



Deepening Parishioners' Understanding of the Sacraments with LECTIO Studies

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Fr. Brian Geary

St. James Church, Belvidere, IL

As the shepherd of the 1,800 families who belong to St. James Church in Belvidere, Illinois, Fr. Brian Geary appreciated his flock’s knowledge of the faith, their familiarity with the rhythm of the Church’s liturgical seasons, and their devotion to service.

At the same time, he sensed that something was lacking. His parishioners did not have a deep understanding of the scriptural roots of the faith—what Fr. Geary calls the “intellectual appropriation” that enriches the faith and helps Catholics get more out of the Mass and sacraments.

To fill that gap, St. James has offered four parishwide LECTIO studies: *Mary*, *Eucharist*, *Salvation*, and *Prayer*, with *Philippians* scheduled for the fall.

“One thing that I love about LECTIO is the connection the series makes between Scripture and the faith,” Fr. Geary said.



“Every pastor wants that intellectual appropriation for his parishioners. LECTIO is ready-made to do that.”



Fr. Brian Geary

He applauded LECTIO's theologians for their "engaging" video presentations that have led group members to new insights and connections.

Additionally, LECTIO's inclusion of sacred art mirrors an effort at St. James to enrich the faith through attention to beauty. When the church building was renovated and expanded seven years ago, oil-on-canvas paintings were added to enhance the worship space.

Moreover, Fr. Geary said that he sees *lectio divina* at work in the series, modeling the practice of spiritual reading, meditation, prayer, and resolution.

"It will be wonderful if participants could practice this prayer form after going through the process," he said.

For each LECTIO study, Fr. Geary committed to attending two to three meetings. After the group watched that week's video, the pastor conducted a question-and-answer session.

"I could see their eyes light up when they understood that Mary was the new Ark of the Covenant," Fr. Geary said.

He has also noticed that daily Mass attendance has been growing among those who have participated in LECTIO studies, and in conversations, parishioners have thanked him for helping them "see the faith in a new way."

"I would greatly encourage offering LECTIO if pastors want their parishioners to be deeply enriched, to get more out of Scripture and homilies, and to develop a deep prayer life," Fr. Geary said.

"One of the attractive things for me," he added, "is that I didn't have to do much prep. The LECTIO theologians do the priests' work for them."



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