

ADVENT RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

JOURNEYING THROUGH ADVENT WITH FILM



mcyn

malta catholic youth network



**LIFELONG
CATECHESIS**

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INTRODUCTION

At the start of this advent season, we invite you to journey together with us in discovering 4 attributes that will help us grow deeper in our relationship with God. We will be learning more about hope, faith, joy, and love through an exploration of four movies, whilst remembering that this search can only be satiated by God's grace, in whom we trust gives these precious gifts to those who ask and seek Him.

In the following resources you will find 4 resources with session plans featuring the aims that each exercise tries to reach. The plans are not constructed on talk-style sessions, but each session includes; videos, group discussions, reflections, bible scriptures and other material which can be useful should you wish to expand on specific themes.

This advent resource is aimed at young people aged 16+, however the plans can be altered to fit any age category you may be accompanying. We invite you to read the resources before and to in turn adapt them according to the particular situation of your young people.

Finally, may you be abundantly blessed on this advent journey, and we encourage you to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you into the loving arms of Jesus who desires to be born in each of our hearts!

1ST WEEK OF ADVENT

"I am the Alpha and the Omega - the beginning and the end"

This session explores the Advent theme of 'hope' by making particular reference to scriptural prophecies and promises which provide a strong basis for hope in the Christian life. This exploration shall also be done through a symbolic analysis of the film

Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe.

AIMS

To explore the theme of hope in the Christian life.

To be able to apply the Christian view of Hope to current circumstances.

To discover the relation between Hope and Marian inspiration (LK 1:39).

Resources Needed: Laptop (*with internet connection*), Bible

SESSION PLAN

Prayer:

Invite young people to share a prayer at the beginning of this session. Ask them to pray for the gift of Hope from God.

Introduction, (5 mins):

Begin by making reference to the message which Pope Francis told the delegates of the International Youth Forum (June 22):

“We were called to bring the light of Christ into the darkness of the world. You, dear young people, are called to be light in the dark night experienced by so many of your friends who do not yet know the joy of new life in Jesus”.

Encourage the youths to take a moment to reflect upon the Pope’s message. Here, outline that to be a “light” also means to bring “hope”. But, in order to bring “hope”, we must first have good reasons to “hope”! Do Christians have a good reason to be hopeful? What are these reasons? You may ask these questions, and at once introduce the first activity.

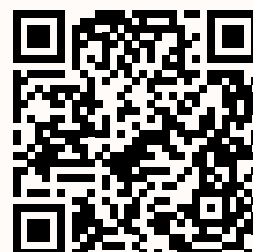
Activity 1, (10 mins): Introduce the film Narnia.

Give the Youths 5 minutes to read and watch videos about the film in case some of them are not familiar with the plot and the characters.

You can make reference to the following links to facilitate their familiarity:



[Film Summary \(Video\)](#)



[Film Plot](#)

If you’ll be using the videos, allow time after for the young people to share with each other what struck them from the video. If you’ll be presenting the content yourself, leave time for any questions the young people may have. You can even ask 1 or 2 young people to give a summary of the film*

Activity 2, (30 mins):

After the above, observe that the characters of Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter keep their “hope” strong because they are told about a “Golden Prophecy”. The Golden Age Prophecy was the ancient prediction of the Golden Age of Narnia. It told of the ending of the unending winter and snow at Aslan’s roar. According to this Prophecy, at some point the true daughters of Eve and Adam will sit once again upon the throne, and the Evil Queen will no longer be in power.

Ask:

How does this Prophecy relate to the Christian narrative?

(i.e., it is symbolic of Christ’s birth on earth for our (and the earth’s) redemption).

1. Divide the youths in groups of 2-4 (i.e., depending on the amount present).

2. Ask each group to read 2 prophecies from the Old Testament which give “hope” because they alluded to the coming of Christ – just as, in Narnia, the Prophecy alludes to the coming of Aslan.

- Genesis 49:10,
- Isaiah 53,
- Isaiah 61,
- Jeremiah 23:5

3. Discussion/ What questions arise in their heart?

Continue by observing that, in Narnia, the reason why the children grow and are not engulfed by the Evil Queen is because they are always willing to trust Aslan. Aslan is a symbolic figure representing Jesus. Are we trusting Jesus enough, especially in those moments in which we feel frustrated, lost, or perhaps sad?

1. Why do we have reason to trust and hope in Jesus at every moment? Which are the promises that Jesus makes to us which give us hope in our lives?

2. Ask each group to read about a few promises that give “hope” which Jesus makes in the New Testament:

- Matthew 28:20,
- John 8:31–32,
- Matthew 11:28–30,
- John 8:12,
- Matthew 6:33,
- Luke 24:49,
- John 14:27–28,
- Revelation 1:17–18,
- Corinthians 1:20.

3. Discussion/ What questions arise in their heart?

Finally, observe that, at the end, Aslan sacrifices his life for Edmund even though Edmund had done a number of evil and treacherous deeds. This event symbolizes Jesus dying on the cross for us even though we have all sinned greatly. They both do it out of love even though they are the last ones that deserve death. This is the ultimate act upon which our “hope” is founded. Our “hope” is founded in God’s infinite love.

So, the final and precious answer is, “yes, we do have good reason to hope!”

Activity 3, (15 mins):

Keeping in mind the above, ask the youths: 1. How can “the light” (i.e., hope) break-through in our Christian lives? (i.e., apart from Scripture, emphasise the importance of a personal/authentic relationship with Jesus).

Ask:

1. Think of ways in which we can bring “hope” to the World today.
2. Each group is to present 2 examples.
3. To help the youths reflect, read out the following statement made by Pope Francis: “**where does Jesus send us?** There are no borders, no limits: he sends us everywhere. The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some (CV 177)”. Here, examples as to where we can “witness Christ” can be: in student organisations, in the parish, school, in our vocation/s, in our family, day-to-day life, with friends, via technology, etc.

*Emphasise that there are different ways to evangelise (i.e., through beauty, through love, through knowledge, etc.). One does not need to explicitly speak of Jesus – Jesus can be “shown” in different ways. We need to “adapt” to each person and circumstance.

Final Reflection: “Mary arose and went with haste” (LK 1:39).

Give context to the above phrase. After, observe how Mary’s “hope” lied in her capacity to bring the Son of God to the world and to, in turn, give hope to the world. This is what encouraged Mary to “arise with Haste!”. We too have good reason to “arise with haste” – we too can be full of hope – because Jesus can and wants to be born in our hearts too! Let us pray so that we may be open enough to “the Light” this Advent.

Prayer:

Invite the groups to write a short prayer on hope.

Additional notes:

Five additional reasons to be ‘hopeful’ that go beyond Scripture:

1. Mass and Holy Communion:

Among all God’s blessings, the greatest is the gift of Jesus Himself in the Eucharist. He is truly in the most Holy Eucharist. What a gift! Every day of our lives the Son of God can descend into the depths of your heart upon receiving Holy Communion. This reality should fill us with abundant hope in this life and for eternal life. Jesus’ promise is filled with hope:

“I am the Bread of life. Whoever eats my Body and drinks my Blood will have everlasting life and I will raise him up on the last day.” (Jn 6).

2. We are gifted with Good Samaritans on the Road of Life:

Another powerful reason for hope is the reality of the Good Samaritans that God, in His infinite goodness and divine Providence, sends us. Rewind the film of your life in the spirit of prayer and awareness and you will notice the many times that God placed in your path some Good Samaritan who helped you in your need, when the skiff of your life was about to be submerged. Our God is not an impersonal God who stays distant from us. Rather, He is actually engaged in our life, so much so that God actually became one of us in the Incarnation. He constantly sends reminders of His presence by the Good Samaritans that lift our load and take us to safety, healing and security. However, we should feel motivated, after having been the recipient of the love of many Good Samaritans, to be transformed into a Good Samaritan for others on the highway of life.

3.Mary: Our Life, Our Joy, and Our Hope:

Saint Bernard penned the beautiful prayer-poem Ave Maris Stella, “Hail, Star of the Sea.” Saint Bernard presents our life as if it were a sailing ship in the midst of the tempestuous sea. The sea-captain is summoned to lift his eyes on high to the star shining in the dark sky. That shining star will lead the captain, sailors, and the ship safely ashore. In the midst of the tempests of life, we are called to raise our eyes to another star in the sea–Stella Maris–that is to say, “Our Lady, Star of the Sea.” It is through her powerful presence and intercession that we will all arrive home safely at the port of salvation, which is God Himself.

4.Divine Mercy:

Another brilliant ray of hope is the doctrine of Divine Mercy as taught by Saint Faustina Kowalska, who was the first to be canonized in the new millennium by Saint Pope John Paul II on Mercy Sunday 2000. The essential message of Divine Mercy is most consoling: Mercy is God’s primary and essential attribute. How might we define mercy? It is God’s overflowing love which is pardoning the sinner. Even the greatest of sinners can become the greatest of saints upon one condition: that they trust in God’s infinite mercy.

5.The Saints Offer Us Prayers, Encouragement, and Friendship:

A crushing loneliness characterizes the modern world. Big cities may have millions of people, but there are many individuals who do not have even one friend, even one person to lend an ear to listen to them. In truth, we are not alone because we belong to a loving family that we call the Church. The Saints, all of them, can intercede if prayed to for intercession. They are eager and happy to give us their love whenever we need!

Do not be afraid, Mary. you will conceive in your womb and bear a son” (Luke 1:30-31).

Let us reflect for a moment upon the above. What did Jesus’ birth mean for Mary? – one woman among the many generations who had awaited this birth? Often, we concentrate on the conception and the birth, and forget about the time in-between – those nine long months when Mary waited for the birth of her child. Mary trusted God enough to become his servant, and yet she must have wondered and worried about the child whom she did not yet know, but who grew within her.

What did Mary do during those nine months? What did she think about on the long nights when her back hurt and she couldn’t sleep? What were her hopes as she spun dreams of the future, and how do her hopes relate to our hopes this Advent so many years later?

Abraham Heschel once said, “We live not by needs alone, but by hopes for that which we do not even know how to utter. A person is what he hopes for”. Something deep and universal in the human person needs hope in order to live, and many things in our society masquerade as hope but are not. One of these is a kind of cheerful and unrealistic optimism. Although there is nothing wrong with optimism, it does not fill that deep need which true hope fills.

Our hope as we await the coming of Christ is something profound -- something woven into the very fabric of our being and only vaguely expressible in the paradoxical continuum of the Christ who was and is and is to come.

Hope allows us already in the present to experience partially the expected fulfilment. This gives a continuity to present and future. That for which we hope is both here and not-yet-here, just as Mary’s child was already present in her womb as he was becoming what he would be.

2ND WEEK OF ADVENT

Seated at the Table – the Christian and the Jedi Apprentice

This session explores the Advent theme of ‘faith’ by making particular reference to the symbolism present in the film

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.

To explore the theme further, reference is also made to St Augustine’s conversion.

AIMS

To explore the meaning of Faith – i.e., also, the different types of faith – exploring “faith” both in ordinary life and in the Christian life

To understand the basis of Faith (i.e., that faith has certain “criteria”), and to understand how to cultivate such a basis

To discover the relation between Faith and Marian inspiration (LK 1:39)

Resources Needed: Laptop (*with internet connection*), Bible, Mobile Phones

SESSION PLAN

Prayer:

Invite young people to share a prayer at the beginning of this session. Ask them to pray for the gift of Faith from God.

Introduction, (5 mins):

Begin by making reference to the following message which Pope Francis told the delegates of the International Youth Forum (June 22) on the Emmaus narrative:

“when the two disciples were seated at table with Jesus, he “took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him”

Encourage the youths to take a moment to reflect upon the Pope’s message. Here, outline that what the Pope has in mind when he says that the “disciples’ eyes were “opened” and they “recognised him” is an instance in which the disciples experienced true “faith” in Jesus. This faith, however, was experienced for a reason. The disciples could “recognise Jesus” only because they were “seated at the table with Him”. Make this observation and at once introduce the first activity.

Activity 1, (10 mins): Exploring the theme of Faith

1. Question: “to have faith” – what do you think it means? – discuss together for 3 mins
2. Divide the youths in groups of 2-4
3. Provide the youths with the following scenario:

Imagine you go to the doctor. When the doctor prescribes you a kind of medicine or makes a certain diagnosis, you often trust him/her, right? However, you never have a 100% guarantee that the doctor is right or correct. The doctor could make a mistake, or worse, he could also be manipulating you for money. This is a possibility. Therefore, we never have a 100% certainty that what the doctor is saying is correct, however, we often (rightfully) trust him/her anyway. To trust means to “have faith”!

After narrating the above, ask each group to think of 2 things / people that they often “have faith in” in their every-day life. Answers can range from: faith in “friends”, faith in “parents”, faith in “science”, faith in “pilots”, faith in the “weather forecast”, etc.

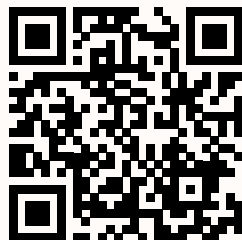
Observe that the reason why we often have faith in these things (i.e., doctors, friends, weather forecast) is because at some point, they proved to us that they are trustworthy. This means that a form of evidence for “faith” is always needed. Faith is not completely blind!

*Here, the task is to reconfigure the idea which the youths may have of “faith”. As persons, we have “faith” in several things, often without realising. Emphasise that “having faith” is a common reality which we all already participate in. Therefore, it is not limited only to God. Emphasise also that “faith” is built on “trust” and “faithfulness” – it takes time, and it requires us to get to know a person. The question, therefore, becomes: how can we get to know God more, so that he can grow “faith” in us?

The film Star Wars can provide some answers to this question.

Activity 2, (10 mins): Introduce the film Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

Give the youths 5 minutes to read and watch videos about the film in case some of them are not familiar with the plot and the characters. Here, emphasise the role of the Jedi and the Jedi apprentices in the film. Additionally, ask the youths to also focus on theme of “faith” present in the film. Make reference to the following video to facilitate familiarity:



Film Summary

Allow time after for the young people to share with each other what struck them from the video – especially the role which they think “faith” plays in the plot. Also allow time for any questions the young people may have. You can even ask 1 or 2 young people to give a summary of the film*

Activity 3, (10 mins):

Observe that in *Star Wars*, the Jedi apprentice needs to learn to open himself to a higher power (i.e., to the Force). Only 'the Force' can guide him and through it he can even accomplish miracles:

Ask:

- How does this experience of the Jedi Apprentice relate to us Christians?

The attitude of the Jedi Apprentice is symbolic of our need to open ourselves to receiving "faith". The Jedi needs to learn how to be "open" in order to experience "the Force". Similarly, we need to learn how to be open to "Jesus" in order to receive "faith". Learning to be "open" is something which takes time and effort. "Faith" is not something which comes second-nature, but it is a gift from God.

Activity 4, (15 mins):

Next, introduce St Augustine to the class. Outline briefly who he was and the tumultuous life he had. He was not always a Christian. In other words, he did not always have "faith"! After this, observe that the following passage is one which Augustine himself wrote after receiving "faith" and converting to Christianity:

"Suddenly (when I was in the garden) I heard the voice of a boy or girl chanting over and over again, "pick it up; read it; pick it up, read it." (Translated from the Latin "Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege" and pronounced "tol-lay lah-jhay"— it means "take up and read.")

I quickly returned to the bench...snatched up the apostle's book...and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:13) I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something light, the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away" - Augustine, Confessions.

Provide each group with 5 mins to reflect upon the above.

Ask:

- Did Augustine start believing in Jesus/did he start having "faith" for no reason or did he have a reason/s? If so, what reason/s did he have?

Augustine started believing in Jesus because he experienced Jesus personally. This means that Augustine first experienced Jesus – that is why he received “faith”.

Ask:

- What made it possible for Augustine to experience Jesus personally and to, in turn, have “faith”?

The reason why Augustine received “faith” is because he was “open” to God. (i.e., fun-fact, Augustine searched for God for over 40 years!). We too can be “open”, but like the Jedi apprentice, we must learn how to be “open”.

Ask:

- Are we being open enough to God? St Paul tells us that “faith” is a “gift” (Ephesians 2:8) – what can we do so that we are more open to receive “faith”? How can we “sit more at the table with Jesus”?

We can read more about the lives of the Saints. Pray more. Ask God to give us “faith” (i.e., Luke 11:13). Change our behaviour – try to be more like Jesus. Be patient and wait (i.e., growth takes time!).

*Here, the task is to show the youths that: 1. “faith” is a gift, 2. that “faith” depends on our openness (God does not impose), 3. that some form of experience of God is needed for us to have “faith”.

God wants us to experience Him, do we want to experience Him?

Final Reflection: “Mary arose and went with haste” (LK 1:39).

Finally, observe that Mary’s “faith” is also one of the virtues which encouraged her to “arise with Haste”. Mary trusted that God has good intentions and will take care of her. We too have good reason to have “faith” in Jesus — and Jesus will give us “faith” if we are open and if we ask Him! Let us pray so that we may be open enough to experience Jesus, to discover His goodness, and to receive the gift of “faith” this Advent.

Prayer:

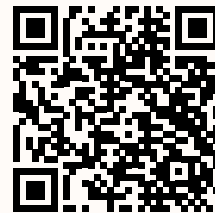
Invite some young people to share a prayer on faith, asking God to grow faith within their hearts.

Additional notes:

The Nature of Faith



[Characteristics of Faith](#)



[More about Faith](#)

1. **Faith is a gift from God**, a virtue gifted by him: “before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and ‘makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.’”

2. **Faith is a human act.** Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. Trusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason.

3. **Faith is certain.** It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie. To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but “the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives.” “Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.”

4. **Faith and science:** “Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth.” Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith.

5. **“Faith seeks understanding”:** it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens “the eyes of your hearts”.

On the relationship between Faith and Reason



Encyclical Letter 'Fides Et Ratio' of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the relationship between Faith and Reason



Summary of the above encyclical



Both faith and reason are sources of authority upon which beliefs can rest

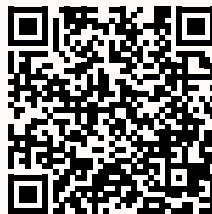
Different Ways to Evangelise

Our call is not only to receive salvation, but we must also work to communicate that salvation to others.

The Way of “Beauty”: the Way of Beauty seems to be a privileged itinerary to get in touch with many of those who face great difficulties in receiving the Church’s teachings, particularly regarding morals. Too often in recent years, the truth has been instrumentalised by ideologies, and the good horizontalized into a merely social act as though charity towards neighbour alone sufficed without being rooted in love of God.

See:

Pope Benedict XVI. “The Way of Beauty.” from On Beauty as a Way to God: Art “Is Like a Door Opened to the Infinite” (August 31, 2011).



[The Via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty](#)

The Way of “Love”: Pope Francis has said that evangelization is not about convincing others with theological arguments, but it is a matter of attraction. People are drawn to goodness and joy. They want to know the secret of those who are capable of great love. On this feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, we are given an example of someone who had this capacity to live a heroic life in an almost childlike way. Known as the “Little Flower,” Therese so trusted God that despite her short life (1873-1897) and enclosure in a Carmelite monastery in France, the universal church recognized her “little way” as a path to full sainthood

See:



[The Way of Love](#)

The Way of “Truth”: 1 Peter 3: 15 — “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you”. It is necessity for any Catholic to be able to respond accurately, authoritatively and with dignity to any challenges made by others regarding the truth and logic of their religion. Here are 12 challenges often made by non-believers which every Christian should be able to answer.

See:



12 Claims every Catholic should be able to answer

Who was St Augustine?

1. Augustine was highly educated

The young Augustine attended school for several years, where he became acquainted with Latin literature. After showing an aptitude for his studies, Augustine was sponsored to continue his education in Carthage, where he studied rhetoric.

2. Bishop Ambrose' influence

It was in Milan than Augustine met the Ambrose, who was then serving as the Bishop of Milan. Whilst Augustine had read and knew about Christian teachings prior to this, it was his encounters with Ambrose that helped re-evaluate his relationship with Christianity.

3. Augustine converted to Christianity in 386

In his Confessions, Augustine wrote an account of his conversion, which he described as being prompted by hearing a child's voice say, “take up and read”. When he did so, he read a passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans.

4. Augustine is venerated by Protestants and Catholics

Augustine was recognised as a Doctor of the Church in 1298 by Pope Boniface VIII and is considered to be the patron saint of theologians, printers and brewers. Whilst his theological teachings and philosophical thoughts have helped shape Catholicism, Augustine is also considered by Protestants to be one of the theological fathers of the Reformation.

5. Patron Saint of Wine Makers?

St. Augustine is the patron of brewers because of his conversion from a former life of loose living, which included parties, entertainment, and worldly ambitions. His complete turnaround and conversion has been an inspiration to many who struggle with a particular vice or habit they long to break.

6. Augustine did not become a Christian right away

Augustine did not become a Christian when he discovered God, because he thought he could never live a pure life. One day, however, he heard about two men who had suddenly been converted on reading the life of St. Antony, and he felt terrible ashamed of himself. "What are we doing?" he cried to his friend Alipius. "Unlearned people are taking Heaven by force, while we, with all our knowledge, are so cowardly that we keep rolling around in the mud of our sins!" Full of bitter sorrow, Augustine flung himself out into the garden and cried out to God, "How long more, O Lord? Why does not this hour put an end to my sins?" Just then he heard a child singing, "Take up and read!" Thinking that God intended him to hear those words, he picked up the book of the Letters of St. Paul, and read the first passage his gaze fell on. It was just what Augustine needed, for in it, St. Paul says to put away all impurity and to live in imitation of Jesus. That did it! From then on, Augustine began a new life.

St Augustine's life is a testimony that it is never too late nor impossible for us to change our lives and grow more holy.

3RD WEEK OF ADVENT

Back to the Shire – Rejoice and exult with all your heart!

This session explores the Advent theme of ‘joy’ by making particular reference to the symbolism present in the film **The Hobbit.**

Particular reference shall be made to the ‘simplicity’ and the sense of ‘community’ practiced by the Hobbits – in contrast to the greed and selfishness of the people of Gondor.

AIMS

- To explore the relationship between “joy” and the “community”
- To understand the importance of “the simple life” – i.e., as one which opens us to receiving divine joy and spreading it.
- To discover the relation between Joy and Marian inspiration (Lk 1:39)

SESSION PLAN

Prayer:

Invite young people to share a prayer at the beginning of this session. Ask them to pray for the gift of Joy from God.

Introduction, (10 mins):

Begin by making reference to the following message which Pope Francis told the delegates of the International Youth Forum (June 22):

Cleopas and the other disciple, after meeting Jesus, felt a vital need to be with their community. [This is because] there can be no true joy unless we share it with others. ... The more we bring him to others, the more we will feel his presence in our lives. The Emmaus account tells us that Jesus lit a fire in the hearts of the disciples (cf. Lk 24:32). As you know, a fire, if it is not to go out, if it is not to turn into ashes, has to spread. So feed the fire of Christ burning in your hearts, and let it spread!

Encourage the youths to take a moment to reflect upon the Pope's message. Here, outline that the Pope is making two primary points. The first has to do with "meeting Jesus". Cleopas and the other disciples feel the need to be with their community only "after meeting Jesus". This means that, when we are close to Jesus, we are given new and reformed desires – desires which were not as strong/or present in us before. One such desire is the desire to be with other persons in a selfless way (i.e., community).

The second point has to do with the relationship between joy and the importance of spreading joy. Experiencing joy and spreading it are related phenomena. We cannot keep the fire that Jesus gives us to ourselves! Indeed, it is only in sharing it with others that it burns brighter – both in our self and in the world.

The question is: how can we both receive and spread this "fire" – this joy – more, so that it does not "turn to ashes"?

Ask this question rhetorically and at once introduce the first activity.

Activity 1, (10 mins): Introduce the film The Hobbit.

Outline that, in this session, you will focus on a specific scene from the film. In The Hobbit, the theme of “joy” – earlier referred to as “the fire” – is eminently present. The film explores how we can experience more joy and also what can stop us from experiencing joy. Watch the following video and take a few minutes to reflect upon the way “joy” is presented:



Thorin and Bilbo Friendship/Thorin death/The Hobbit Battle of Five Armies

After watching the video, allow time for the young people to share with each other what struck them from the video – especially the role which they think “joy” plays in the scene. Also allow time for any questions the young people may have. You can even ask 1 or 2 young people to give a summary of the scene.

Activity 2, (25 mins):

Observe that, in the video, there is a point in which Thorin says: “if more of us valued home above gold, it would be a merrier world (i.e., a more joyous world)”.

Explain that Thorin speaks the above words just before he dies, asking Bilbo’s forgiveness for his harsh words to him before the Battle of the Five Armies. Here, in his speech, Thorin acknowledges that, although in his greed he has looked on Bilbo’s simple goodness with hate, he realises that the world would be a better place with more Bilbos and fewer Thorins. We therefore see a contrast between the simple life of the Hobbits (i.e., ‘home’) and the life of greed, power and selfishness (i.e., gold).

Divide the youths in groups 2-4

Ask:

What is the most important point that Thorin is making here?

Thorin emphasises the importance of “the simple life” above a life that is too concerned with appearing big, important, and powerful. Thorin is trying to tell us that, very often, it is the simple things that matter the most and which make the biggest difference.

Ask:

What exactly do you think are these “simple things” that Thorin has in mind when he mentions “home”? *Hint: it has to do with the way the Hobbits live their life.*

Here, “home” refers to those things which are most natural, and which bring us the most peace. These include: loving each other in our everyday life, appreciating the gifts which are given to us everyday – such as our home, our family, all of nature, our life, our friends, etc.

How does what Thorin says relate to what Pope Francis tells the Youth delegates at the Forum? (i.e., make reference to the initial passage):

When Thorin speaks of “home”, like Pope Francis, he has in mind the community (i.e., not only our biological family). Like Thorin, the Pope is trying to tell us that true joy is experienced only when we live together as ‘one people’ (i.e., one body). This is the simple life that the Hobbits live. But such a simple life is not as easy to live. So here, another fundamental question emerges:

How can we be a community (i.e., a home)? What does it mean for us to live as a community?

For us to be able to live as a community we need to practice certain virtues. We need to be able **to forgive** each other, **to listen** to each other, **to give** to each other, to guide each other, **to encourage** each other, etc. Without these, there will be division. There will be pain. But if we are able to live like this, as Jesus and the Hobbits live, then we will be both spreading and also experiencing the joy of the Gospel. This is why Pope Francis compares “joy” to a “fire”. Like fire, joy needs to spread in order not to die. We can only spread this joy in the presence of others. Let us therefore take a few moments to think about how we can spread the joy that is Jesus!

Activity 3, (15 mins): Living like a Hobbit – Spreading and Receiving Joy

Hobbits are well-known for their simple life. Compared to the Men of Gondor or Rohan, Hobbits seem backward in their desire to live close to the earth, yet they experience the greatest joy. We ourselves are faced by many choices in our life. But we need to ask ourselves, are we living a simple life – a life that gives us the greatest joy?

Note: The life that gives the greatest joy is one which is full of peace and fulfilment, even though it will still be struck by pain and tragedy – it is a life that, amidst everything, keeps us close to God.

Let us ask ourselves: what are those things in our life that might be stopping us from deeply experiencing this divine joy? Is there anything that we are doing which the Hobbits or Jesus would never have done, and hence, which is stopping us from experiencing true joy?

Possible answers:

1. Excessive and unhealthy technology use (i.e., we don't have to dismiss technology altogether, but we can be wise about our use of it)
2. Not taking enough time to appreciate and care for the beauty of nature and the environment (Genesis 2:15)
3. Not reaching out to all sort of people, to try to get to know them, and to bring to them the love of Jesus (i.e., this can be done in different ways – one can bring Jesus by listening, guiding, or encouraging)
4. Are we making enough time to pray and to receive the love of Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit? (i.e., we can receive God's love also through the way we live, not simply through prayer)
5. Are we aware of the reason why the Gospel is called "good news"?
6. Great joy is also found in discerning what Jesus wants us to do or be (our vocation/s) – Jesus wants us to be active in the world in our own unique ways! Are we experiencing joy in the way we live and in our activities? If not, let us take a moment to reflect further on what we can do so that we experience true joy –

We can find joy in caring for the environment, joy in guiding others, joy in witnessing the truth of the Gospel, joy in sharing, joy in helping the poor and needy, joy in being creative, joy in praising God through music or Art, etc.

Final Reflection: “Mary arose and went with haste” (LK 1:39).

Finally, observe that Pope Francis tells us that, as Christians, we “must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!”. If we helped others see the joy of the Gospel – they would join the celebration. But first, in order for us to be joyous, we have to experience the joy ourselves. Mary arose and went with haste because she was filled with Jesus! She was filled with joy! And the beautiful thing is, she was motivated to arise and share this joy with others because she knew that it is only in sharing it, that she could let the fire spread.

Additional notes:

The Simple Life.

Tips on How to Live in the Freedom of Simplicity:

- Buy things for their usefulness, not for status. Own-brands vs Designer Labels.
- Reject anything that is addictive in nature.
- Use time wisely, enjoy the moment. It's not a commodity. It's sacred.
- Develop a habit of giving things away. Sharing belongings.
- Learn to enjoy things without owning or possessing them.
- Enjoy God's Creation. Take a walk outside. Look at God's artistry.
- Avoid the “buy now, pay later” schemes. Don't buy debt.
- Let your “Yes” mean yes and your “No” mean no. [Simplicity of Speech – reduce buts and maybes].
- Reject anything that oppresses others. Buy Fair Trade and ecologically sound products.
- Shun anything that distracts you from seeking God's Kingdom.



[Spirit of Simplicity](#)



[Ownership and the simple life](#)

St' Francis of Assisi: Joy and the Environment / Nature:

St. Francis would eventually be named the patron saint of ecology. He looked upon nature and its beauty as a wondrous creation of God, which needed to be treated with respect. Francis' intimate relationship with nature can be tied to the fact that he lived in extreme poverty, choosing to pray, reflect and even sleep outdoors.

Staying Fit with St. Francis:

Go outdoors for your workout — St. Francis loved spending time in nature. Instead of hitting the treadmill in the gym, go outside and run on a trail. Go for a bike ride. Take a simple stroll. Just spend some time outside. Not only will you get a workout, but you'll get fresh air and experience nature.

Volunteer in your community — St. Francis gave time to help rebuild the church of San Damiano. Find a charity or organization in your community where you can volunteer your time. If you love animals, volunteer at an animal shelter. If you like working with kids, volunteer at a tutoring or after-school program. There are many organizations out there that need volunteers — don't forget your local parish! Maybe one of these programs will capture your heart.

4TH WEEK OF ADVENT

“Clothe Yourselves With Love”

This session explores the Advent theme of ‘love’ by making particular reference to the symbolism present in the **Harry Potter** films.

Particular reference shall be made to some of the sacrificial elements which the films explore – comparing these with particular events from Christ’s life. Ultimately, the primary aim of this session will be to capture the relation between Christian love, joy and human freedom.

AIMS

To explore the relationship between “Christian love” and “sacrifice”.

To understand the centrality of “love” within the Christian framework – i.e., *love as that which primarily opens us to receiving divine joy and salvation (freedom from sin) and, love as a reality which has long-lasting effects (i.e., as opposed to short-term ones).*

To discover the relation between Love and Marian inspiration (Lk 1:39).

SESSION PLAN

Prayer:

Invite young people to share a prayer at the beginning of this session. Ask them to pray for the gift of love from God.

Introduction, (10 mins):

Begin by making reference to the following message which Pope Francis wrote in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (Christ lives!) directed to “to young people and to the entire people of god”:

Saint Paul invites us to strip ourselves of the “old self” and to put on a new self (Col 3:9-10). In explaining what it means to put on that youthfulness “which is being renewed” (v. 10), he mentions “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other if anyone has a complaint against another” (Col 3:12-13). In a word, true youth means having a heart capable of loving, whereas everything that separates us from others makes the soul grow old. And so, he concludes: “above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col3:14).

Encourage the youths to reflect upon the Pope’s message.

Here, outline that the Pope is making two points:

Firstly, he speaks about two distinct types of Self. An old Self and a new Self. The new Self, he says, is a Self who is always “young”.

After saying this, the Pope goes on to make reference to Saint Paul’s description of love. He says, “true youth means having a heart capable of loving” – this heart capable of Christian love belongs to the “new Self”.

Ask:

But what really is “love”? And how can we practice this essential virtue which Christ lived out so perfectly? Ask these two questions rhetorically and at once introduce the first activity.

Activity 1, (15 mins): Introduce the film, Harry Potter

Observe that, in this session, you will focus on a specific theme that is found throughout the film. In Harry Potter, the theme of “love” is eminently present. The film explores what love is, how we can practice it, and the beautiful effects that love has. Watch the following video and take a few minutes to reflect upon the way “love” is presented:



[Watch until 6:58](#)

After watching the video, allow time for the young people to share with each other what struck them from the video – especially to discuss the role which they think “love” plays in the films. Also allow time for any questions the young people may have. You can even ask 1 or 2 young people to give a summary of the scene.

Activity 2, (25 mins): The Different Faces of Love and Its Effects

1. Divide the youths into groups of 2-4
2. Invite the youths to reflect upon the above video and to answer the following questions:
3. In the video we see that, using an Unforgivable curse (i.e., a particularly evil form of dark magic), Voldemort tried to kill baby Harry. But in the first four novels especially, Voldemort was unable to even touch Harry. Why was this?

This is because of the protection caused by Lily Potter’s (i.e., Harry’s mother) loving self-sacrifice. It was love which protected Harry from the evil of Voldemort. Here, read out the following citation from the Film:

Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign...to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever.

Take a moment to reflect upon the above citation.

Ask:

Outline how the depiction of Lily Potter's love for Harry relates to the Christ's love for us. What is similar? How does Lily Potter's love reflect Christian love? And, what about the effects that such a sacrificial love has?

1 (i.e., what is similar). Outline how:

Just how the sacrificial love of Harry's mother protects Harry from the curse, so does Christ's sacrificial love for us deliver us from sin whenever we take the opportunity to repent and confess.

Apart from this, observe that just how Harry Potter was always protected from Voldemort through his mother's love, Christ's love brought down the Holy Spirit – which is with us always, protecting us and giving us the graces that we desperately need.

With regards to Advent especially, Christ's birth is to also be seen as an expression of the Father's love for us. The Father's love is precisely what made it possible for us to be delivered from the curse of the evil one (i.e., the fall). Advent marks the beginning of Christ's ministry – the ministry of love!

2 (i.e., the effects of love): Outline how:

In the film, the effects of love are portrayed as being long-lasting. Love is portrayed as protecting Harry always. Similarly, the effects of Christ's love are so great that, through His love, Christ made it possible for us to move away from our "old Self" and to put on the "new Self" – a Self that is sinless and that is able to love in a perfect and pure way. This transformation from "old self" to "new self" can be experienced (through grace) by anyone, at any time (i.e., before Christ's sacrifice, this transformation could not have been experienced).

Here, further observe that the effects of love are different from the effect which 'food' has, for example – things like food fulfil us only for a moment, then we get hungry again. These effects are temporary. But the effects of actions done out of love – actions such as sharing, guiding, listening, protecting, forgiving, and even dying out of love for our neighbour – leave affects which are eternal.

Finally, observe that it is not only Christ's love which leaves eternal effects – but even our love. In Harry Potter, it is not only Lily Potter who sacrifices her life out of love, but even Harry Potter himself. Harry follows the footsteps of his mother!

Ask:

What effect did Harry's love leave on those around him? And how is Harry's sacrificial love related to our vocation as Christians?

Answer:

All the characters in Harry Potter have the capacity to love. In fact, Harry Potter does the most difficult act of love – he sacrifices his life out of love for others. Harry did this so that those around him would have a certain amount of protection, making it so that the spells Voldemort tried to place on them quickly wore off. **The question here becomes:**

How does this framework relate to the acts of love which we are called personally express?

Answer:

Observe that all expressions of love, big or small, bring others (and us) closer to Jesus. Whenever we bring a person closer to Jesus, we will be helping them be more protected – by virtue of opening them more to God's grace and the Holy Spirit. We too are called to do as Harry did – to love others even at the point of sacrificing our life. This kind of love is not natural – it requires "grace".

Activity 3, (15 mins): Clothing Ourselves with Love Today

In his addressal to the Youths at the Youth Forum, Pope Francis said:

To call you (i.e., us youths) "protagonists" is not just to say something nice about you. Either you are protagonists, or you are not. Either you go ahead of the train or you end up as the final car, dragged along by the rest. Protagonists. You are young people, and young people on the move, in a synodal Church, and this is what you have been thinking about and reflecting on during these past days.

Why does the Pope say that “youths” are protagonists? What does it really mean to be a protagonist in the Church today?

Outline that a protagonist is someone who takes the lead in important matters – someone who does not shy away from doing what is right, and someone who has the courage and the energy to try harder, even when the odds don’t look in their favour. To be a protagonist in the Church is to be like Christ, like His apostles, like all the Saints. For example, it means to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world. The Pope tells you:

“Dear young people, please, do not be bystanders in life”

We need to get involved! To be a Christian is not something to do privately – it is a public experience. Jesus was not a bystander. He got involved in all sectors of life. The reason why the Pope says that it is the youths who are protagonists is because the youths are protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future! Through you, the future enters into the world.

Ask yourselves: How can I be a protagonist of this change in the world today? How can I be involved? Invite the youths to provide at least 4 examples.

Outline that the Pope tells us:

“above all, in one way or another, fight for the common good, serve the poor, be protagonists of the revolution of charity (love) and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial individualism”.

All of these examples which the Pope mentions are an expression of love. Love is the ultimate protagonist of change! To guide others is to love them. But in order to guide, we must first be guided. In order to love, we must first receive God’s love. We cannot give what we do not have:

This Advent, therefore, let us not only try to show love to others, but let us try to first experience the unique, profound, and unconditional love that Jesus has for each of us in a personal way

Let us reflect upon Christ's birth. Let us reflect upon his sacrificial love. Let us take a moment to understand how powerful and effective love is – even when everything else seems futile and weak.

And let us remember that all acts of love are effective, from the big and the small, the loud and the silent. Love has many faces – our task is to understand when and how to love – according to the circumstances.

Final Reflection: “Mary arose and went with haste” (LK 1:39).

In conclusion, outline that, Mary's hastiness was a result of both an eagerness she experienced to show love (Jesus) to others – to bring Christ to the world – and also a result of her joy in the face of God's personal love for her. God chose Mary, and He chooses us too. He loves us as much as He loved her. Jesus wants to be born in us, and He wants us to bring him to others in our own unique ways. Let us therefore pray.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, please help us not be afraid to defend what is true. Help us not ever tire to show the love that you showed and always continue showing with us. Help us speak your Word. Help us clothe ourselves with your love!

BLESSED CHRISTMAS

These sessions were designed to help you and young people in your groups to journey together towards this special feast, Christmas, where the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

We do hope that you will continue to delve deeper into these 4 attributes of hope, faith, joy, and love, and that this celebration of Christ's birth will be a renewed time where together we commit ourselves to allow Christ to be born in our hearts anew!

We wish to end these sessions with a prayer by St. John Paul II:

"And you, Mary, the Virgin of expectation and fulfilment, who hold the secret of Christmas, make us able to recognize in the Child whom you hold in your arms the heralded Saviour, who brings hope and peace to all. With you we worship him and trustingly say: we need You, Redeemer of man, You who know the hopes and fears of our hearts. Come and stay with us, Lord! May the joy of your Nativity reach to the farthest ends of the universe!"

Amen

