

AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM

PRAYING WITH THE SUNDAY READINGS



Produced by St Beuno's Outreach

Pathways
TO GOD

RATIONALE OF THE PREGO GROUP

In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come. (Evangelii Gaudium)

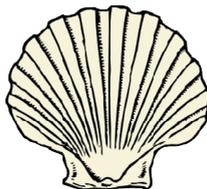
Pope Benedict in his homily at the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, and Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Paragraph I and Paragraph 264) in particular both emphasise that 'the basis of the Church is a personal relationship with God through Christ *shared with others* and then *celebrated*. This leads to a sense of mission arising from a prayerful awareness of the Spirit working in and through us.

This leaflet outlines the method used by the prayer guides of St Beuno's Outreach Team in the Diocese of Wrexham.

BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

The importance of a prayerful environment.

1. A time of stilling; slow entry into prayer.
2. Scripture read out (maybe read it out several times with pauses in between, or read it in different ways.)
3. Invitation to share what went on in prayer, not what we think we should do, not a discussion. No compulsion to do so. You can also use a method similar to Lectio Divina. Or you can look at another reading from scripture, or use the Opening Prayer.
4. Intercessions. Individuals simply just mention a name or intention, and if desired add an *Our Father* or *Hail Mary*.
5. One word or a short phrase to reflect on this time of prayer. This can be followed by a *Glory Be* or other suitable closing prayer.
6. A cup of tea or coffee, which helps to build community.



HOW TO RUN A PREGO GROUP

The 'Prego' material is a weekly leaflet (also known as 'This Sunday') which is prepared by the St Beuno's Outreach Team working in the Catholic diocese of Wrexham in North Wales and uploaded weekly to the Jesuit spirituality website, www.PathwaystoGod.org.

Its purpose is to help individuals and groups pray with the readings of the Sundays, in preparation for a deeper participation in the Mass. We were much encouraged in this work by Pope Benedict who said at his first Mass as Pope:

There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.

This is the essence of our work: to deepen each person's love of and friendship with Christ, and to encourage them to share their faith with others in small groups so as to build the community, that is church, where they live.

The format of a Prego meeting follows from this – an encounter with Christ Jesus and a sharing of our prayer and faith. The basic format is simple, and may last an hour or so, leaving time for a cup of tea or coffee afterwards.

A FEW MORE HINTS

1. If you are beginning a new group, it is important to explain at the beginning that a Prego group is not Bible study or a discussion group, but that it is primarily a place for prayer, and later for sharing other things if one feels comfortable to do so. We come together as a small part of the Church to support each other in our faith. For this reason, it is important that whatever is shared within the room is not then shared outside it but treated with great confidentiality. This preserves each person's freedom to express their thoughts and prayer openly.



2. We usually begin with a period of coming to stillness in the presence of God, perhaps using a stillness exercise, often with some suitable music. We might ask people to look back at the week or month that has gone in the form of a kind of Examen if this seems appropriate. We may also ask them to ponder the grace that they need at this particular time and encourage them to ask the Lord for help in their own words.

This lasts for 5-15 minutes depending on the group – perhaps a shorter time if the group is not used to silent prayer/stillness. Bringing the stillness to a close gently by warning people that it about to end seems helpful e.g. such words as “in a few moments/in a minute, I’ll draw this stillness to a close...”

3. What you do next depends on whether you want to read one of the scripture readings directly into the silence, or to hand out the Prego leaflet so that people have it in front of them if they wish. Often the latter works better, but sometimes, if you are leading an imaginative contemplation of a short gospel for example, you might just read it aloud to them, after warning that you are now going to do this so they may want to be attentive the words you are reading. If you are going to hand out the leaflets you might say something like this at the end of the stillness: “Now, in your own time slowly come back to the presence of each other in this room, and when you are ready, open your eyes” (then you know people are with you before you begin sharing the leaflet). If you read the gospel without this, you may want to read it more than once.

You will learn by experience which readings work best in your group; sometimes the gospel is difficult and we choose the other reading; sometimes the psalm or reading provides an introduction to the gospel.

Flexibility and freedom are very important. This is your group and you know the people best and will learn with God’s help what works for them. God will always outdo the generosity we have in volunteering to lead a group. To prepare to lead the group meeting it really helps to have prayed the leaflet before. And, perhaps at another time, just to have listened to what the Lord is saying to me as I imagine how I might present it to the group. The group will pray in silence for a time, and you may use the suggestions the leaflet offers to help them, or your own insights. Always try to encourage pondering and prayer, an encounter with God, rather than thinking.

4. Sharing: After a time – you will judge yourself how long this is – you may like to invite people to sum up their thoughts, perhaps making a prayer of them to the Lord; after a short while invite them to come out of their silence and to share.

Here it is good to remind people that we listen to what each one shares, rather than entering into dialogue or discussion. What each one shares is what they experienced in their prayer; their own insight and all the insights are right and valid, however different they may be.

It is also important to remind people that there is no obligation to speak, that being here is the most important thing. But that they might wish to bear in mind that the seemingly insignificant thing they may say may be exactly what another person needs to hear. Allow time for people to speak and try not to rush.

Perhaps this part of the meeting is where the Prayer Guide needs to really trust that God is at work – particularly when there are long silences.

If the silence seems awkward after a while, you may wish to ask, “Is there anything else that anyone wishes to say?” so that you can move on. If not, or if someone seems to be trying to work up the courage to speak, it can help to invite them by name – “N., is there anything you wish to share?”

It’s worth repeating here: when it comes to sharing, it is important for each one to speak out of their own prayer experience of this particular scripture or their own life. Be wary of the kind of sharing that is prefaced by “we”... or “they”...

Occasionally, one may have to interrupt very gently to try to encourage someone to talk about themselves and their prayer. If a discussion seems to be starting, you might ask people to defer that to the tea time and use this time to speak more personally.

You might want to thank each person for their sharing, spoken or unspoken, since being together in prayer as a group depends on everyone.



5. After this, a time of intercession sometimes helps a shy person to say something even if they have not spoken up until now. It also encourages us to look out to the needs of the world around us, to the places where we can take the presence of Christ after the group has ended. If people are shy, just ask them to name in a few words what they wish the group to pray for – they do not need to make a complicated “bidding prayer” out of it.

You may like to end this time with an *Our Father* or a *Hail Mary*, depending on what would be appropriate for the group members.

6. Reflection on the meeting: we usually end the meeting after the intercessions by saying something like, “Before we finish, let’s go round the room and ask each person to say, in a word or a short phrase, how they are feeling now at the end of this time of prayer. If you do not wish to say anything, please just say ‘pass’ so that the next person knows to speak; ‘NN would you like to begin?’”.

This helps people to reflect on their experience of the meeting, and to have some idea of how people are with the group – occasionally you have not had the usual words such as: ‘grateful’, ‘peaceful’, ‘rested’, ‘challenged’, but someone who says ‘frustrated’, ‘upset’, ‘in a muddle’ – this clue sometimes helps the Prayer Guide to know who may need help through a quiet private conversation after the meeting, or at another time.

Finally, it can be very helpful to invite the group to pray for each other, saying something like this: “let’s pray for a few moments for each other; for what each one needs for the week ahead... or ... now let’s pray for each other – you may like to pray especially for the person on either side of you. And let’s end with a prayer of praise” – *Glory be to the Father ...*

Encourage people to take the leaflet home and to pray through the week with the readings or to use the short texts or picture on the back. If you are only meeting once a month, you may like to introduce them to the webpage so that can use other leaflets between meetings.



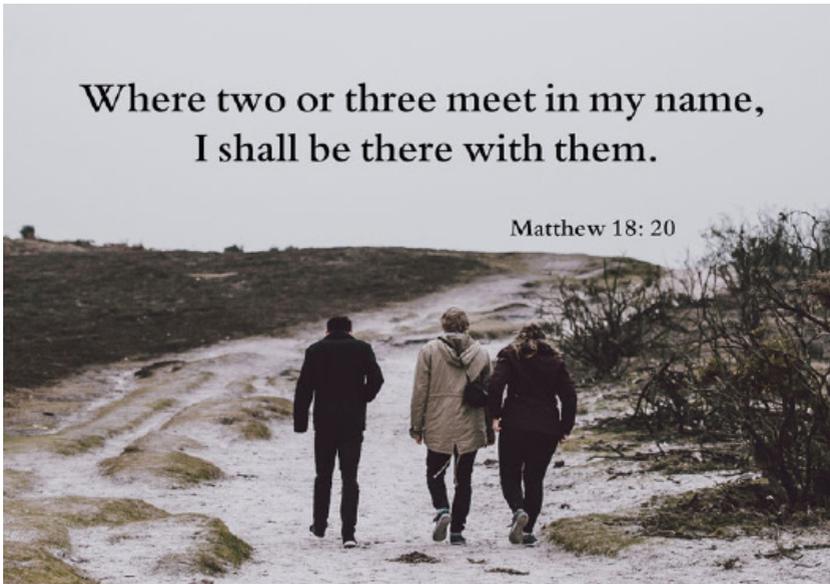
7. End with a cup of tea or coffee. This is where any discussion that was starting in the meeting can happen, and where people can catch up socially and plan for the next meeting. For our communities (where increasingly there is no daily Mass and sometimes not even Mass on Sundays) this is often as important as the prayer.

A COUPLE OF PRACTICAL POINTS:

1. We usually find that a group can be as small as two or three, and as large as even 18.

The 'ideal' number is around 12. But we work with what we have. Always remember – flexibility!

2. We find that it helps to run most groups once every two weeks. However, some of our groups meet every week; others every three weeks, or even monthly.



FIND OUT MORE

The Prego groups were originally set up in the Diocese of Wrexham in North Wales and run by Prayer Guides working with St Beuno's Outreach Team. The leaflets produced there have been found to be of great use to many people in different pastoral situations all over the world. You can find out more about the Prego groups at: stbeunosoutreach.wordpress.com/ or get in touch at saintbeunosoutreach@gmail.com

The reflection sheets can be used to reflect on the Liturgy of the Word, to prepare for the Sunday Mass, or if a person cannot get to Mass for any reason to pray with scripture. A new reflection sheet is published each week for the following Sunday. You can download them from: www.pathwaystogod.org/my-prayer-life/sunday

For more prayer resources including audio, video and downloadable resources, and information about Ignatian spirituality, please explore the Pathways to God website: www.pathwaystogod.org

You can also find a wide range of courses, retreats and workshops in all aspects of Ignatian spirituality at St Beuno's, Wales; Mount Street Jesuit Centre, London and the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow. This includes training courses for prayer guides and people training to be spiritual directors, and a range of retreats for all.



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