

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ESS MASS JOURNAL



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The ESS Mass Journal**

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Welcome!

We are so excited that you are starting to use your journals for this new liturgical year! We created this booklet to support new members of our community and to provide an opportunity for veteran members to journey deeper into the Word of God. Throughout the next few pages, we will walk you through the foundational components of the ESS Mass Journal, offering you practical and spiritual tools to get the most out of your journal and, even more importantly, your walk with God.

As always, we're sending our hugs and prayers from ESS HQ in Houston!
Kassie & Christie





Getting Started

The core of the ESS Mass journal is the weekly Mass readings followed by space to take notes. We intentionally created this journaling template with four key sections:

- 1 **Scripture Speaks** - rewrite and reflect on a verse that stands out to you
- 2 **Weekly Intentions** - record prayers of petition and praise to focus on during Mass
- 3 **Notes** - journal on the readings or take notes on the homily
- 4 **Go Forth** - reflect on where God is challenging you and commit to taking action

In the following pages, we share prayerful and practical tips for each of these sections and more—let's dive in!

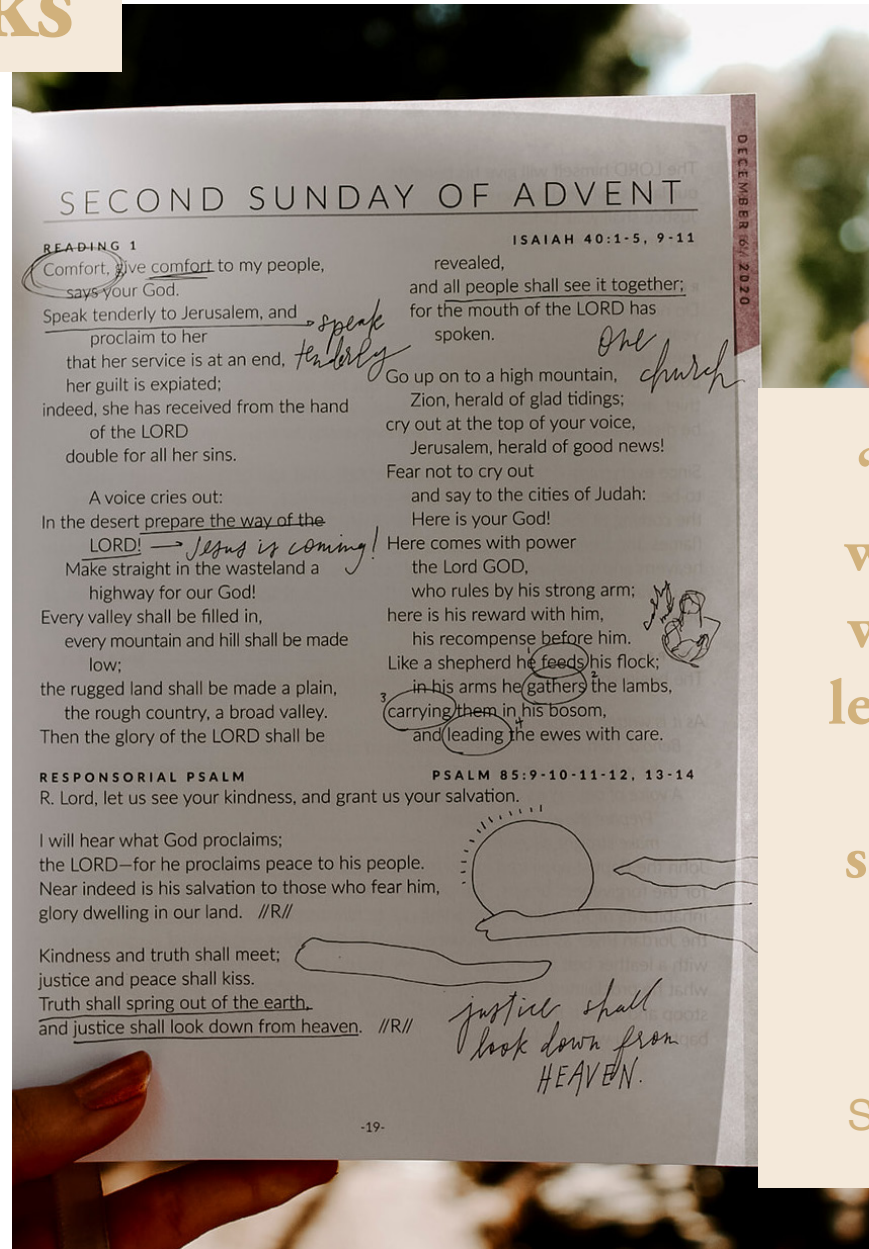


Scripture Speaks

For each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation for the Liturgical Year, the ESS Mass Journal provides the two readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Gospel reading. On the following page, you will find four distinct sections to engage deeply and personally with the weekly readings through reflection and journaling. The first section, “Scripture Speaks,” is a space for you to record verses, words, or themes from the readings that catch your attention.

Weekly Mass Readings

You can read the weekly Mass readings at any point in the week leading up to the designated Sunday. To form a consistent habit, we recommend thinking through your weekly schedule and identifying a regular period when you can come to the Word free of distractions and without feeling rushed. This could be a weekday evening, Saturday morning, or 10-15 minutes before Mass begins. There is no correct answer to when you should read the weekly Mass readings and write down your thoughts. God desires your undivided attention not a strict or perfect schedule—and we recommend approaching this scheduled time with a degree of flexibility because no two weeks look the same. The point isn't to burden yourself with a chore or to make yourself feel guilty but to develop a mindset of intentionality and a deeper desire to spend time with Our Father.



“If we really want to pray, we must first learn to listen: for in the silence of the heart God speaks.”

St. Mother Teresa



Scripture Speaks

Practical Tips & Tricks

When you sit down with the readings, relax your shoulders and take a few deep breaths to help focus your mind on an awareness of God's presence. If your mind begins to wander, don't berate yourself; simply take a few more deep breaths and begin reading. As you approach the Word of God, we encourage you to use an ancient method of reading scripture.

Lectio Divina is a four-step process of:

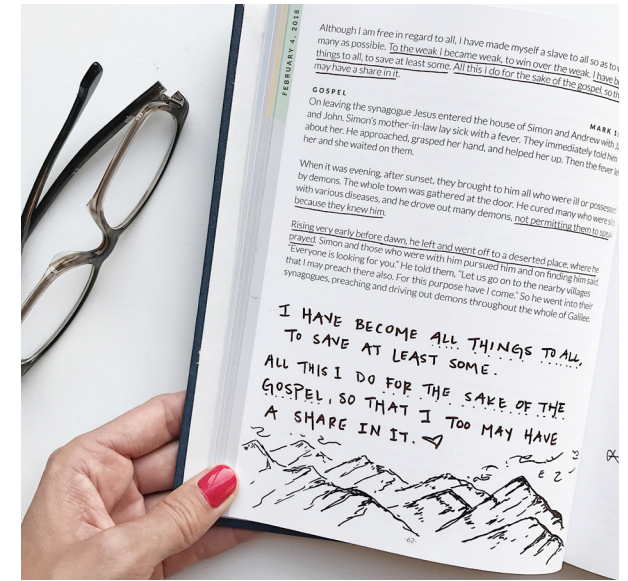
- 1) Reading
- 2) Meditating
- 3) Contemplating
- 4) Praying

A great way to incorporate Lectio Divina is to read through everything once before reading through each scripture passage a second time, highlighting (or underlining) words and phrases that stand out. Use these phrases to ground your meditation and contemplation of the Word. You can find a more in-depth description of Lectio Divina on the USCCB website (<https://www.usccb.org/bible/national-bible-week/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>).

As you continue to dwell on the readings, what—a verse, a word, a theme, a prayerful thought—is your mind especially drawn to? Write down these responses under the “Scripture Speaks” section. This is a space for you to personally encounter God through His Word.

Going Deeper

Think about the difference between hearing and listening, especially with respect to God's Word. Hearing is a passive activity that doesn't require your active attention, whereas listening cognitively and emotionally engages you, making you fully present to the person speaking. In the case of Holy Scripture, the Person speaking to you is God, and although the scriptures are thousands of years old, there is a specific message God intends just for you in this season of your life. The process of Lectio Divina and the recording of your thoughts in the “Scripture Speaks” section of the ESS Mass Journal bear the most fruit when you accept the invitation to listen to what God is telling you specifically.



Weekly Intentions

Overview

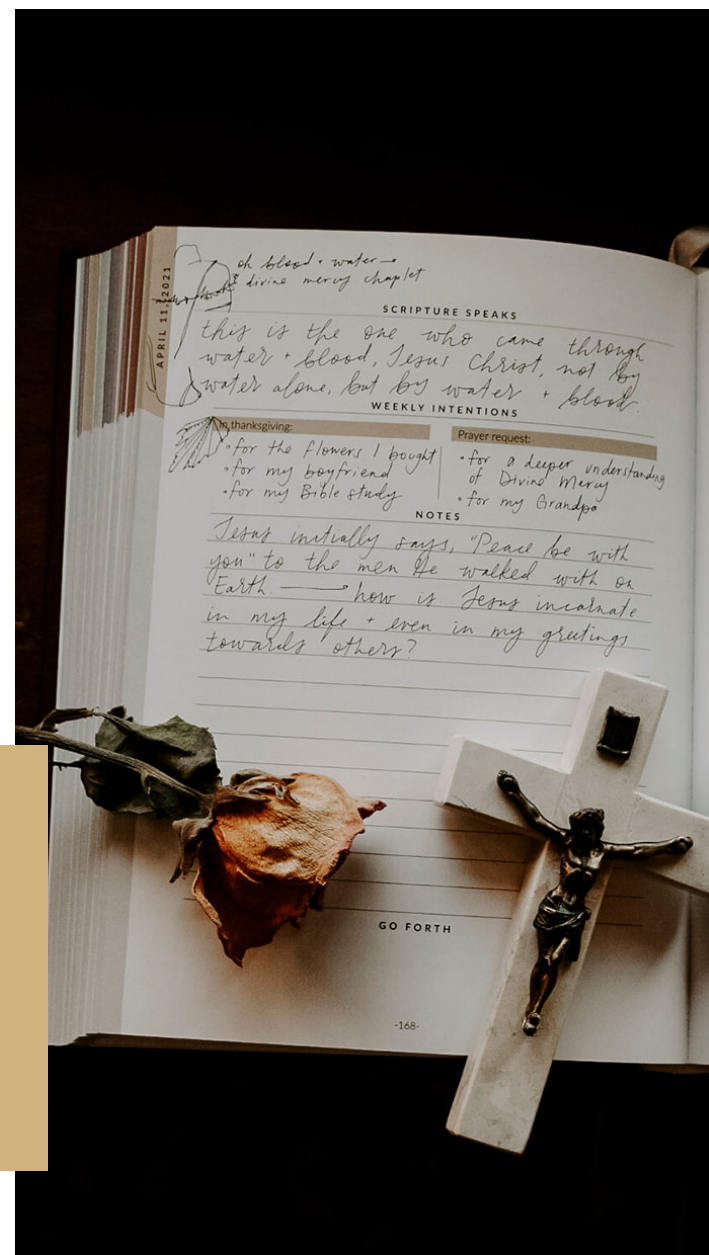
The Bible is filled with stories of needy, broken individuals coming to God on bended knees—sometimes quite literally—with their intentions, desires, and fears. What we read about time and again is God’s generous and loving response. He may not always respond in the way we expect, but we witness His continual presence and His love through His willingness to listen and respond to the needs and desires of His children. Pay attention to these interactions in the weekly Mass readings. This same God is listening to you and desires that you bring your intentions to Him. The “Weekly Intentions” section of the ESS Mass Journal prompts you to come on bended knees to God, petitioning Him with the specific needs and desires in your own life and thanking Him for his continual presence.

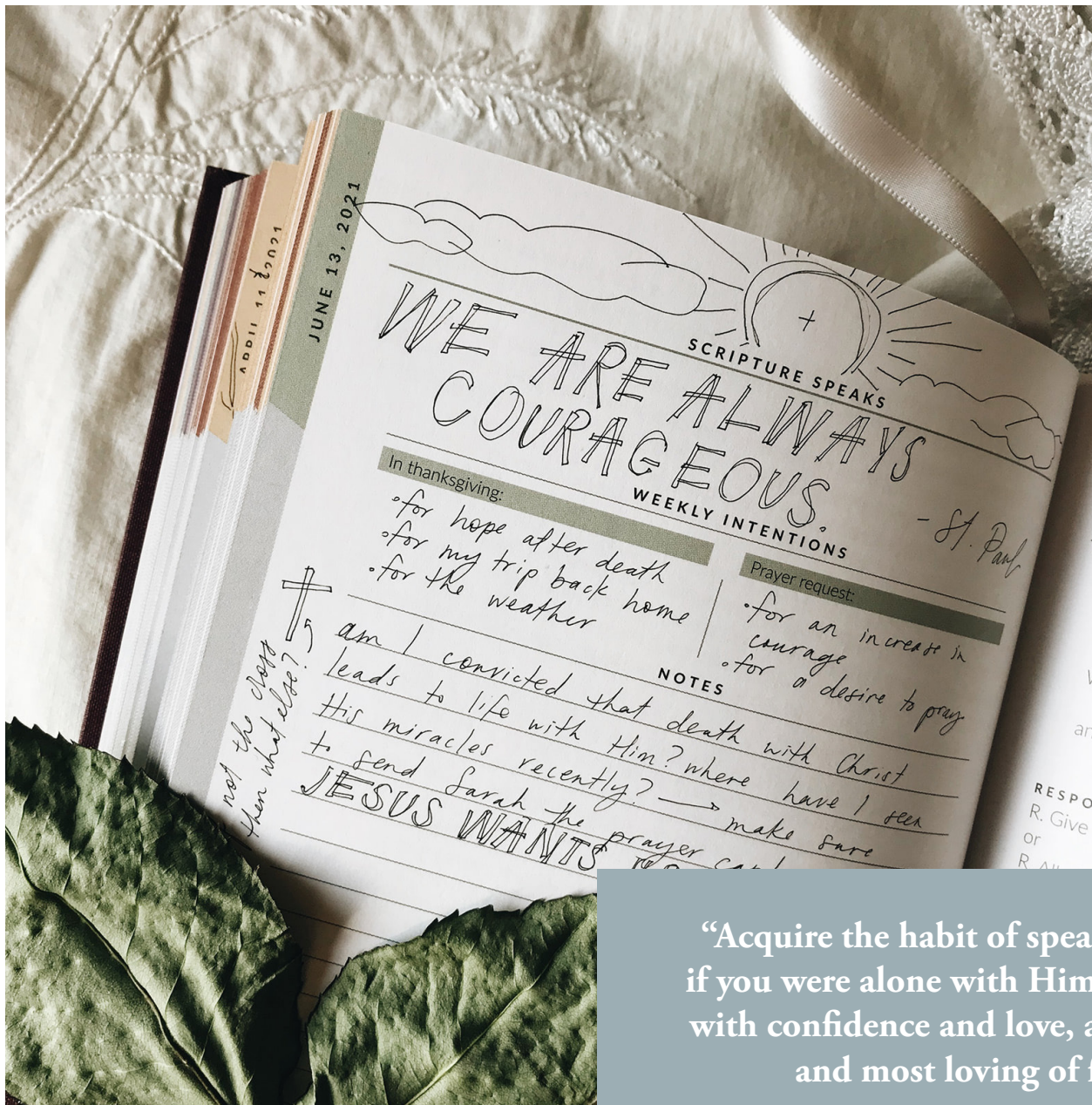
Focus on Gratitude

Gratitude is an essential part of healthy relationships. Gratitude encourages you to appreciate someone’s presence in your life, helping you to recognize their efforts and abiding love. Additionally, it prompts you to accept that you are seen and loved and that your needs and desires are taken seriously. God’s presence in our lives might not always be manifested in the ways our human hearts expect, so it can be tempting at times to think we’ve become invisible or that our deepest desires and aches aren’t important. Although logically we know this to be false, that doesn’t mean it can’t be hard to overcome emotionally—this is where gratitude plays such an important role. The “In Thanksgiving” section is not only intended to encourage you to thank the Father for His many blessings but to help you recognize how God remains attentive and present in your life.

Practical Tips & Tricks

As you fill out your weekly intentions, spend a moment reflecting on the ways God has answered your prayers this past week. It may be helpful to glance back to the previous few weeks to remind yourself of your past prayer requests. Is God working in your life to make Himself more known to you through one of those? We also encourage you to pay attention to the small ways in which God provides for you throughout the week. Maybe you experienced a beautiful sunset at the end of a particularly draining day. You may not have been aware you needed that moment of peace and beauty until God provided it for you; gratitude is just as important when it comes to the smaller moments.





Notes

While the “Scripture Speaks” section of the journal provides you with space to record a verse from the readings, the “Notes” section of the journal allows you to build upon this by bringing your personal excitements, dreams, fears, struggles, and more to the page. The “Notes” section enables you to develop a prayerful written practice that is rooted in close communion with God through the Mass. In this space you are given absolute freedom to talk to God about whatever is on your heart.

“Acquire the habit of speaking to God as if you were alone with Him, familiarly and with confidence and love, as to the dearest and most loving of friends.”

St. Alphonsus Liguori

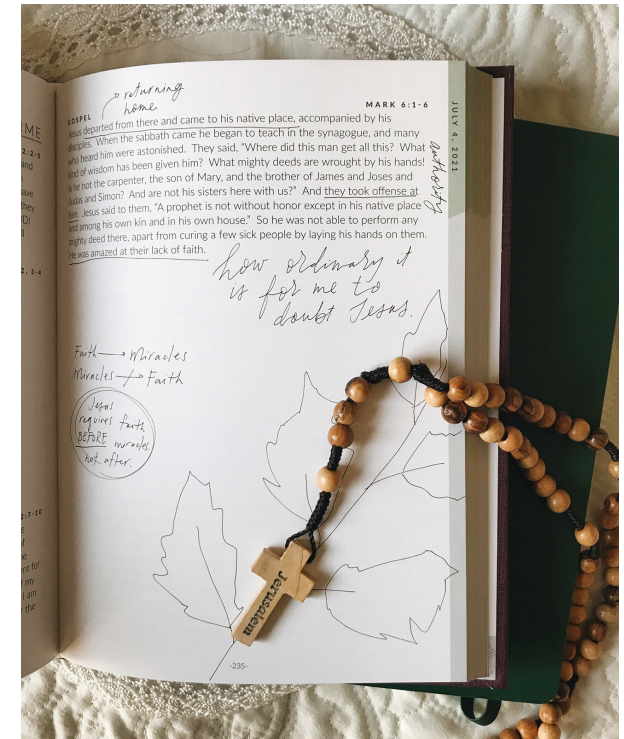
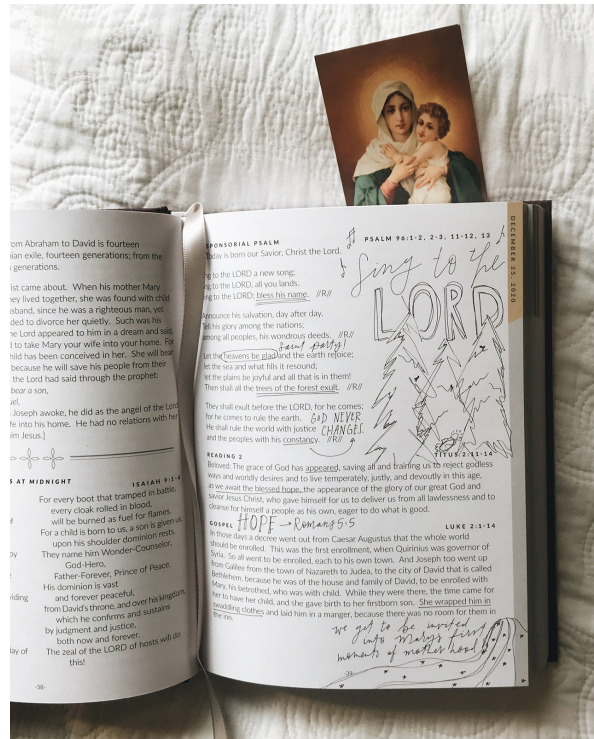


Notes

Journaling

The open-endedness of journaling can be daunting at first! We completely understand this hesitation if journaling is new to you — there is no single “right” way to use the “Notes” section. We don’t provide prompts with the weekly readings because we want you to embrace the freedom and intimacy that comes from dialoguing with God one-on-one.

As you encounter the readings, are there any immediate feelings that arise within you? It’s likely you’ve heard a particular reading or Gospel passage before, but on a certain week something about it may strike a new chord within you. You can simply and beautifully begin by writing about this reaction. Maybe one particular phrase or word drew on a personal association with an emotion or situation that you have been struggling to address. The association may not even be entirely evident, but if you had a personal reaction to it, it is deserving of your time and emotional attention.



Practical Tips & Tricks

- Feel free to journal whenever suits you best.
- Keep your journal somewhere visible throughout the week, like on a coffee table or nightstand, as a reminder to set aside time to pray with the readings.
- When your journaling time is interrupted, ask God to continue revealing His perfect will for you through the daily demands of your vocation.
- If you’re not sure how to start journaling, bring your journal with you to Mass and record the main points of the homily.

Going Deeper

Although the idea of journaling may remind you of a childhood pastime, recent research supports the emotional and mental benefits of journaling. Putting pen to paper in a space that is both personal and private (and this is very important) has been shown to boost communication skills and help individuals process thoughts and experiences, especially those that are more intimate and difficult to discuss. Additionally, a regular journaling habit enables people to analyze patterns and behaviors in their own lives. Now, imagine the additional spiritual benefits that will arise when your most intimate thoughts are placed within the loving safety of our Father’s heart!



Go Forth

Overview

At the bottom of the weekly journaling template is a space for you to “Go Forth” and commit to one concrete action in the upcoming week with the goal of growing closer to God. What is God calling you to say “yes” to this week? This section is best to complete after the other journaling sections, as reflecting on the readings can help you discern if there is a particular aspect of your life where God is calling you to grow closer to Him this week.

Going Deeper

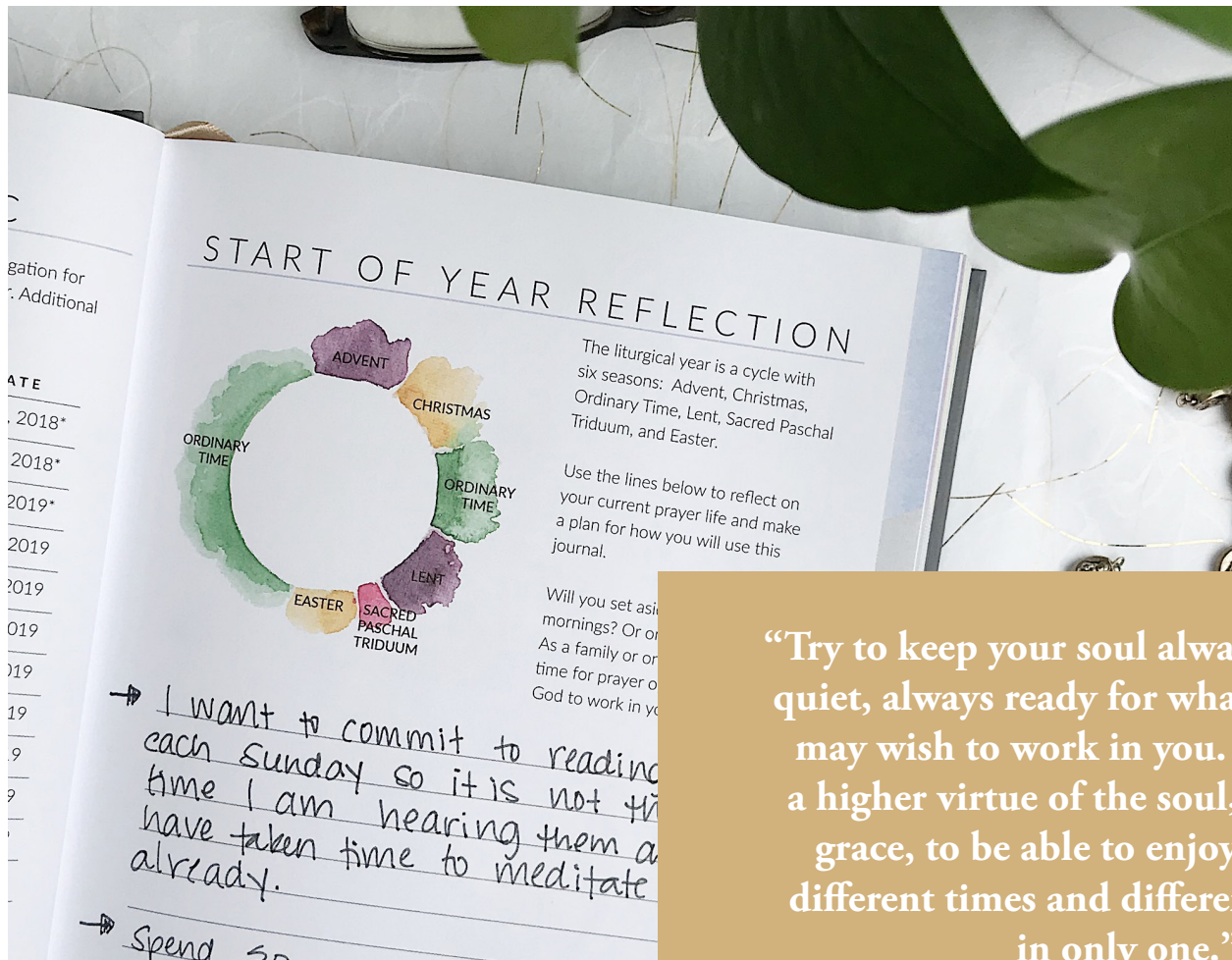
One intentional way to frame the “Go Forth” section is to ground your action in gratitude. There are many different ways you can think about this. For example, if you’ve been coming to God and praying for a greater sense of clarity and direction about the next big decision you need to make, you can make your weekly action to spend thirty minutes in adoration giving thanks to God for all the ways He has guided you in the past. Or, perhaps you’ve been asking for God’s grace to overcome a difficult vice but aren’t sure where to begin. You can make your one weekly action to spend some time reading about a particular saint’s life, thanking God for the support He provides to us through the communion of saints. Framing our actions in gratitude can help us keep God at the center of our actions, rather than falling into an inward focus on self improvement.

“The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for what He is sending us every day in His goodness.”

St. Gianna Beretta Molla



Liturgical Rhythm + Season Reflections



You'll notice that there are different colored tabs on the top right and left corners of each page in the ESS Mass Journal. Each of these colors is tied to a specific liturgical season. The different tabs not only offer a navigational aid, but they ground you in the symbolic and visual nature of the current liturgical season. For example, the color purple used during Advent signifies penance and preparation, while rose, which marks the third week of Advent, symbolizes joy. Additionally, each liturgical season is bookended with a pre- and post-season reflection. The first helps you prepare for the upcoming season and the second prompts you to reflect back in a "mini-Examen" on the graces and growth of the past liturgical season.

“Try to keep your soul always in peace and quiet, always ready for whatever our Lord may wish to work in you. It is certainly a higher virtue of the soul, and a greater grace, to be able to enjoy the Lord in different times and different places than in only one.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola





Liturgical Rhythm + Season Reflections

Start-Of-Season Reflection

As with each section of the ESS Mass Journal, we have built a degree of flexibility into when and how you can use the season introduction reflections. These pages offer brief context for the upcoming weeks and we draw your attention to the duration of the liturgical season, the significance of the seasonal color, the pertinent Gospel readings, and a daily suggested prayer. Finally, the “To Ponder” section prompts you to think, pray, and journal about how you are being called to approach the upcoming weeks.

A great way to avail yourself of the seasonal graces is to sit with these questions and sincerely take them to heart as you respond. In imitation of Our Lady, keep these preparations tucked in your heart as God speaks to you through the upcoming Masses of the current season.

Practical Tips & Tricks

- Some reflection questions will resonate with you and some will not—that’s just fine! Engage and journal with the prompts that you feel tugging at your heart in this season of your faith journey.
- Reflect on the past before jumping into a new season—the reflections at the end of each season encourage you to review your notes from prior weeks, a practice that can reveal broader themes and highlight answered prayers.
- There is no pressure to answer the end-of-season reflection questions in one sitting, rather feel free to come back to these questions throughout the week.

Going Deeper

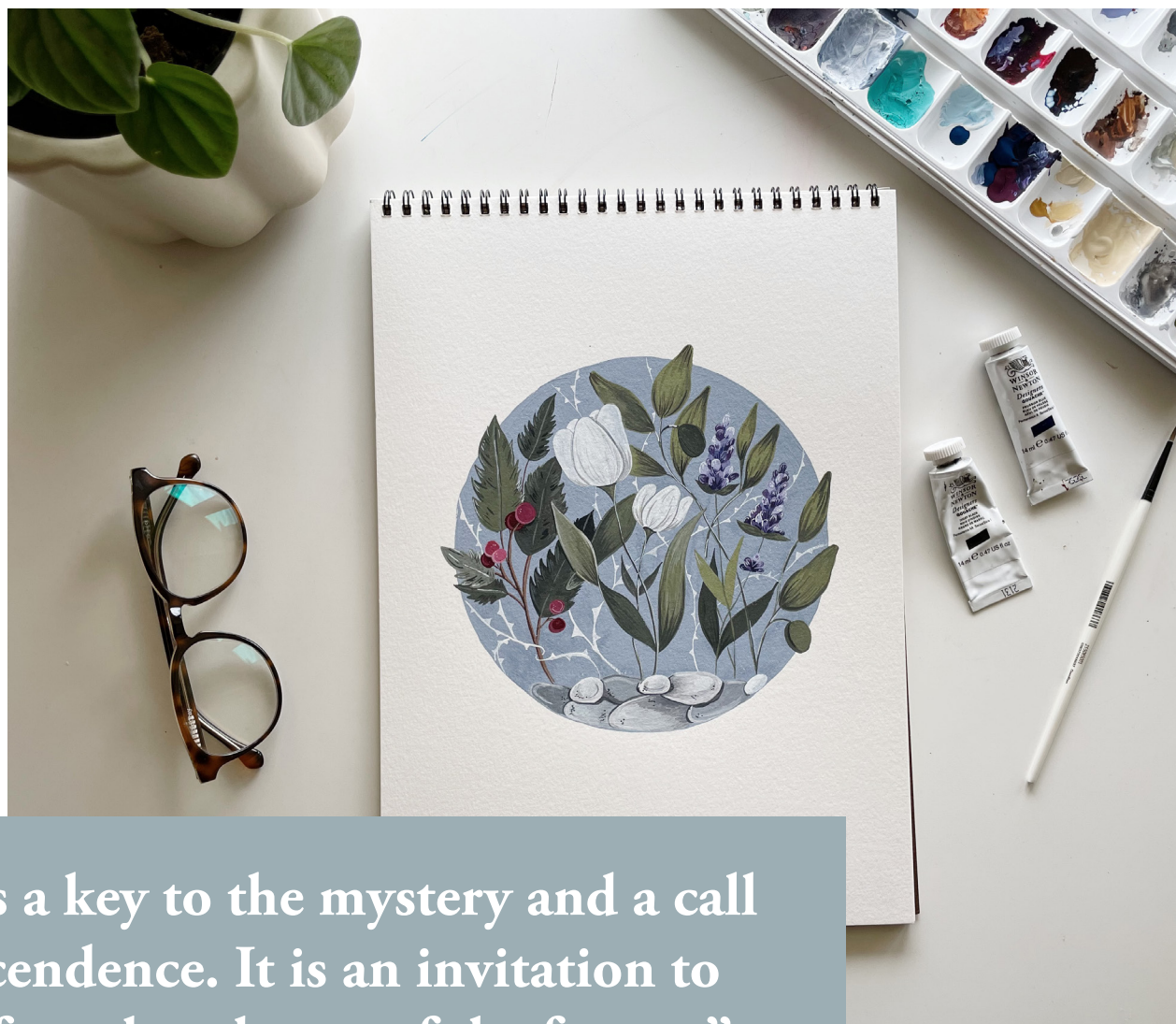
The Church’s sense of time and place is exceptionally unique. Similar to the calendar year, the Church’s seasons ground us, giving us a rhythm through which we can cultivate and experience a deeper sense of ourselves. The yearly seasons—fall, winter, spring, summer—structure our lives in many practical and emotional ways. Yet, the Church’s liturgical year goes even further, guiding us also to form our lives through spiritual awareness and interior growth. The flow of the liturgical seasons is not coincidental. Each season lays the groundwork for the next, providing opportunities for grace throughout the liturgical year. Similar to the Daily Examen, a form of prayerful reflection developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the post-season reflection questions in the ESS Mass Journal are valuable tools that can guide your spiritual awareness. As you move from one season to the next, stay attentive to the ways in which the reflections from the prior season prepare your heart, mind, and soul for the upcoming one.



Beauty

Visio Divina

Just as we can encounter beauty through God's creation or the splendor of a cathedral, we also want you to encounter beauty through your experience with the ESS Mass Journal. Similar to the practice of Lectio Divina we discussed earlier, we encourage you to practice Visio Divina. Throughout the journal, you will find an original illustration for each liturgical season. Take some time and sit with these paintings at the beginning of each new season. Look at their colors and their unique attributes. Is there an element that draws your attention or brings up a memory or emotion? How does the image point you to Christ? This practice of Visio Divina invites us into conversation with God, the author of beauty.



“Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savour life and to dream of the future.”

St. John Paul II, Letter to Artists





Beauty

The Artwork Process

Each year, Christie paints original artwork for the ESS Mass journal. This is a multi-step process rooted in prayer, research, and revision. Of course, prayer is the first step! Part of our prayer is to discern a theme and verse of the year for the upcoming journal, which serves as the foundation and inspiration for the artwork. For example, in the 2021-2022 journal we both felt drawn to the verse “Be still and know that I am God” from Psalm 46. This verse inspired Christie’s artwork of delicate petals, smooth river stones, and thorny vines—each little detail of creation reminding us that true peace and stillness come from God our Creator.

After praying to identify a theme and creative direction for the year, Christie will research the topic—for example, last year she learned about different types of plants native to ancient Israel. This type of research helps bring deeper meaning to each piece. Finally, it is time to put paintbrush to paper! We meet up at a local coffee shop to review rough drafts of each painting and choose the color palette for the book covers. It’s a hands-on process and one of our favorite times of year! We fill the table with sketchbooks and swatches as the vision for the upcoming journal comes to life. Creating these journals is an honor, and it brings us so much joy to share the artwork with you each year!

Going Deeper

The Mass provides an opportunity to experience divine beauty on a very physical and human level. As a Catholic Church, we give—and have given throughout our history—concerted attention to the structuring and decoration of our churches as ways to augment the Liturgies of the Word and Eucharist. We do this because the visceral and bodily encounter with beauty has the distinct ability to enable us to experience a glimpse of the Heavenly Kingdom. The next time you are at Mass, we hope the artistic details in the ESS Mass Journal prompt you to in turn give your attention to the artistry of the space around you. Whether it is a vaulted ceiling or a stained glass window, the beauty around you is an invitation to marvel at the goodness of God, the ultimate Artist.









Conclusion

However you use your Mass journal, our hope is that it fosters a deep encounter with Christ. Wherever you find yourself today—happy or sad, energized or drained, assured or doubtful—Christ offers you his love just as you are. And each day, each Mass, is a chance to begin again.

Thank you for joining us in saying “Yes!” to God, one Sunday at a time!

In thanksgiving,
Kassie & Christie

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