



# The Literary Catholic Parish Program

## HOW TO GET STARTED



# Purpose

The purpose of The Literary Catholic is to build a community inspired to unpack life-changing stories from centuries of Catholic literature, connecting readers to God and inspiring their faith and imagination.

The key is to meet people where they are and move forward together. The Literary Catholic is a way to deliberately schedule downtime and connect with others.



“Accepting oneself does not preclude an attempt to become better.”

*Flannery O'Connor*

## What is Catholic imaginative literature?

Catholic imaginative literature includes fiction, poetry, drama and memoir. Theological, scholarly, or devotional writing can complement the exploration of Catholic imaginative literature.

## Group Structure/Meeting Logistics

- Choose a meeting place, day, time, and frequency. Set a regular schedule monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly with a typical meeting length between one and two hours. Discuss the option of having members bring snacks or drinks to share.
- Choose a group size. Small groups are under 10, and medium groups are 10-15. Larger groups make it difficult to have meaningful conversations, but they can work with a leader.
- Try to make the common space comfortable; create a small space within a bigger room around a table.
- Provide name tags or name tent cards for a new group.

## Leadership Roles

- Moderator responsibilities include facilitating discussions and organizing meeting logistics. *Moderators do not have to be experts*, but they do need the desire to read, have meaningful discussions, and help others. They bring the conversation back to the book.
- Other Roles: Each book or reading selection can have a different volunteer moderator who introduces the book and gives a brief, 5-minute introduction to the author and the historical, cultural, and/or theological context.



## Book Selection

The leader/organizer can pick the first book and then ask for input from the group or vote from suggested reading lists. Try to be flexible and open to suggestions without losing the group's purpose. To give readers time to purchase or borrow books, choose 2-6 months of reading at a time.

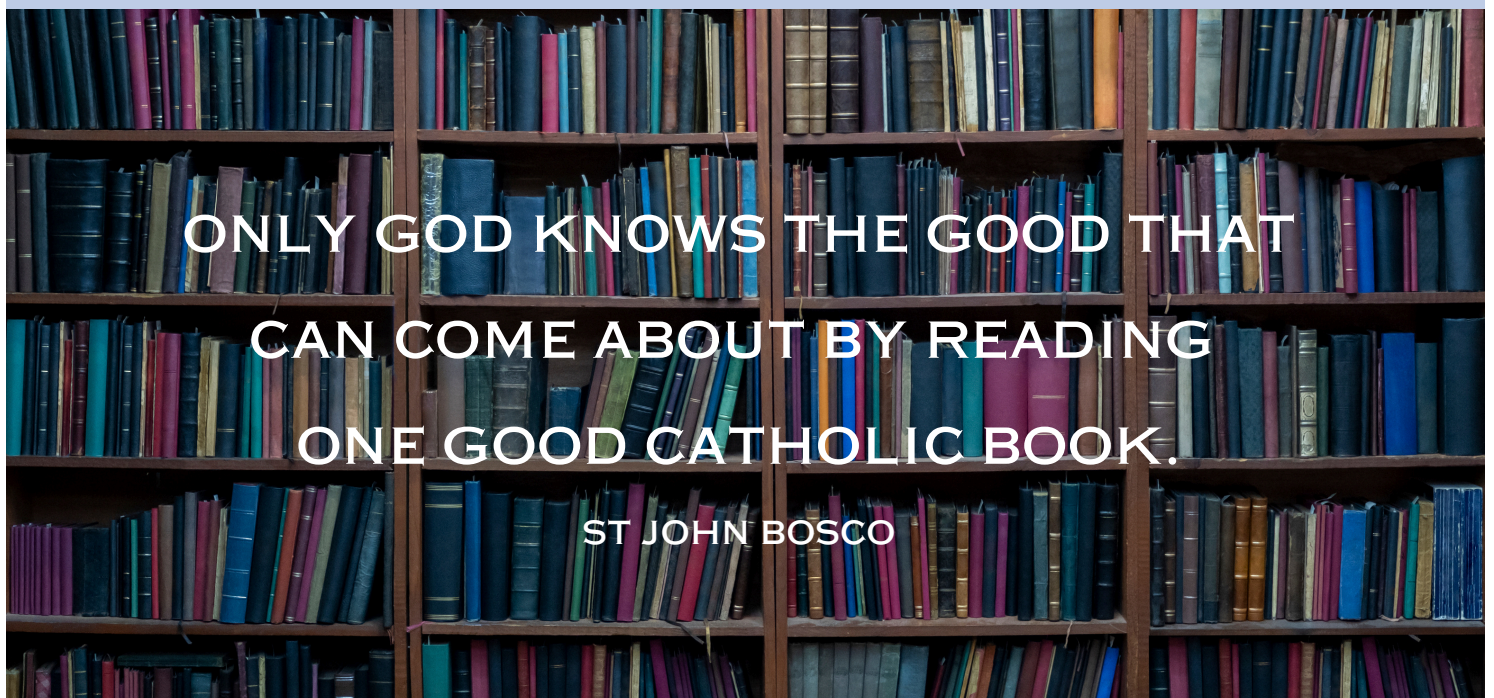
All books must be in print and easily obtained online or from a local bookstore, print, digital, and/or audible, library/library loan or used online. Note that some books and short stories are available for free online.

Long books can be divided into multiple sessions (usually no more than 50 pages/week, 200 pages/month). If you take a summer break, choose a longer book for September so everyone has time to read. Around the busiest times, Christmas and Easter, consider a podcast, video, short story, article, or gospel.

Consider reading with a theme, a fictional work followed by a memoir/biography of the author or memoir/biography in a similar setting or time.

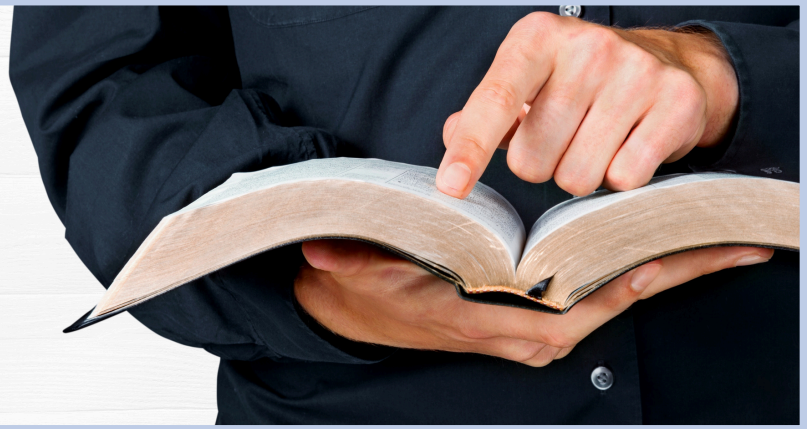
## Communications

Consider setting up an email or text group to send out meeting reminders. Publish meeting times and reading selections in the Parish bulletin, parish website/social media, and Mass announcements. Encourage group members to personally invite fellow parishioners who might be interested. Post a flyer on the parish bulletin board.



Catholic fiction communicates artistically through Catholic symbols the spiritual and moral mystery of the human condition.

Mariella Gable , O.S.B.



## Format ideas

- 9:30 am** Coffee/Water/Snacks bring your own  
Everyone has time to chat and relax.
- 10 am** Brief prayer  
Everyone briefly introduces themselves and tells one significant thing that happened in the past month. This helps in the first meetings to remind everyone of names, include new people, and get to know everyone.
- 10:15 am** Discuss the book.  
Rotating group members can give a short introduction of the book.  
Ask: How did you like the book? How do you see Catholic culture in the book? How does the book deepen your understanding of God and the Catholic faith? How does the book relate to today's world?
- 11 am** Closing prayer, confirm the next meeting's reading, date, and time.
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- 7 pm** Coffee/Water/Beer/Wine/Snacks bring your own.  
Everyone has time to chat and relax.
- 7:30 pm** Brief prayer  
Everyone briefly introduces themselves and tells one significant thing that happened in the past month. This helps in the first meetings to remind everyone of names, include new people, and get to know everyone.
- 7:45 pm** Discuss the book.  
Rotating group members can give a short introduction of the book.  
Ask: How did you like the book? How do you see Catholic culture in the book? How does the book deepen your understanding of God and the Catholic faith? How does the book relate to today's world?
- 8:30 pm** Closing prayer, confirm the next meeting's reading, date, and time.

**Alternative:** Each book has a leader who very briefly presents a little info about the author, time-period, place, culture, context of reading, or other information easily found in an online search.

## Guidelines for Discussion

Everyone should read the book, but members should attend even if they haven't finished the reading. Participating is vital to fostering friendship and community.

Respect everyone's opinion – you can always learn something, even if you disagree!

Everyone gets the opportunity to speak. No one should dominate the conversation.

- Ask if someone has something to add.
- I'm curious to know what (name of someone in the group) thinks about this.
- What stood out in this chapter and why?
- What is the text teaching us about God and living better?
- Does this resonate in your life?

## Every Reading Group is Different

A mom's group may want to meet weekly in the morning while children are at school and read Flannery O'Connor stories over several weeks, break Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* into small chunks, or read more recent Rumor Godden's *In this House of Brede*.

A mixed or men's group might want to meet monthly in the evening and focus more on historical literature or memoirs like, Walter Cizek's *He Leadeth Me*, Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*, or C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

A younger adult group might prefer meeting at a pub after work and discussing the dystopian Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World* or Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins*.



Language exists  
less to record  
the actual than  
to liberate the  
imagination.

*Anthony Burgess*

## Additional Resources and Activities

Consider linking discussions to parish events or with the liturgical season.

Invite authors or speakers to enhance the literary experience, turning regular meetings into unique events that can attract a larger audience.

## Evaluation and Growth

Solicit regular feedback from the group on the format, discussion and reading choices. Be open to changes in structure or book selections based on group feedback, and evolving interests.



We do not  
find the  
meaning of  
life by  
ourselves  
alone.  
We find it  
with  
another.

*Thomas Merton*

The Guild of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus  
Georgetown, Connecticut  
[info@jesusguild.org](mailto:info@jesusguild.org)

# Reading Guide

## The Literary Catholic



The Literary Catholic Reading Guide is designed to assist readers as they navigate and engage with Catholic literature, which often explores themes of faith, morality, human nature, and redemption.

1. Themes of Faith: What do you consider to be the most important themes or messages in the book? How does the book address themes of faith and doubt? Are there any moments or characters that embody these themes? What question is the book asking?

2. Moral and Ethical Challenges: What moral dilemmas do the characters face? How do they resolve these, and what does that say about their character or belief system?

3. Character Development: How do the characters evolve throughout the book? Are their transformations influenced by their faith or lack thereof? What is underneath the character's veneer?

4. Impact of Setting: Consider the place and time. How does the setting influence the religious and philosophical undertones of the story? Does it add to the characters' spiritual journey?

5. Role of the Church: How is the Church portrayed in this work? Does it play a central role in the narrative or thematic development?

6. Influence of Catholic Doctrine: In what ways does Catholic doctrine influence the decisions, actions, or fate of the characters?

7. Symbols and Motifs: What symbols enhance the book's religious themes? How do these symbols help deepen the reader's understanding of the characters or the plot?

8. Comparative Reflections: How does the treatment of Catholic themes in this book compare to other books in the genre or other books by the same author?

9. Author's Perspective: Based on the text, what can be discerned about the author's own religious views? How do these influence the reader's perception of the story?

10. Personal Reflections: Which aspects of the book resonated with your life experiences or beliefs? Were there any points of significant agreement or disagreement? How do the book's insights impact or reflect on Catholic thought or society in general?

## Look for Catholic Ideas

Good/Evil	Hope	Sanctity of Life	Humility
Temptation	Justice	Reconciliation	Compassion
Forgiveness	Charity/Love	Vocation/Purpose	Consequence
Perseverance	Suffering	Prayer	Courage
Redemption,	Miracles	Mercy	Patience
Sacrifice	Prophecy	Reflection	Generosity
Faith	Martyrdom	Resurrection	Fidelity
Grace	Sin	Conscience	Persistence
Community	Pilgrimage	Dignity of Work	Ecumenism



# Books to Consider

Catholic writers  
tend to see humanity  
struggling in a  
fallen world.

Dana Gioia

## Traditional Great Works

Benson, Robert Hugh	Lord of the World
Bernanos, Georges	Diary of a Country Priest
Cervantes, Miguel	Don Quixote
Cizek, Walter	He Leadeth Me
Dante	Divine Comedy
Day, Dorothy	The Long Loneliness
Gerard, John	The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest
Greene, Graham	The Power and the Glory
Hopkins, Gerard Manley	Poems
Manzoni, Alessandro	The Betrothed
O'Connor, Flannery	The Complete Stories
Percy, Walker	Love in the Ruins
St. Therese of Lisieux	Story of A Soul
Tolkien, J.R.R.	The Lord of the Rings
Waugh, Evelyn	Brideshead Revisited

## Other Classics

Cather, Willa	Death Comes for the Archbishop
Connolly, Miles	Mr. Blue
Chesterton, G.K.	The Innocence of Father Brown
Chesterton, G.K.	The Man Who Was Thursday
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	The Grand Inquisitor
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	The Brothers Karamazov
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	Crime and Punishment
Gable, Mariella	Many Colored Fleece (short stories)
Greene, Graham	The End of the Affair
Hassler, Jon	Staggerford A Novel
Horgan, Paul	Things As They Are
Lewis, C.S.	The Great Divorce
Merton, Thomas	The Seven Storey Mountain
Miller, Walter	A Canticle for Leibowitz
Percy, Walker	Lost in the Cosmos
Tolstoy, Leo	The Death of Ivan Ilyich
Undset, Sigred	Kristin Lavransdatter
Waugh, Evelyn	Men at Arms
West, Morris L.	The Devil's Advocate
Wilder, Thornton	The Bridge of San Luis Rey

# More Books to Consider

## Contemporary

Boyagoda, Randy	Original Prin
Boyagoda, Randy	Dante's Indiana
Burgess, Anthony	The Wanting Seed
Fenollera, Natalia	The Awakening of Miss Prim
Godden, Rumer	In this House of Brede
Godden, Rumer	Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy
Hansen, Ron	Atticus
Karr, Mary	Sinners Welcome: Poems
McCarthy, Cormac	The Road
McDermott, Alice	The Ninth Hour
Moore, Brian	The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne
O'Brien, Kate	The Land of Spices
Spark, Muriel	The Ballad of Peckham Rye
Thomas, Sally	Works of Mercy
Wolff, Tobias	Our Story Begins, New and selected stories

## Biography and Others

Chesterton, G.K.	St. Francis of Assisi
Chesterton, G.K.	St. Thomas Aquinas
De La Palma, Luis	The Sacred Passion
Eliot, T.S.	Christianity & Culture
Gable, Mariella (Ed.)	Many-Colored Fleece
Gaurdini, Romano	The Lord
Hildebrand, Alice Von	The Privilege of Being a Woman
Hildebrand, Alice Von	Love Refined: Letters to a Young Bride
Holzner, Joseph	Paul of Tarsus
Lsgerkvist, Pär	Barabbas
Lovasik, Lawrence	The Hidden Power of Kindness
Pinckaers, Servais	The Pursuit of Happiness God's Way
Stein, Edith	Woman
Suarez, Frederico	Mary of Nazareth
Trochu, Francois	The Cure of Ars
Undset, Sigrid	Catherine of Siena
Von Hildebrand, Dietrich	The Art of Living
Walsh, William Thomas	Our Lady of Fatima
Waugh, Evelyn	Helena
Wegemer, Gerard	Thomas More: Portrait of Courage

# Get Inspired!



Explore and share the richness and beauty of great literature.

You are invited to join our Literary Catholic book group.

The Literary Catholic aims to build a community inspired to unpack life-changing stories from centuries of Catholic literature, connecting readers to God and inspiring their faith and imagination.

Some things are essential. Everyone should attend, even if you haven't finished the reading, because participation is vital to fostering friendship and community. Respect everyone's opinion – you can always learn something, even if you disagree! Everyone gets the opportunity to speak.

A Literary Catholic book group can choose from the recommended reading list of great books, both classic and contemporary. Our YouTube videos can help inspire your choices. (<https://jesusguild.org/the-literary-catholic/>)

*Join us for a welcome meeting:*

Date/Time:

Place:

Host:

Contact Info:

We do not find the meaning of life by  
ourselves alone.  
We find it with another.  
Thomas Merton

In cooperation with the Diocese of Bridgeport and Guild of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.





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