

# Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



## Week Thirty Eight Encouragements & Wisdom

*E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.*

In our initial Seattle project at two thirds through the Forty Weeks, some of our participants offered reflections on the spiritual benefits received through Forty Weeks *Sacred Story* prayer. The reflections cover many different and important themes:

Awareness and Attention to Reality

Finding Balance in Life

Concern for Others

Spiritual Growth

Difficulties Encountered

Gratitude and Healings

Intimacy and Friendship with God

God's Love and Mercy

Peace and Hope

The Structure and Routine of Prayer

**Appreciation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist**

**Growth in Self-Understanding**

This week's reflections cover **Appreciation of the Sacraments** and **Growth in Self-Understanding**. As you listen to these reflections, be amazed at how powerfully God is working in all of our lives. The Good News is much more powerful than the bad. Remember, God is healing the world one life at a time while he writes our *Sacred Story*.

## APPRECIATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

1. *Sacred Story* has challenged me to look at myself and see where I need to make changes in my life and why I need to make them. It has also challenged my resistance to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I find myself wanting to increase prayer in my life. I still am having a difficult time making *Sacred Story* a daily practice, but will continue to pray for God's grace and mercy.

**RESPONSE:** *Oftentimes our resistance to Reconciliation is due to fear or shame. Sometimes we just don't understand how it can help us advance spiritually and so we grow lax in our practice. Keep praying for God's grace and mercy and keep up your practice of Reconciliation. You will be graced beyond measure.*

2. *Sacred Story* has opened me up to the possibility of healing from a very deep scar regarding the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Whole Life Confession was such an inspiration and made me think how wonderful it would be to be able to enter into Reconciliation with peace--I haven't been able to yet, but I am definitely working on it.

**RESPONSE:** *I would add that what has opened you up is a new way of understanding the mercy and love of Christ consistent with the Scriptures. Sacred Story seeks to share that Good News. God gives peace and the enemy of human nature inspires fear. Learn the difference and resist the fear so you can heal from that "very deep scar."*

3. I have come to appreciate my faith more, as this discipline has deepened it in a manner that I didn't know was possible. At first, I wasn't sure what would happen and was a little afraid. The meeting, the exercises and the whole life confession have made an impact that has really changed the way I look at myself and my faith journey. I've become more attentive at Mass and have attended Mass more this summer than any other summer in recent memory. Thank you for this marvelous opportunity.

**RESPONSE:** *In Romans (13:11) St. Paul says: "you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." What you are discovering is a living faith and awakening to the presence of God in your life and in the Eucharist. The gift of a living faith will continue to deepen as you stay faithful to the spiritual disciplines St. Ignatius taught us.*

4. (I am) developing a true relationship with Jesus; relating all that happens in my day to the Way of Jesus. It has been very helpful to review my day, identify the blessings and challenges, see the trends, (and) make the connections. All this leads to a more focused sacramental reconciliation. The grace from this sacrament increases hope and provides the grace necessary to living a better life.

**RESPONSE:** *Awakening to our story, seeing the links and understanding how God wants to heal us is a blessing beyond measure. “It increases hope and provides the grace necessary to living a better life.” Does anything more need to be said? Yes—thanks be to God!*

5. *Sacred Story* has been very helpful in making me realize where I need to improve and what to pray for. From my first (whole) life confession, an impossible thing that I was praying for the last ten years has happened in my family recently. I'm very grateful for the people who prayed with me for that to happen. I'm very thankful to God for giving us this chance of reconciliation in my family. I hope and pray it will be a fruitful endeavor for all who are going to be affected by this.

**RESPONSE:** *St. Ignatius was a strategist. His methods are intended to help us “know how to improve and what to pray for.” He was very big on our asking God for very specific graces. We awaken to know our issues and then we can petition God for help. God responds. Keep moving forward.*

6. It is totally different from anything I have ever done to grow in my Catholic faith. It is a different type of prayer discipline which makes me conscious, makes me think of my thoughts, and the impact of a lifetime my words and actions have on those around me. Spiritually, I think I am getting more out of Mass, out of Confession (though I still haven't found my confessor). The *Sacred Story* prayer has opened (me) up (to) the fact that it's not all about me.

**RESPONSE:** *St. Ignatius spent thirty years without understanding how his thoughts and actions were affecting his life. When he first began to “wake up,” his comment was: “what is the new life we are living?” The “new life” was his life of faith in Christ that opened him to his authentic identity. Pray to St. Ignatius in gratitude for your discoveries. Ask him to intercede to God that you stay faithful to these spiritual disciplines that have proven so beneficial to your life.*

7. Never before have I thought of my life as a story, not to mention a sacred one. Now I see my life as a sacred story that God is writing on the world. It is up to me to make sure I don't throw in my own words. The meditations in Part One put me on edge and brought me to face some things that I don't want to face. I have grown since then but still have a ways to go. Telling my whole life story in confession seems to be a step in the right direction.

**RESPONSE:** *Practicing regular Reconciliation is a great way to keep God as author of your sacred story. St. Ignatius ended most of letters with this phrase: “May God help us know his will and give us the grace to follow it.” By understanding your life as a sacred story, you are beginning to understand that Christ's life was THE Sacred Story and he is now inviting you to participate in his work of reconciliation by allowing your life to follow the pattern of his own. Don't worry, you will “throw in your own words” but God will help you know when you are, and*

*give you the grace to erase what is not helpful.*

## SELF-UNDERSTANDING

1. I believe the greatest spiritual benefit to me has been the unfolding understanding of my *sacred story's* connection and purpose to the *Sacred Story* of the entire human race throughout time, and Christ's fulfillment of the Earth's *Sacred Story* through my reconciliation with Christ and all those throughout history who have touched my life and whose lives I have or will touch, to eternity.

**RESPONSE:** *Yes, see the response above. We are all one in Christ Jesus. Everything we do is mystically linked by Christ to the whole creation. You have been given a great grace. Be thankful.*

2. It is truly an awakening and a discovery of how narcissistic I am. But because Jesus is here to help me I have discovered a healing presence for myself. I now can also bring a sense of peace to myself when I am anxious by thinking of God as the Creator. Times of difficulties always will lead to peace.

**RESPONSE:** *Yes, I know. It is not pretty to discover our narcissism! But it leads to life if we allow Christ to unravel our narcissism and by grace, become more selfless and other centered. Be amazed instead of alarmed at your narcissism because by grace, God can transform it.*

3. The spiritual benefit that *Sacred Story* prayer has opened to me is providing a sense of grounding, a means of mindfulness to connect with God in a personal way regarding the daily trials of life, a means to identify wounds from the past and their connection to what generates strong emotion in the present.

**RESPONSE:** *Remember the story of Martha and Mary. Mary was able to sit at Jesus feet. She was grounded in Christ. Resisting the world of "total work" that has ravaged our lives and taking time for quiet openness to Christ, helps us know and see what is most important. Keep moving forward.*

4. I am more open to the *Examen* and what it can do for me and those around me. I am more forgiving and accepting of myself.

**RESPONSE:** *It is God that grants you the grace to be more forgiving and accepting. He loves us so we can gently view our lives from his perspective of compassion. Christ's love and compassion give us the grace and courage to change. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore (Jn. 8: 10-11)."*

5. I have identified my shortcomings. I know I can overcome them by knowing the source, the intensity and the frequency...with practice and with God's grace I know eventually will get better.

**RESPONSE:** *Always focus on the hope that stabilizes your heart with the good news, "I know I will eventually get better." That is the truth! In our discernment lessons, we know fear deceives us with bad news: "You will never get better." God is the author of Truth and all Good News. Rejoice!*

6. Through this experience, I have been able to come to a better understanding of my whole self, my weaknesses, and my potential. Even though I most frequently feel as if I'm simply making a muddle of the whole process, the moments of insight and understanding seem to be occurring with greater frequency. I can't imagine not continuing at this point.

**RESPONSE:** *One of the greatest hurdles any person faces in the process of spiritual maturation is overcoming the fallacy of seeing themselves as either all good or all bad. The truth is that we are a combination of light and darkness because of the original Fall. We seek to grow toward the light and, with God's grace, minimize the effects of sin that darkens our journey of faith. The more you move forward with your Sacred Story prayer, the more the muddle will clear. We are in fact, sinners loved and called by God to work for the Kingdom.*

7. I am able to view my life in a new way. I can see how my narcissism has negatively impacted my daily life and by meditating on Creation, Presence, Memory, Mercy and Eternity, I am feeling its evil effect lessen its grip on me. I feel a renewed purpose with Christ at the center of my life and desire to give myself up to forgiveness, reconciliation and service of others. I may only begin with baby steps, but it is definitely a start in the right direction. Thank you for your guidance!

**RESPONSE:** *Praise be to God!*

