



SECURING OUR
FOUNDATION
BUILDING OUR FUTURE

Devotional Booklet

**There are ten suggested spiritual reflections in this booklet.
Each reflection keys on a different moment in life.**

CONFIRMED YOUTH

YOUNG ADULT

ESTABLISHED SINGLES

YOUNG COUPLES – YOUNG MARRIEDS

MARRIED WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

SINGLE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

PARENTS WITH ADOLESCENTS

PARENTS WITH COLLEGE OR EARLY CAREER CHILDREN

ADULTS WITH GRANDCHILDREN

OLDER ADULTS

Instructions:

1. Find the reflection that best matches your situation in life.
2. Read the Biblical passage for the reflection.
3. Read the short response to the Bible reading.
4. Allow your mind to personalize the homily for your own life as you would any sermon.
5. Pray the prayer provided adding any current concerns you may have.
6. Allow these reflections to prepare you for your response to the “Securing our foundation, Building our future appeal.;

Bonus: Feel free to use the other nine reflections in your moments of devotion as needed.

Confirmed Youth Reflection

Please read **Luke 2. 40-51**. The boy Jesus in the Temple says “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Jesus was more than at home in the Temple. As a recently confirmed young person, you find Mt. Carmel a second home. You’ve spent many hours working with Pastor Johnson and Mrs. Rosnowski exploring your faith. As much as your faith gets lived out at school, at home, with friends and family out and about in the world, Mt. Carmel is the haven in which you were led to a deeper investigation of what faith in God means. You took your Sunday School faith and ran it up against the deep spiritual understandings women and men have written about over the centuries. And then you wrote your own faith statement.

You could say, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Jesus enjoyed the Temple as a youth. He shared there the deepest of understandings of the faith in adulthood. Reflect upon what commitment you can make to enhance our Father’s house at Mt. Carmel.

Prayer: Dear God, continue to transform my maturing faith into the active religious life that echoes Jesus’ youthful time in the Temple. Help me to a deeper yet closeness to You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Young Adult Reflection

Please read **Matthew 19. 16-22**. “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?”

As I meet more and more youth and young adults at Mt. Carmel, I marvel at the take charge, strong intellect, accomplished, and caring people there are. I could easily see each of them responding, “All these I have observed...” if reminded of the key beliefs of our faith.

You can tell that Jesus is fond of the young man who comes to him asking about good deeds in Matthew. Every time Jesus challenges him, the young man pushes deeper. Jesus just seems tickled pink by this man who is willing to inspect his own spiritual interior.

But how wise this young man is who can quite boldly claim that he has kept all of the commandments Jesus names as central, but who knows there is a deeper place yet to go. Jesus has to be thrilled when the young man goes farther with him by asking “What do I still lack?”

The boy asked for the post-graduate course. And, of course, Jesus teaches.

But Jesus feels free to suggest perfection because Jesus has come to offer unconditional love. The young man already is redeemed in Jesus’ eyes. Jesus knows his weakness and presents the perfection challenge aimed at his weakness.

As you have moved years beyond confirmation, the challenges of life have surrounded you. Jesus challenges you to perfection. Rewrite the challenge the young man faced in the terms of your own life. You know what faith challenge would measure up to perfection. You are at full power in your life. Embrace faith perfection.

A prayer: Heavenly Father, your unconditional love picks me up when I am down. Send your Holy Spirit so I can give glimpses of the perfection to which Jesus leads me. Amen.

Established Singles

Please read **Luke 10. 38-42**. “My sister has left me to serve alone.”

This story about Martha and Mary follows the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke’s Gospel and you would think that Jesus would side with Martha who was being a Good Samaritan to Jesus and his traveling party at her home.

Martha, after all, had made them welcome and was so attentive to their needs that she “was distracted with much serving.” And you would think that “much serving” was a point from the Samaritan story that should not be lost on any follower of Jesus.

But some scholars suggest that the real point Jesus was making in both stories was that the people of God are like the beaten man and needed to be more like Mary. The people of God have really fallen among robbers, have been beaten, and left half-dead when Jesus comes upon them. They would never admit their sorry state. They should put themselves at the lowliest spot at Jesus’ feet as Mary did and hear the good news, be redeemed, and receive healing.

Young, established singles in 2011 have just come to full power in the world. They are educated, trained in their jobs, succeeding, and surrounded by friends. But as you reach this stage of “full power” in your life, the next disconcerting realization is that you now come to know how much you don’t know.

But the good news is that Mary has found the place where she can go with what she doesn’t know. And Jesus invites Martha to slow down and join her there.

May you remember that the Christ community at Mt. Carmel actively invites you to join them at Jesus’ feet.

A Prayer: God help me not to let the power you have given me to keep me from joining in thanks and praise to you. May the worship, music, Word and Sacraments community put me close to You and your grace. Amen.

Young Couples – Young Marrieds

Please read **John 2.1-11**. “But you have kept the good wine until now.”

A good bottle of wine isn’t hard to find these days. In fact, select grocery stores and stand-alone wine bars, readily accessible, will teach you how to obtain a very sophisticated taste on your palette.

As a result, this famous story of Jesus at the wedding from John’s Gospel may seem passé to young couples who already know from where their next excellent bottle of wine is coming.

But the message that Jesus gives to the couple whose wedding he celebrates in his lifetime is a message he gives to all couples today.

Jesus, the Messiah, Son of God, the Redeemer reveals his transforming role in the mundane moment of the wedding party and in your mundane moments as well. Jesus, part of the Triune God, walks into everyday life and lifts it to new heights.

The absolutely heady joy of what life can be like when your one and only and you become a couple is spectacular enough. But Jesus joins you in your couple-ness adding even more depth and gravitas and wildly rich realities to your life.

And that reality of the Holy Redeemer deigning to walk with us in our humanity is the central theme of John’s Gospel. For here is the essence of God, who the gospel asserts has been present in every point of grace since the

creation on forward who comes to a wedding with the rest of humanity from his family and he transforms the moment.

Jesus is doing the very same to you and your beloved. Jesus transforms your couple-ness filling it with glimpses of a redeemed future.

A Prayer: Dear God, help us sharpen our vision and see your Son in our midst. May we feel his redemption over and over and over again. Amen.

Married with Young Children

Please read **Matthew 19: 13-15**. “Then children were brought...”

If you have attended a grade school or a middle school music concert recently, you have heard a music teacher or a principal thank the parents for the behind the scenes support they have given their children encouraging them to rehearse their instruments and attend all rehearsals. Parents get their due on Spring Concert night.

But in Matthew 19 parents are really behind the scenes. Note the passive tense of this sentence the gospel writer renders: “Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.” The parents are the unsung actors in this story that gets taught in Sunday School. The visual in every leaflet I’ve ever seen is Jesus sitting on a rock surrounded by children with one in his arms being blessed. And, of course, that is the big point. The parents are out of frame. But think about it. Earlier in chapter 19 adversaries are questioning Jesus’ orthodoxy. The jury is still out on who he really is. And that will remain true to the end of his life.

But here are parents who have heard Jesus teach, they’ve seen the miracles, their hearts have been transformed. And their instincts tell them to bring their children for the blessing.

You are just like them. You have had your heart touched by the Redeemer and you can’t do anything but bring your children into Jesus’ presence here at Mt. Carmel. And you and your family help to make real the larger faith community that gathers the resources so that Mt. Carmel is a great place for children to meet Jesus. And you are not unsung. From your involvement when your child was on the way to baptism to soothing a young one in the pew to ushering them forward for a children’s sermon to thrilling to their singing in choir we see your guiding hand. We see those moments and many more. You’re part of that long line of mothers and fathers who brought their children for the blessing. Unsung no more.

A Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the spiritual and physical gifts that enable me to bring my child into your presence. Bless my child and me so that your redemption is ever clear in our hearts. Amen.

Single with Children

Please read **I King 17. 8-24**. “See, your son lives.”

When you find yourself parenting alone, for whatever reason, there are days when, emotionally at least, you feel like the Widow of Zarephath. Rather than do another favor for anyone, you just have enough resources to prepare a meal for yourself and your child, “that we may eat it, and die.”

A bit over dramatic, but you know the feeling.

For the widow Elijah befriends, things get dire, indeed.

But the heart of this story is that God sends Elijah to pull the widow into a series of miracles. And she finds it within herself to be a part of several moments of grace that become legendary for the people of God.

Be on the lookout for the miracles God is pulling you into. Often the challenges will seem to outnumber the miracles. But the story of the Widow of Zarephath stands as a point of grace that all families can embrace as God's true intention for all parents. Whether in this life or in the promise of the resurrection the miracle of redemption and grace is ours to cherish.

The very hardest part of all of this is to find it within you to be the vehicle, the vessel to carry the miracle.

As the grace of God is more and more clearly real for you, you will be more able to be the place where God's miracles happen and envelop your child with love.

A Prayer: Dear God, help me with the conflicted and complicated days of my life. Lift me from my moments of sadness and fill me with solace and love. Amen.

Parents With Adolescents

Please read **I Samuel 3. 1-11, 19-21** "If he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.'"

Samuel's birth was an answer to his mother's fervent prayer to God. And the short story is that Hannah brought Samuel to Eli, the priest at the temple, to help him in his old age. Help Eli Samuel does until in the passage you just read, God calls Samuel to succeed Eli.

As I have met teenagers at Mt. Carmel, I have been continually impressed with the gifts they bring to church life. And how many of them take those gifts into the wider community. Choir members who are leads in musicals. Recent confirmands who become eagle scouts. And athletes with state championship performances.

Like Hannah, you, as parents, have begun to see your children step out into the world and make their mark. Often, they turn out to be smarter, stronger, more talented, more swift, and better musicians in their own way than you have been. They are Samuel-like moving from a quiet childhood into an eventful adolescence with key accomplishments.

Like Hannah, you have brought your child into church life and into the public and he or she is beginning to make their contribution.

I'm sure at times, you hold your breath. You speak quietly to your spouse about what your child is becoming. You pray that nothing interrupts their rising trajectory. You mix praise with continued guidance and more and more rare parental pronouncements.

As God's hand guided Samuel, God's grace surrounds your child as they head to adulthood.

A Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give my child your Holy Spirit so that they are fortified in the world. Calm me with your continuous presence so I reflect your love. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Parents With College or Early Career Children

Please read **Matthew 4. 18-22**. “He saw Peter & Andrew... casting a net...”

Peter and Andrew, who are brothers, and James and John with their father Zebedee are all hard at work when Jesus walks among them. As we learn later, in Matthew 13.55, Jesus is the carpenter’s son. Presumably, Jesus knew what hard work was. If Joseph was anything like the carpenters I know, their kids could hang right in with their dad on the job site. Jesus might not have been the master carpenter Joseph was but by the time Jesus walked in the midst of the men by their boats, his hands were as calloused as theirs.

Jesus calls the boys away from their boats pulling them into his Kingdom and knowing that their hard work will help make the Kingdom real to many more people.

Jesus walked among the working men and women of his day and Jesus walks among your working-aged children as they make their way in the world. Your adult children are already a part of the Kingdom of the Redeemed that Jesus created with his selfless love and his disciples and apostles spread across the globe. Your adult children, through their hard work and their family, community, and congregational building efforts, continue the age old tradition of Christians re-making the Kingdom century after century.

Jesus’ presence in the world as a human being and his walk with, teaching of, and service to everyday people is part of the Good News of faith. Jesus experienced the life men and women know, the difficult and the joyous. When he becomes our redeemer, he carries callouses of a life truly lived like we live. His redemption of us is just as real. Jesus walks among your hard-working children to announce that joyous reality.

A Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, guide my child so that they are reminded in the midst of their responsibilities that you love them. Fold their excellence into your Kingdom for all time. Amen.

Adults With Grandchildren

Please read **Luke 2: 22-32**. “He took him up in his arms and blessed God...”

No one sees the future like a grandparent so when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the Temple for a blessing, Simeon recognizes the child as the Messiah and adds a new moment of wonder to his parents. Simeon says, “a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

But then you know the feeling.

As you hold your grandchild in your arms you get visions, too. It’s a mix of memories you have of other children in your life and your own youth and that misty past of family and friends upon which your own life is built. Perhaps your own childhood comes to memory and your own grandparents come into focus. But as you look down at the child you are currently holding, you can see the future. Not the sitcom stereotype of the declaration that this one will be a doctor. But a more general feeling of joy and satisfaction rises that the new, young, talented vanguard of your family is stepping into place.

My parents probably couldn’t have imagined the engineer, K-4 teacher, HR leader, grade school teacher and hi-tech music librarian at NPR as they were holding each of their grandchildren in their infancy. Nor did you have much of a guess about the roles your grandchildren would play in the world to extend and deepen your family’s contribution to Mt. Carmel and the wider community.

Allow Simeon's story of spirit-touched visioning inspire you to see the spiritual impact of your own grandchildren upon the world. See into Jesus' Kingdom's future and be assured that the precious one you hold in your arms will take their place sharing gifts in the community of faith.

A Prayer: Dear God, send your Holy Spirit upon me so I can clearly see your Kingdom and my family's redeemed place in it. Amen.

Older Adult

Please read **Genesis 17. 15-17**. "And Abraham fell on his face and laughed..."

When I was a graduate student, one of my professors asked me to house and dog sit for him and his wife as they went on a long vacation. And one of my most important tasks was to go next door every other evening and visit emeritus professor, Dr. Luther Reed. Dr. Reed was days short of his 99th birthday. His sight was very limited, he walked with great difficulty, and all of his contemporaries had already gone on to heaven. But his intellectual powers were intact and I thoroughly enjoyed the conversations he led me through. And he surprised me by being aware of a column I wrote for the student newspaper. One evening, Dr. Reed told me he wanted to give the students a message on his 99th birthday. He asked me to bring a cassette recorder (you remember what those are) and invite the student body leaders to his home. We turned out and I recorded his address, which he gave, no notes, to the small gathered group. They were words of encouragement and challenge to work harder to be open to God's deepest meaning. I immediately went back to the newspaper office and transcribed the recording for the paper.

I stopped next door to see him shortly after and he thanked me for getting the address printed but then pointed out two places where I had gotten his message wrong. He caught my mistakes when his housekeeper read back to him what he had said. Even at his great age he was as sharp as a tack and I happily made sure the corrections were printed.

You're not 99, but I approach each person older than my 62 years as sages like Dr. Reed, placed in my way to continue to reveal God's love.

Now you might feel like Abraham did in Genesis when God comes to you again in your advancing years. Like he asked Dr. Reed, God asks you to continue to give of yourself. And because the father of Israel, Abraham, fell down laughing at God's suggestion, you can too. But don't be surprised when God comes knocking.

A Prayer: Dear God, ask me what you need me to do but send your Holy Spirit to help me make it so for you. Amen.