

Discussion Activities for Fall *(Teen and Adult Groups)*

Here are three sets of discussion activities based on three of the weekly bulletin inserts provided by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America.

They all involve saints commemorated by the Church during the month of October, and provide guidance for teen and adult discussion groups to think about these “fall saints” more deeply.

Each set is followed by suggested answers to questions and/or guidance for you, the group leader, to use in discussion. Have copies of the bulletin insert and writing materials for each person, and Bibles for each person or enough to share.

(Note: You and your parish will find bulletin inserts for every Sunday of the year at dce.oca.org)

“LONGINUS THE CENTURION”

Find it at dce.oca.org/assets/files/inserts/longinus-the-centurion.pdf

1. Read the bulletin insert together.
2. Ask: “*Longinus the Centurion was a commander in the Roman Army. How many men were in the military unit under his command?*”
3. The bulletin insert tells us that some books claim there were no eyewitnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is not the case; John 19: 31-5 describes those witnesses.

But even without Scripture, there is evidence that the crucifixion took place—so there had to be witnesses. The reliable Roman historian Tacitus was no friend of Christians. In the *Annals* he produced in the year 115, he wrote about the emperor Nero’s efforts to deflect blame for the burning of Rome: “...Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberias at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...”

Ask, “*Why do you think some people are eager to believe that the crucifixion didn’t take place, by saying there were no witnesses?*”

4. Longinus’ life changed in one day. He began as the “bored centurion” who had to make sure the troublesome Jewish preacher really died; he ended the day as a witness ready to be martyred for Christ.

Read together about two other people whose lives changed in a day: the apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-20) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-9). Ask, *“Have any of you ever had a life-changing experience in a day, or as the result of a relatively brief encounter?”*

Question 1: the answer is 100.

For Question 2, participants can give their opinions. Note that several religions, including Islam, teach that the Christ was not actually crucified. In some cases, they teach that such an indignity is unworthy of the Son of God. Christianity teaches that Christ was willingly underwent even this indignity so as to defeat death and save us.

For question 3, participants can share any experiences they care to tell about.

“A BISHOP UNAFRAID OF BEAUTY” (PELAGIA THE PENITENT)

Find it at dce.oca.org/assets/files/inserts/a-bishop-unafraid-of-beauty.pdf

1. Read the bulletin insert together.
 2. Ask, *“How does the title reflect a difference between Bishop Nonnus’ attitude toward Pelagia and the attitude of the other bishops who were with him?”* Then read Matthew 15: 11 together. Ask, *“Do you see a reflection of Bishop Nonnus’ attitude in this verse?”*
 3. Ask, *“How do the words of the troparion reflect the kind of person Pelagia was?”*
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Question 2: Bishop Nonnus, like any celibate man, could be tempted by looking at a woman who was only beautiful but who was making an effort to entice men. He wasn’t afraid of this temptation, and could even take a lesson from observing Pelagia’s beauty. The Matthew verse seems to reflect this: You can look at anything or anyone, and you will only be harmed if the response from your own heart is an unhealthy one.

Question 3: The troparion’s mention of fragrance and roses reflects Pelagia’s beauty. But they emphasize that her beauty became much greater when she gave it to God.

“SAINT HILARION THE GREAT”

Find it at dce.oca.org/assets/files/inserts/saint-hilarion-the-great.pdf

1. Read the insert together.
2. Ask, *“Why did Hilarion’s parents send him to Alexandria? Do parents do similar things today?”*

3. Note together the sixth paragraph of the bulletin insert, which describes some elements of the great Saint Anthony's life in the desert. Ask, "*What do you find most significant in the way Saint Anthony lived?*"
 4. Read together Matthew 7: 13-14. Ask, "*Do you think only a monk or nun could manage to travel on the narrow road that Christ talks about in these verses? Why or why not?*"
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Question 2: Hilarion's parents wanted to give him a good education, and so they sent him to the great city of Alexandria. Of course parents make efforts today as well to get their children into good schools. It's interesting that this has been a parental concern for so long.

For Question 3, participants can give their opinions.

Question 4: We know that the Church teaches that anyone can find and follow the "narrow road." It's true that monasticism lays out the path clearly, and not everyone is called to be a monastic, so to find the path in another kind of life may not be easy. But all styles of life are valued by the Church and by God, and all can be paths to Him.

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