

ADVENT RETREAT FOR CATECHISTS

A Christmas Heart Is a Christ-Filled Heart!

Purpose

Reflect on the Christmas Day readings and various other biblical passages dealing with themes of the heart so that participants, in groups, may share their reflections on these passages. This will assist catechists in their preparation to receive Christ in their hearts once again during the Christmas celebration. This retreat will take three hours.

Materials Needed

- A table (four to six feet long) to be used as an altar along with the following:
 - A tablecloth and candles
 - A small manger and any other image of the Nativity or crèche
 - A *Lectionary* opened to the Nativity of the Lord (Mass During the Day)
- A radio with a CD player with religious music for Advent and Christmas
- A table for coffee and already prepared snacks for the day
- Copies of previously selected biblical passages or Bibles, one per participant
- Paper and pencils to take notes
- A separate table with a selection of religious Christmas cards, one per participant

Preparation

- Arrange tables and chairs in the room.
- Play religious music before participants arrive.
- Make sure that both coffee and snacks are ready and served.
- Before the retreat begins, select three readers to read the readings of the Mass During the Day of the Nativity of the Lord (see *Lectionary*).
 - First Reading: Isaiah 52: 7-10. Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97, “All peoples see his glory.”
 - Second Reading: Hebrews 1: 1-6
 - The Gospel according to John 1: 1-18

Schedule of the Day

Welcome, First Reading, and Responsorial Psalm to begin the retreat (15 minutes)

First series of biblical passages (30 minutes)

Second series of biblical passages (30 minutes)

Break—Snacks (15 minutes)

Activity with Christmas cards (30 minutes)

Sharing what participants wrote on Christmas cards (15 minutes)

Third series of biblical passages (30 minutes)

Closing prayer (15 minutes)

Welcome

15 Minutes

After turning the music off and greeting participants, read out loud the theme of the retreat and the purpose of the day. Ask participants to stand up, make the sign of the cross, and recite together “I confess . . .” from the Penitential Rite of the Mass. After a

brief pause, ask them to sit down and listen to the First Reading and the Responsorial Psalm. Invite participants to reflect in silence for a few minutes on the meaning of the reading and our preparation for Christmas.

First Series of Biblical Passages

30 minutes

Give participants the first passages to read and reflect in private:

- Deuteronomy 6:5
- Proverbs 17:22
- Ecclesiasticus 38:18
- Wisdom 2:2

Question to lead biblical reflection:

According to these biblical passages, how should we prepare our hearts to receive Christ during Christmas and what should we avoid?

After 20 minutes of private reflection, ask participants to share the fruits of their reflection with the rest of the group (about 10 minutes).

Second Series of Biblical Passages

30 minutes

Start with the Second Reading of the Mass During the Day of the Nativity of the Lord

Give participants the second series of passages to read and reflect on in private:

- Ecclesiastes 5:20
- Philippians 2:2
- Mark 2:8
- Psalm 22:27

Question to lead the biblical reflection:

According to these biblical passages, how should we prepare our hearts to receive Christ during Christmas and what should we avoid?

After 20 minutes of reflection, participants may share the fruits of their reflection with the group.

Break—Snacks

15 minutes

Activity with Christmas Cards

30 minutes

Ask each person to take a Christmas card and, in the spirit of Christmas, write a personal message to Jesus Christ inside.

Share What Was Written on the Christmas Cards

15 minutes

Afterwards, invite participants to share with the rest of the group why they selected that particular card among all the rest and what was the message they wrote to Jesus. At the end of the activity, all the cards should be placed around the manger or crèche. Following the retreat, participants will take their card home and place it on their Christmas tree, manger, or crèche.

Third Series of Biblical Passages

30 minutes

Start with the Gospel of the Mass During the Day of the Nativity of the Lord. Then give participants the third series of passages to read and reflect on in private:

- Ecclesiasticus 30:22
- Matthew 11:28-30
- 1 Thessalonians 3: 12-13
- Psalm 28:7

Question to lead the biblical reflection:

According to these biblical passages, how should we prepare our hearts to receive Christ during Christmas and what should we avoid?

After 20 minutes, ask participants to share the fruits of their reflection. You have the option of dividing them into small groups—according to the number of people present—and then bringing them together in a plenary session.

Closing Prayer

15 minutes

Ask participants to stand closer to the manger. Before the closing prayer, give them the opportunity to share what they have experienced during these three hours of reflection and how this experience will help them receive Christ in their hearts once again during the Christmas celebrations.

Then ask them to hold hands, forming a circle, and all together pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be for personal intentions.

Close the retreat with Christmas music in the background while participants say their farewells, giving each other the sign of peace.

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