

Good Afternoon,

My name is Spencer Penn, and I appreciate this opportunity to share my Lenten Group experience. A good template for my experience comes from our Parish Mission Statement, particularly the last part, that says we work to be the presence of Christ in our World. What exactly does that mean? My Lenten journey was going to help me find out.

I remember getting an email invitation two years ago to a newly forming Lent group that I could not refuse. My high school English teacher, David Mitchell, from over 30 years ago, with whom I have remained friends, also happens to be a member of our parish. By coincidence, we both moved to Chestnut Hill. I was a little intimidated by the prospect of joining a Lent group with strangers specifically to help develop my spirituality. But Teacher Dave, as we referred to him decades ago invited me, so I couldn't say no.

Our Lent group started before the pandemic, and we met in person, and I eagerly read my assignments and made notes in the margins for discussion points when our group met. I can do this, I thought, it's just like the countless literature classes I attended as a high school student and later an undergraduate. But this was different. I was supposed to consider my personal relationship with Jesus in a format entitled *Lectio Divina*, a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

Each week I was encouraged and challenged by my group's facilitator to have a personal conversation with Jesus as a familiar friend to broaden my spirituality and relationship with God. What I found was that I had a new and bigger Catholic family. Via some shared spiritual desire, people who were complete strangers now felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences when interacting with the scripture we were assigned. Many of the readings were about Christ's journey with his apostles up to and including the Resurrection. My Lent group suddenly felt like a very important journey similarly seeking Christ in our world, much like our Mission Prayer.

I also found it helped me develop courage to develop spiritually. I work in Emergency Medicine, and I am responsible for helping to train the next generation of Emergency Medicine Residents. The residency program I am affiliated with is very diverse, but suddenly I managed to find not so much the courage, but the curiosity to talk about God with residents. You know we watch people die together sometimes so this is not so radical for us. The Palestinian woman I assumed was a Muslim is a Christian witness, and I found myself facilitating brief discussions between other Muslim residents and I learned about two residents, a Muslim and a Catholic, who plan to marry. My point is that my Lent group gave me the courage to talk about God in my life, at a time when being Catholic is not always politically popular, and I was met with a refreshing return on my spirituality from other coworkers.

My Lent group has decided to meet for a few more weeks beyond Lent. I continue my journey to help bring the presence of Christ in the world in a more invigorating way. It has expanded my Catholic family, and my personal experience with Christ in my world. I highly recommend my fellow parishioners to consider participating in similar small Lent groups next year.