: Pray for Us!**

Reader: Guardian Angels,

**All: Pray for us!**

Reader: St. Thomas More,

**All: Pray for us!**

Reader: May we always walk in the footsteps of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**All: Amen.**

[All: make the sign of the Cross]

**Additional Reflection Points on the Scripture Reading**

Leader: We are gathered here tonight to learn what is required of us as a community to help prepare your children to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What could this Gospel reading have to do with that? We see two important images in the reading: children and sheep. We also hear Jesus mention the angels in heaven. We learn from the example of the children invited to come to Jesus that he loves us when we are humble and live with eyes wide open in faith.

Children have great imaginations and therefore are open to new possibilities. They are drawn to beautiful things, want to know the truth about things (they are always asking “Why?”), and they seek goodness in other human beings. This is because Our Lord created all of us that way, to hunger for those things. This is good. But sometimes we can fall away from that original plan for who we were created to be. This is where sin enters the picture. Sin is the rift between God and man, it slowly separates us from feeling close to the One Who created us and loves us. This is when we must remember the beautiful truth of our tradition as Catholics: God loves a humble heart and he is waiting for us to come back to him. This year, we must strive to work at cultivating humility and to nurture humility in our children as well. Humility is a necessary condition of the heart for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Secondly, we remember the image of the sheep. God cares about the lost sheep, he cares about the one who has been separated from him. Whether it is a parent who hasn’t gone to the Sacrament of Reconciliation in many years or the child who has never received the sacrament for the first time, the Lord is waiting, in the person of the priest in the confessional, for the person to be reunited with Him in love. We bring Our God great joy by being found—by coming home to Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

And finally, the angels in heaven…what do they have to do with this reading and with our lives? As it says in the reading, every person has an angel who is responsible for his or her wellbeing. We can call upon our Guardian Angel for anything we might need, and that angel is given special graces by God to help us in our lives. They are in close communion with God and can help us return to God. They always know the way home. They also watch over each of your children, and they are there to hold each of us accountable for the wellbeing of our child, as we are their caretaker on earth, in collaboration with the child’s Guardian Angel. We must take this responsibility seriously and long for our children to have a close relationship with Our God and to do everything in our power to instill that love of Christ in them and to give them opportunities to grow closer to the Lord. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the quickest, surest way to restore our relationship with God, and as parents and guardians of our children, we should feel a special obligation to provide our children with and encourage them lovingly to participate in this beautiful sacrament of love.