

11:4) so that we may imitate him in bending down to our brothers and sisters, for nothing is more pleasing to the Father than a true sign of mercy" (Misericordia et Misera 16).

REFLECT

Instructions: The leader invites people to take few moments of silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- ◇ What does this gospel passage say to you?
- ◇ Can you see how to go back to these very basic truths of love and mercy and to learn again how to live by them and to be shaped by them?

RESPOND (15 minutes)

No sharing would be complete without a commitment to putting our faith in practice. You may like to share what you have decided upon and /or keep a record of your response.

Think about what God is inviting you to do:

- ◇ Is there someone you need to listen to and to allow to grow in God's love in their own ways and pace?
- ◇ Are there examples of loving communities in your parish? Are you able to acknowledge what they are doing and thank them?

Closing Prayer

The leader, or another member of the group, who has been advised in advance, then leads the group in the closing prayer.

Loving God, teach us to
fast from judging others; feast on Christ dwelling in them
fast from emphasis on differences; feast on the unity of life
fast from apparent darkness; feast on the reality of life
fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness
fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others.
fast from discouragements; feast on hope and enthusiasm.

Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.
(Unknown author)



Diocese of Westminster

Agency for Evangelisation

<http://rcdow.org.uk/faith/small-groups/>

LENT 2017

Proclaim Westminster
building missionary parishes



Week One, Meeting Mercy *In the desert*

GATHER (30 mins)

As this is the first session in this Lenten faith sharing series, take the time to introduce yourselves and, perhaps, about why you said yes to participating in this small community.

Opening prayer

*Grant, almighty God, through our yearly observance of Lent,
that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ
and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.*

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son,

*who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE/Living our faith

Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud

When we daily see so many shocking images on our TV screens - of thousands of migrants crossing the treacherous waves, of children dying of starvation or people living in constantly bombed cities - it can be all too easy to close our eyes and hearts as soon as the TV is switched off. The temptation is to justify our inaction by reasoning that, as individuals, we are helpless—or we project the responsibility for change on to the international community, or the countries involved in a conflict or even the victims of suffering themselves. We can pray for the suffering of others, but what more can we do?

Oskar Schindler was a German industrialist, a womanizing, heavy-drinking, German-Catholic and Nazi Party member who is credited with saving the lives of 1200 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his enamelware and ammunition factories. During the Second World War, many people closed their eyes, hearts and minds to the suffering inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of their countrymen, even their close relatives or neighbours.

So why did this unlikeliest of all role models answer the call of conscience? Was it because he learned at one point that people who were not deemed fit for work were going to be sent to extermination camps and killed? Hundreds more were killed on the streets by the Nazis as they cleared out the ghetto. Schindler had his workers stay at the factory overnight to prevent them coming to any harm. Schindler witnessed the liquidation of the ghetto and was appalled. From that point forward, Schindler changed his mind about the Nazis. He decided to get out and to save as many Jews as he could. Why did he not turn a blind eye like so many of his fellow countrymen?

Schindler was a man all too human, full of flaws, like the rest of us, just an ordinary man. Why did he rise to the highest level of humanity to save the lives of others? Why did he spend everything he had and even risk the lives of his family and himself? Schindler's life story bears witness to goodness, love and compassion, an inspiring evidence of human decency. Louis Bülow said it all, "Oskar Schindler not only saved the lives of 1200 Jews; he saved our faith in humanity".

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections.

Share

1. The temptation not "to get involved" is great. Can you think of a time when you resisted the temptation?
2. Can you think of a time when the actions or words of another challenged you or your living out of the Gospel?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES (45 minutes)

Instructions: Some time before the next meeting, the leader may ask a member of a group to read the Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent Year A.

Gospel Matthew 4:1-11

Take some time for silent reflection after Scripture passage is read; then read the following reflection silently or aloud

When we begin the forty-day Lenten journey, the Scriptures invite us to be united with all who are suffering from starvation, different forms of war, oppression. Also, it invites us to break old models of thinking we might have formed over the years. By doing so, we can make our conscience much sharper and able to see the temptations of our time more clearly. This is a hard and a life-long work. However, we are not alone in this. Jesus also was tempted by Satan throughout his whole life and we can expect the same. The only difference is that our temptations will be shaped by the time we live in and might be not always self-evident.

Pope Francis asks us to go back to very basic truths of love and mercy and to learn again how to live by them and be shaped by them. He invites us to try to discern the working of God in each concrete circumstance and to offer an accompaniment of each other in our parish communities.

By doing so, Pope Francis reminds us of a few truths. The first one is that "time is greater than space" (*Evangelii Gaudium*. 222-225). He means that we should not be trying to fill, or dominate space and shape it as we believe it ought to be shaped. We have to respect the pace and the timing of each person's conversion. There might be a temptation on our part to do otherwise and therefore to deny a genuine sense of belonging within the Church for some people who might feel they are excluded. Feelings of exclusion might be different depending on each person's life situation, but exclusion is always painful.

Our God of mercy and compassion never stops drawing compassionate mercy from us: "*We have learned that God bends down to us (cf. Hosea*