

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

OUR LONGING FOR GOD



All human beings long for God. The desires of plants and animals are all biologically based. But within ourselves, we discover a longing for something *more*. We long for something more than food and pleasure and possessions, and even more than power, accomplishment, honor, popularity, and good human relationships. We long for something above and beyond *all* of these things. This longing for something *more* is a sign that we are made “in the image and likeness of God” (see Genesis 1:26-27). Because God made us in a special way *like* Himself, we are inherently related to God in our very being and have an inherent tendency toward God. This longing for *more*, then, is a really longing for *God*.

Signs that we desire something *more*:

- ***Nothing in this world satisfies us.*** Even when all our earthly desires are satisfied, we still want more, and it is never enough.
- ***Our desire for happiness:*** In everything we do, we desire to be happy and fulfilled. With experience, however, we discover that nothing finite satisfies us. Our deepest longing is for something infinite. Since only God is infinite, only He can fulfill this infinite desire of our hearts. It is for this reason that we can assert that all people long for God, whether they realize it or not. St. Augustine once said, “O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”
- ***We wonder.*** We want to know. We long for knowledge, answers, meaning, insight, and truth. Ultimately, we want to know who we are, why we are here, where we come from, where are we headed after death, where happiness is found, how we should live, and if there is some sort of escape from sin, suffering, and death. All this propels us to look to God for the truth, love, goodness, peace, and salvation we desire.
- ***Our rational abilities and personal nature:*** We have self-reflexive awareness (the ability to be aware of our own awareness), rationality, conscience, free will, and a personal and relational nature. Having all of these abilities, along with the ability to think about God and the potential to be in relationship with Him, is a sign that we are meant to know and love Him.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

—Psalm 42:1-2

“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.” —Psalm 62:1

“O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.” —Psalm 63:1

“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

—Jeremiah 2:13

“What do you seek?” —John 1:38

John 4:1-42 (*the woman at the well*)

“I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger; and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” —John 6:35

Jesus said to the Twelve, “Will you also go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” —John 6:67-69

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What strikes you about these passages from the Bible?*
2. *In the Gospel of Mark, some of the disciples of Jesus come to Jesus and say, “Everyone is searching for you” (Mark 1:37). They mean that everyone in the area was looking for Jesus because of His miracles and teachings. But how is this true on a deeper level, that everyone is searching for Christ, whether they realize it or not? What are people looking for? And how is it that what they are looking for is fulfilled in Christ?*
3. *What are some examples of people today searching God in the wrong places?*
4. *How do you experience longing for God in your own life?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Ecclesiastes 1-3 / ***Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):*** numbers 1-30

OTHER RELIGIONS: MAN'S QUEST FOR GOD



Human beings are inherently religious. Until modern times, every civilization has been deeply religious. The religions of the world are testimony that human beings are in search for meaning in life, for answers to the riddle of existence, and to find that *something more* we all long for.

Are all religions equal?

While there is some common agreement among the world's religions, the religions of the world often propose different answers to life's questions. While there tends to be general agreement on broad moral principals and ideals, there is great variance on more specific moral issues, the nature of the ultimate reality, what happens after death, what we primarily need to be saved from, how God has or has not revealed Himself, and what He desires. Many traditional religions are polytheistic (they believe in many gods). Some, like Hinduism and Buddhism, believe in reincarnation. Some believe that the material world is inherently bad. Some believe the ultimate reality is not personal. The more one studies the world's great religions, the more one sees that there are some very fundamental differences, and that they cannot all be true or right about everything. The differences are too fundamental and contradictory for all religions to be equally true.

How do Catholics view other religions?

Catholics believe all that is true and good, wherever it is found. We therefore affirm everything that is good and true in other religions. We cannot endorse anything that is not good or true, however. It is important to understand other religions accurately. It is always important to respect other believers as well. It is fitting to look for how God is at work in them. None of this should mitigate our devotion to our own Christian faith, however.

Is it arrogant to think that one's own religion is right and others are wrong?

One can be arrogant and be wrong. One can be arrogant and be right. It is best to be humble and right. It is not necessarily arrogant to believe that something is true, and to communicate this with conviction to others, for example that the law of gravity is true. If this is the case with scientific or historical facts, it is also the case with religious belief. One should make sure one is right. To be right, though, is not necessarily to be arrogant.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“But Ruth said, ‘Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’” —Ruth 1:16

1 Kings 10:1-10 (*about the Queen of Sheba*)

“And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

—1 Kings 18:21

“In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.” —Isaiah 11:10

Matthew 2:1-12 (*about the Magi seeking the one to be born king of the Jews*)

Acts 17:22-31 (*Paul preaching to the Athenians in the Areopagus*)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think that Ruth, the Queen of Sheba, and the Magi are searching for a religion outside of their own, and come to Israel seeking God?*

2. *How is Elijah’s challenge relevant today?*

3. *How does Paul try to convince the Athenians of the true God and of Christ?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Psalm 139 / ***Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):*** numbers 31-49

DOES GOD EXIST?



People disagree on the existence and nature of the ultimate reality. But what is actually the case? Does God exist or not? Is God personal or not? Are there many gods or only one God? And can we ever really know the truth?

There are two ways to know God exists: through *Faith* and through *Reason*. We know God exists through *faith*, because God has revealed Himself to the world and given His Holy Spirit to assure our hearts of the truth of what He has revealed. We know God exists through *reason*, because everything created points to Him. So, we can come to know that God exists even apart from faith. St. John Paul II once said that faith and reason are like the two wings of a bird by which we ascend to the heights of truth.

Why do many people today doubt or deny God's existence?

There are psychological and moral reasons that people deny or doubt God's existence. Many people were never taught about the one true God. Many have misunderstandings about God. They then reject God based on these misunderstandings. Many reject God because they project upon Him the faults and shortcomings of their parents or other human beings. Their rejection of God is often a psychological attempt to assert their own value and independence. Some reject God, because they think the idea of God threatens or diminishes human responsibility, autonomy, or freedom. Some would rather not believe in God's existence, because they would then be accountable to someone else and would have to change their behavior and lifestyle. While these are many real reasons people doubt or deny God's existence—and these need to be understood and taken seriously—none of these are serious intellectual arguments against God's existence.

All intellectual objections to God's existence boil down to two. The first objection concerns evil and suffering. The argument is that an all-good God would not permit evil in a universe He created, or at least not as much evil as there is. The second objection concerns the apparent self-sufficiency of the universe. The argument here is that, because the world explains itself, it doesn't need God to explain it. Accordingly, God is like a fifth wheel (unnecessary).

How do we know God exists through reason, despite these objections?

In short, God can permit evil in this world for a greater good. Plus, this world's evils are only temporary. Second, the universe only *apparently* explains itself. Ultimately it doesn't explain itself, and modern science, more than ever before, attests to this. Science is also limited to speak only about the physical causes within the universe.

Since no individual thing in the universe explains itself, but must be explained by something outside of itself, the whole universe also cannot explain itself, but must be explained by a cause outside of itself, sufficient to bring it into being. Again, modern science would echo the fact that everything in the universe is dependent. Ultimately, the existence, dynamism, goodness, and order of the universe must depend on a being whose existence is not dependent at all. This being must also be supremely intelligent (to create such a universe), and the ultimate source of goodness found in the universe. This being we call God.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” —Exodus 3:13-14

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” —Psalm 14:1

Wisdom 13:1-9 (*From the greatness and beauty of created things
comes a corresponding perception of their Creator*)

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.” —Romans 1:19-23

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What tells you that God exists?*
2. *Why do people doubt God's existence?*
3. *How might you help others to know that God exists?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Sirach 42:15-43:33 / ***Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):*** numbers 198-231

GOD'S NATURE



What can we know about God?

Both faith and reason tell us about God. What can we learn about God through reason? Just as an artist's works tell us something about the artist, so every created reality reflects the Creator in some way. Since God is the source of the existence, goodness, life, and order in the universe, He must possess these things in a preeminent way. God must, therefore, be the fullness of being and existence, perfect goodness, infinite life, and infinitely wise and intelligent. He must also have all the perfections of created things in a supreme way but without their limitations. Therefore, God cannot be a physical thing subject to change and limited to space and time. We therefore say that God is *perfect* (He has no imperfections or limitations), *infinite* (there is no limit to Who God is), *spiritual and incorporeal* (He is Spirit, not a body), *one* (there is only one God), *personal* (He is Someone we can relate to, not an impersonal force), *omniscient* (He knows all things), *omnibeneficent* (He is all good), *omnipotent* (He can do all things), *omnipresent* (He is present in all things), *transcendent* (He is beyond all things), *intimate* (He is infinitely close to everything), *infinitely happy* (He is infinite bliss), *immortal* (He is not subject to death), *unchangeable* (He doesn't change like we do), and so forth. Our faith, as revealed in the Bible, echoes and affirms all these "attributes" of God. Scripture reveals something even deeper about God: that He is a Trinity of Persons, that His deepest mystery is love, and that He is infinitely merciful and wants to forgive us.

What are some common misunderstandings of God?

Some people have a primitive idea of God, such as thinking that He is an old man with a beard, or some invisible light or cloud. Many atheists and agnostics do not believe in God because they misunderstand the nature of God and often caricature our belief in God. Some people have a very imperfect view of God, in the sense that they think He is an overly harsh dictator who is ever ready to punish, or an absent and uncaring father who doesn't care about what we do. Some wrongly identify God with the totality of all that exists, or some part of it, like the spiritual part, or the good part. This view is called *pantheism*.

If all our thoughts and words fall infinitely short of the mystery of God, how can we talk about God at all?

Our words and thoughts are signs of God. Signs point to something else, something greater than their own reality. Yes, all our thoughts and words fall infinitely short of the reality of God. Yet, they express what God is in a limited, but helpful way. It is also important to note that the Bible speaks of God in two ways: *metaphorically* and *literally*. Metaphorically, God is at times described as light, or as a shepherd, or as walking, or as getting angry, or as stretching out His arm. It is important to interpret metaphors as metaphors, and not literally. At other times, the Bible speaks more literally. Both ways of speaking are important and reveal important things to us about God, but it is important to distinguish and not confuse them. Finally, God has given us various titles we can use to refer to Him, all of which emphasize something different about Him. In the Old Testament, God reveals His proper name as YHWH, which in Hebrew means, “I AM WHO AM.” Jews do not pronounce this name out of reverence for God. God is also called “Adonai,” (my Lord), and Elohim (God), and many other such titles. In the New Testament, the name of Jesus, significantly, means “God saves.”

How do we know that God is personal, and not an impersonal force?

Some people think that God is an impersonal force or reality, since being personal is seen as a limitation to them. Certainly, God is not personal in our limited way. Yet, He must be personal, since He must possess the fullness of all created perfections in an infinitely greater way than we possess them. One of the perfections that we human beings have is the ability to know and love on a rational level. If God cannot know and love rationally, then we have a perfection He doesn’t have, which would mean that God is not perfect. God must know and love, and for this reason we must affirm that God is personal. Indeed, God knows and loves—like us—but in an infinitely more perfect and preeminent way.

What does the Bible tell us about the attributes of God?

Read carefully through the following collection of categorized quotes and references in order to see how and where God’s many attributes are taught in Scripture. Note that this is a representation, and not an exhaustive list.

THE FULLNESS OF BEING (Spirit, One, Living, Outside of Space and Time, Most Holy)

“I AM WHO AM.” —Exodus 3:14

“God is spirit.” —John 4:24

“The LORD our God is one LORD.” —Deuteronomy 6:4

“I am the LORD and there is no other.” —Isaiah 45:5

“Living God” (see Dt 5:26; Jos 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Kgs 19:4; Est 13:16; Ps 42:2; 84:2; Is 37:4; Jer 10:10; Dan 6:20, 26; 14:5-6, 24-25; Hos 1:10; Mt 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1 Th 1:19; 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 12:22; Rev 7:2)

“Blessed be God who lives forever.” —Tobit 13:1

“They pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.” —Psalm 102:27

“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” —James 1:17

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory”

—Isaiah 6:3; see also Revelation 4:8

INFINITE (Unending, Inexhaustible, Transcendent, Immortal)

“Though we speak much, we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our words is, ‘He is the all.’ ... when you praise the Lord, praise Him as much as you can; for He will surpass even that. When you exalt him, put forth all your strength, and do not grow weary, for you cannot praise Him enough.”

—Sirach 43:27 & 30

God “alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.” —1 Timothy 6:16

PERFECT (Without Limitations and Imperfections; Nothing Unattractive)

“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” —Matthew 5:48

ALL-KNOWING (Truth and Wisdom)

“For the Most High knows all that may be known.” —Sirach 42:18

“There is one who is wise, greatly to be feared, sitting upon His throne” —Sirach 1:8

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” —Romans 11:33

ALL-GOOD (Loving, Good, Just, Merciful, and Forgiving)

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness, keeping merciful love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.” —Exodus 34:6-7

“The LORD is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made.” —Psalm 145:9

“Righteous are you, O Lord; all your deeds are just and all your ways are mercy and truth, and you render true and righteous judgment forever.” —Tobit 3:2

“God is love.” —1 John 4:16

ALL-BEAUTIFUL (Light, Majesty, Splendor, Glory)

“If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them... For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.”

—Wisdom 13:3 & 5

See also Psalm 27:4 and 96:6

ALL-POWERFUL (Almighty; Can Do All things)

“For with God nothing will be impossible.” —Luke 1:37

See also Gen 18:14, Jud 16:13, Jer 32:17 & 27, Wis 13:4, Sir 39:18, Mt 19:26

ALL-PRESENT (Is Present; Upholds All Things)

“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Let the darkness cover me, even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with you.’” —Psalm 139:7-12

PERFECT & INFINITE HAPPINESS

“You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.” —Psalm 16:11

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’” —Matthew 25:21

How can God have all these attributes if He is not divided into parts but is perfectly one?

In God, all attributes are one. We speak of them separately only because we experience these qualities as separate in creation. Thinking of a prism is a helpful way of understanding this truth. God is like the white light that shines through the prism. We might not see that light directly, but we do see that light refracted into the many colors of the color spectrum shining through the prism. So, even as it is necessary to affirm each of the many attributes of God, and to sometimes speak of them separately, it is important always to remember that in God all these attributes are one. God's perfection is His truth is His love is Himself, etc.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think of God? Have you ever had any misunderstandings of God?

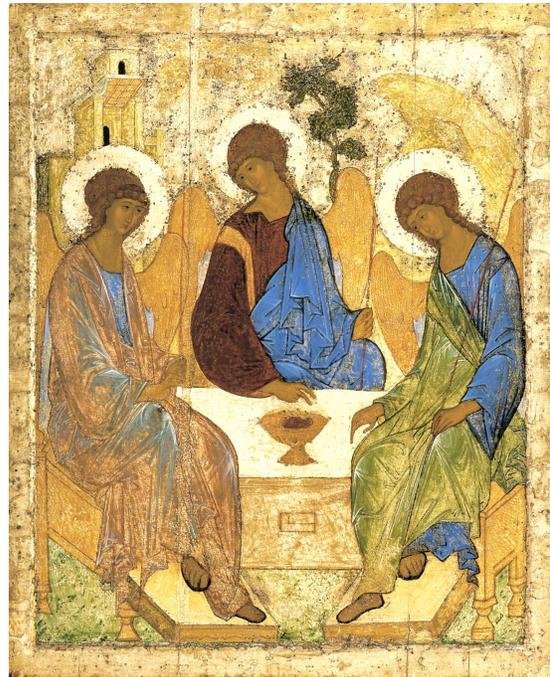
2. How can we better understand and fall in love with the mystery of God?

3. How can we help others better understand and love God?

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: John 14-16, Genesis 18 / *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC):* 232-278

THE HOLY TRINITY



Through reason and the Old Testament we can know that God is one, the source of all that is, personal, and infinitely perfect. We only come to know that God is in one sense Three, however, through the coming of Christ, and through the gift of faith that assures us of this beautiful and sublime truth about God.

What is the Trinity?

The Trinity is the mystery of God, the mystery that God is a divine Communion of Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God possesses one divine *nature*, and yet in the one divine nature of God there are three *persons*. There is an inner dynamism in God, in which we say that the Son proceeds (comes forth / *is begotten*) eternally from the Father, while the Holy Spirit proceeds (*is spirated*, or “breathed forth”) eternally from the Father and the Son both, as from one principle. *What* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is, is the same (the one divine nature). *Who* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is, is distinct (three divine *Persons*). So, the Father is not the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father, nor the Son. Yet, the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God, since they all fully share (or possess) the same divine nature. The Persons of the Trinity are therefore *coequal* and *coeternal*. However, there are not three “Gods,” but only one God. The *Nature* is one, the *Persons* are three. Even though the Trinity is a mystery beyond our mind’s grasp, it is important that we understand these basic truths about God.

Why do we believe that God is Triune?

We believe in God as Trinity because of Jesus Christ. The New Testament reveals that Christ is the eternal Son of God, fully one with the Father. And yet, Christ is also distinct from the Father, since He prays to Him and relates to Him as distinct from Himself. Jesus also taught us about the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Here again, the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, and yet is still divine and fully one with Them.

If the Trinity is God, why wasn't this revealed earlier, in the Old Testament?

We find intimations (hints) of the mystery of the Trinity in the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament refers to both the word, or wisdom, of God, and the spirit of God. The word and spirit of God are depicted as being distinct from God in one sense, and yet in another sense they belong to, and are “part of,” God. However, these remain only hints. It was important that the people of God would first come to understand the oneness of God before coming to understand a deeper dimension to the mystery of God. When Christ comes, He reveals the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to us in an explicit way. It is only through His coming that we are prepared to understand God's inner mystery as the Trinity.

How can God be not only one, but three?

Within creation, we find many things that are both three and one, and are thus reflections of the Trinity. In fire, we have the reality of fire, and then the light and heat that comes forth from the fire. Water, and many other substances, can also exist in three different forms, depending on temperature: a liquid, a solid, or a gas. Some plants, like the three-leaf clover, are one plant with three leaves. All of these things are analogies. They resemble the Trinity in some way. And yet they also fall infinitely short of the mystery of the Trinity, and are thus more dissimilar than similar to the Trinity in the end. The Persons of the Trinity should not be understood to be three parts of God, since God has no parts. The Three Persons should also not be understood to be three different masks of God, since then God would not really be three but only appear to be three. Analogies can be helpful, but they all “limp.”

Perhaps the most helpful analogy is found within our own soul. Each of us has the ability to know and love, and we are able to know and love ourselves. We can call these abilities to know and love ourselves “self-reflexive knowledge” and “self-reflexive love.” As said before, since *we* know ourselves, *God* must know Himself, but in an infinitely more perfect way. *We* don't know ourselves perfectly however. Our inner “self image” falls far short of who we fully are. It is not ourselves, but only an idea about ourselves. It is like looking into a mirror, where the image in the mirror looks like us, but is not actually us. Since God knows Himself perfectly, however, the *knowing* with which He knows Himself is perfect. It is a perfect image of Himself within Himself. It is no less than Himself, and doesn't fall short of Who He fully is. It is this perfect self-image of God within God that we call the eternal “Word” or “Son” of God. Further, God not only knows Himself perfectly. He loves Himself perfectly. One can say that the Father and Son love each other so perfectly in eternity that their love is no less than a third divine Person, the Holy Spirit. So, the Son comes forth from the Father in virtue of God knowing Himself perfectly. And the Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father and Son in virtue of God loving Himself perfectly.

Another beautiful image of the Trinity is the family. In the book of Genesis, Eve is depicted as coming forth from the side of Adam. She is equal to Adam, and yet distinct. Adam and Eve, in their married love, then give themselves to each other, with a result that a distinct person (a child) comes forth from both of them. It is important not to project the limitations and humanness of this analogy into the mystery of God. But it is significant that the family reflects

the Trinity in a very beautiful way. It is worth contemplating that our families were created to resemble the Trinity, and that our families are called to express and reflect the eternal love of the Trinity in their own way.

Lastly, St. John in the New Testament tells us, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). But in the phenomenon of love there must be three elements: a lover, a beloved, and the love between them. Indeed, God is a divine and eternal Communion of Love, the Father loving His beloved Son in the eternal and personal love of the Holy Spirit.

While we will never fully be able to comprehend the mystery of God as Trinity, these analogies help us to understand how God can be, and is, both One and Triune.

What is the significance of God being Trinity?

It is the Trinity that created us. It is the Trinity that saves us. It is the Trinity that comes to dwell within us and make us holy. We are also destined to share in the inner life and love of the Trinity forever. The Trinity is at the heart of all that we believe, live, and strive for.

How do we pray to the Trinity?

Typically, we Catholics pray to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, especially in the Mass. We can also pray to the Trinity as one. We can and should address each member of the Trinity often, as well. It is always understood that we are always praying to the whole Trinity even if we might focus on One Person at any given time. The Persons of the Trinity are never separate or divided. We Catholics celebrate the mystery of the Trinity in a special way on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity every year, one week after the Solemnity of Pentecost.

Where do we see the Trinity taught in Scripture?

Kindly read through the following collection of categorized quotes and references:

GOD IS TRINITY: 3 PERSONS IN ONE GOD

See Matthew 28:19; John 14:16-17; 3:34; 15:26; Acts 1:6-8; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:3-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; 1 Pt 1:2; 1 John 5:6-7; Jude 20-1; Revelation 1:9-10

THE PERSONS ARE DISTINCT

“The Word was with God.” —John 1:1

“There is...one Spirit..., one Lord..., one God and Father of us all.” —Ephesians 4:4-6

EACH PERSON IS EQUAL IN DIVINITY

The Father is God. “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.” —John 11:41

The Son is God. “the Word was God” —John 1:1; see also Mark 2:7; John 8:58; 10:33,

20:28. Jesus “called God his Father, making himself equal with God.” —John 5:18

The Holy Spirit is God.

“For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...”

No one understands the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

—1 Corinthians 2:10-11

... the Father almighty...

THE NATURE OF GOD IS ONE (There are not 3 Gods but 1)

“He is one, and there is no other besides he.” —Mark 12:33

“I and the Father are one.” —John 10:30

THE TRINITY HINTED AT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God’s Word (or Wisdom)

God’s Spirit

Passages: Genesis 1 & 18; Psalms 57:3; 61:7; 138:2; Wisdom 7

TRINITARIAN THEOPHANIES (Manifestations of God)

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17), Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8)

Old Testament Theophanies: Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, Consecration of the Temple

THE INDWELLING TRINITY

“If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” —John 14:23

“And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.” —John 14:16-17

See also 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 6:19

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What does Rublev’s Icon of the Trinity tell us about the Trinity?*
2. *How might you grow in your appreciation of the Trinity in your life?*
3. *How can our families and communities more greatly resemble the inner love of the Trinity?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Genesis 1-3 / ***CCC:*** 279-324

CREATION



Why did God create the universe?

The philosopher Leibniz once asked, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” It is a deep and fundamental question all of us have asked in our own way: Why are we here? Why do we exist? Why does anything exist at all?

God could not have created the universe because of some inner need, or for His own benefit, because He would not then be perfect, which means He would not be God. But God must have created the universe for *some* reason, since every action is for an end, and creation is an action. Further, the end of any action is some good that is aimed for. With much thought and prayer, one can eventually come to realize that there is only one possible reason God could have created the universe: for the good of creation itself. However, only rational creatures, such as ourselves, could actually appreciate any good God had in mind. One could reason that God must have created the universe in some way for *our* good, for *us*.

Apart from faith, however, this is as much as we could guess. Through Christ, we come to learn that God created all things out of nothing, only so that we, who did not before exist, might one day come to share in the infinite life and love of the Trinity forever. In other words, God created the universe out of an act of generosity. He created the world in order to share: He, Who did not need anything, willed that other beings might come to enjoy what He enjoys in eternity: His own infinite love and joy.

This, then, is the whole reason we exist: that one day we might share eternal life with God. There can be nothing greater than this. God could not give us any greater good.

Creation is also the foundation and backdrop for everything that will later unfold in the drama of salvation, in God’s plan for us that will culminate in Christ. In Christ, God joins Himself permanently to the created world. He weds Himself to humankind. The Gospel of John tells us that the “Word” through whom God created the universe has finally become “flesh” (John 1:1-3, 14). Likewise, St. Paul tells us that Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . .” (Colossians 1:15-16).

Why did God create many things?

Every created thing reflects God in its own way. But if God only created one type of thing, or only a few things, we would get a much more limited idea of God. Because there are many beautiful things that God created, we get a better idea of God's infinite beauty and grandeur through them. In a similar way, we get a much better idea of who an artist is if we see many of his masterpieces versus only one or a few.

It is also important to note that God did not create only physical things that we can see and touch. He created *spiritual beings* (angels), *material beings* (the visible universe and its life forms), and certain beings which are *both spiritual and material* (humans).

How are faith and science compatible, since they seem to give us two conflicting views about the origins of the universe and humankind?

The beginning of the Bible contains two creation accounts. They are both different, and neither of them claims to be an eyewitness or scientific account of the origins of the universe and humankind. This doesn't make these accounts untrue, however. While scientific accounts tell us about the physical and technical "mechanics" regarding the origins of the universe and humankind, the Bible reveals much deeper truths to us: that God created the world out of nothing, that God is different than—and infinitely transcends—the world, that God cares for us and guides our lives, that the world is good and ordered, that human beings have a special dignity in virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God, that we are called to respect creation and be good and creative stewards of it, that we have fallen away from God through sin, but that God has a plan to save us.

Faith and reason cannot contradict each other. Therefore, whatever the legitimate findings of science tell us about the universe and its origins must harmonize with what God has revealed. Science reveals *how* God did things and the processes through which things came to be in their present form. The Bible and our faith tell us the deeper meaning of creation and God's plan for us.

Interestingly, the present theory about the origins of the universe, popularly called *The Big Bang Theory*, was first proposed by a physicist who was a Catholic priest, Fr. Georges Lemaître. This theory is very much in harmony with what Catholic belief professes about creation. Both tell us that there is a beginning to the universe. Furthermore, the Catholic Church has never condemned the *Theory of Evolution*, and many modern popes have publicly acknowledged it. The Church teaches that there is no problem with Catholics affirming the theory of evolution as long as they affirm that God must have created the soul of humans whenever they first properly existed, and in some reasonable way uphold the doctrines of *Original Justice*, *Original Sin*, and the *unity of humankind*, which modern science confirms.

In summary form, then, what are the basic teachings of the Church on Creation?

- God freely created all things.
- The whole Trinity creates.
- God made us for Himself, so that one day we might share in His life and love forever.
- God did not use pre-existent material to create the universe, but created all things *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).
- The universe did not always exist but was created at the beginning of time.
- God is distinct from the universe and all created things, and infinitely transcends them. We cannot identify God with the whole universe or anything in it (*pantheism*).
- God constantly sustains all things and guides history through His *Providence*.
- Everything that God created is *good*. Evil is a privation, not something in itself.
- All created things reflect the goodness and beauty of God.
- God created *material* beings (the visible universe and all life forms), *spiritual* beings (angels), and beings that are both *spiritual and material* (humans).
- Human beings have a special dignity with *intrinsic worth* since they are made in the image and likeness of God.
- The goodness of creation is the basis for the natural law, justice, morality and the good stewardship of the universe, of living things, and of the environment.
- Faith and reason cannot contradict each other. Therefore, all legitimate findings of science must harmonize with what God has revealed. It is permitted for Catholics to affirm the *Big Bang Theory* and the *Theory of Evolution*, so long as Catholics uphold all essential truths of the faith concerning the origins of the universe and humankind. If God prepared the human body through evolution, He had to directly create the soul when humans first began to exist.
- Creation is the foundation and the backdrop of God's saving plan for us.
- Christ is the center of creation and the culmination of human history.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . . And God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good.” —Genesis 1:1, 31

“The heavens are telling the glory of God.” —Psalm 19:1

“Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of His laws.” —2 Maccabees 7:23

“I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being.” —2 Maccabees 7:28

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” —John 1:1-5, 14

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.” —Acts 17:24-25

“God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

—Romans 4:17

“He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.” —Colossians 1:15-16

“In these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the ages.” —Hebrews 1:2

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Why did God create the universe?*
2. *What do created things tell us about God?*
3. *How can faith and science be seen in harmony?*
4. *What are the moral implications to the goodness of creation?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Revelation 5 & 7 / *CCC:* 325-354

ANGELS AND DEMONS



God created not only the visible, material universe. He also created a multitude of spiritual beings we call *Angels*. Angels are pure spirits. They do not have bodies. They are totally inaccessible to us through our senses. Although they sometimes make themselves known to human beings through physical manifestations, this is only a way of communicating to us and is not their actual nature.

Angels are personal beings that are highly intelligent. They know things intuitively which we know through the process of learning.

Angels were all created in grace, a grace that was moving them toward *Heaven*. However, God left them free to say ‘yes’ to this grace, or to resist it. We learn in Scripture and from Jesus that many angels resisted God’s grace. They were very aware of what they were doing and the consequences of their decision. We call them *Demons*. *Satan*, which means “adversary,” was the chief rebellious angel. Most of the angels, it seems, were faithful to God and entered *Heaven* immediately, while the demons chose to be eternally separated from God in a state we call *Hell*. The Scriptures reveal that it was because of pride, envy, and wanting to be like God that the demons rejected God (Genesis 3:5; Wisdom 2:24).

Since God made everything interrelated, He willed that the angels would have some interaction with us and some influence in our affairs. Angels are therefore aware of us. They care and pray for us. They guide and protect us. However, God also allows the demons to influence us. The *ordinary* work of angels and demons is hidden and common. In a way we are often not aware of, angels are always trying to help us to be faithful to God and to do good, while the demons are subtly trying to tempt us into sin. Demons tempt us, because this is their way of trying to get back at God. They want us to echo and join in their rebellion. Demons are not behind every temptation, however.

The *extraordinary* (out-of-the-ordinary) work of angels and demons is much rarer, and consists in visible and sensorial manifestations to us, when there is a kind of apparition of an angel or demon, or when they make their presence known to us in a more open and evident manner.

How do we know angels really exist?

We know that angels and demons really exist for the following reasons:

- Jesus explicitly speaks about them many times.
- Church teaching affirms their existence.
- Angels appear throughout the whole of Scripture.
- Many people have experienced manifestations of angels or demons throughout history.
- It is fitting that God created not only material beings and beings that are both spiritual and material (us), but also beings which are purely spiritual, namely angels.

Are there different types of angels?

Although there are not different “species” of angels like there are among animals and plants, Scripture does talk about different categories of angels, such as *Seraphim* (Is 6:2, 6) or *Cherubim* (Genesis 3:24). We are even given the names of three particular angels in Scripture: *Michael* (Daniel 12:1), *Gabriel* (Daniel 9:21), and *Raphael* (Tobit 3:17). Michael’s name means, “Who is like God?” Gabriel means “the Might of God,” and *Raphael* means the “Healing of God.” In the church calendar of feasts, which we call the *Liturgical Calendar*, we celebrate the Feast of the Archangels on September 29th.

Jesus also speaks about children having angels that always see the face of God (Matthew 18:10). This is the basis of our understanding of *Guardian Angels*. The Church teaches that human beings all have a guardian angel assigned to them by God who seeks to guide them to eternal life. We celebrate the feast of the Guardian Angels on October 2nd.

Where do angels appear in the Bible?

In the Old Testament, an angel guards the way to paradise (Gen 3:24). Angels guide and intervene in the lives of the patriarchs (Gen 16:7-14; 19:1-29; 21:17-18; 22:11-19; 24:7; 28:12; 31:11; 32:1-2; 48:16; Hos 12:4), Moses (Ex 3:2; Acts 7:30, 35, 38), Balaam (Num 22:22, 35), Joshua (5:13-15), and the judges (Judg 2:1, 4; 5:23; 6:11-12, 20-22; 13:3-21), kings (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; 1 Chron 21:12; 2 Chron 32:21; Is 37:36), and prophets of Israel (1 Kings 19:5, 7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; Is 6:2-1; Bar 6:7; Ezek 40:3; Dan 3:25, 28, 37; 6:22; 13:55, 59; 14:34; Zech 1:9, 11-14, 19; 2:3; 3:1-3, 5-6; 4:4-5, 10; 5:5, 10; 6:4-5; 12:8). An angel guides the people of Israel through the desert to the Promised Land (Ex 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2; Num 20:16; Is 63:9). The manna which the people of Israel ate on their way through the desert is described as the “bread of angels” (Ps 78:25; Wis 16:20). Angels are also mentioned in the Psalms (34:7; 35:5-6; 91:11; 103:20; 148:2), in Job (Job 4:18; 33:23), in Tobit (5:4, 17; 5:22-6:1, 4-5, 7; 11:14; 12:15, 22) and in 1 Maccabees (11:6; 15:22-23).

In the New Testament, angels surround the events in Christ's early life (Lk 1:11-19, 26-38; 2:9-15, 32; Mt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). Jesus refers to angels several times in His public ministry (Mt 13:27, 39, 41, 49; 16:27; 18:10; 22:30; 24:31, 36; 25:31; 26:53; Mk 8:38; 12:25; 13:32; Lk 9:26; 12:8-9; 15:10; 16:22; Jn 1:51), and angels serve Him after His temptations in the desert (Mt 4:11; Mk 1:13) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:43). Angels remove the stone placed over His tomb (Mt 28:2) and announce the good news of His resurrection to the women at the tomb (Mt 28:2-7; Mk 16:5-7; Lk 24:4-7, 23; Jn 20:12-13).

Angels play a major role in the Acts of the Apostles (5:19; 6:15; 8:26; 10:3-8; 22; 11:13-14; 12:7-11, 15, 21-23; 23:8, 9; 27:23-24). They are also mentioned many times in the New Testament epistles (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 4:9; 6:3; 11:10; 13:1; 2 Cor 11:14; 12:7; Gal 1:8; 3:19; 4:14; Col 2:18; 2 Th 1:7; 5:21; Heb 1:4-7, 13; 2:2, 5, 7, 9, 16; 12:22; 13:2; Jas; 1 Pet 1:12; 3:22; 2 Pet 2:4, 11; Jude 6) and appear abundantly in the book of Revelation (1:1, 20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 5, 7, 7, 14; 5:2, 11; 7:1-2, 11; 8:2-13; 9:1, 11, 13-15; 10:1, 5, 7-10; 11:1, 15; 12:7-9; 14:6, 8-10, 15-19; 15:1, 1, 6-8; 16:1, 3-5, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1, 7; 18:1, 21; 19:17; 20:1; 21:9, 12, 17; 22:6, 8, 16).

How should we relate to the angels?

We should be aware of the presence of angels, even though we can't see them. Since they form part of the Church, we should see them as spiritual allies and friends. We can and should ask for their prayers and assistance, as we do with each other and the saints.

As mentioned, each year the Church gives us two feasts of angels (*Archangels* and *Guardian Angels*) in order to honor the angels and remind us of their presence and activity. The angels are mentioned in the prayers of every Mass. There are also many popular prayers to angels. The most popular prayers are the *St. Michael Prayer* and the *Guardian Angel Prayer*.

It is easy to not fully appreciate angels. It is also possible to have an imbalanced devotion to angels or fear of demons, in a way that distracts us from God. True devotion to the angels—guided by the Church's faith—will draw us closer to God, not farther away.

Does the Church still perform exorcisms?

Yes. The Church has been entrusted with the mission of Christ, part of which involves deliverance from evil spirits. Because demons are real and do influence people, the Church calls upon the power of Christ in helping people to overcome evil spirits. Evil spirits influence most people only through temptation. For some people, evil spirits have a particular influence, involving possession or harassment. For this reason, every diocese is supposed to designate a priest as the local exorcist. The Church is very careful to make sure a person's case is diabolical rather than just psychological in nature before performing an exorcism.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. Give heed to him and listen to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him.” —Exodus 23:20-21

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.” —Matthew 18:10

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
—Luke 15:10

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” —John 1:51

The devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” —John 8:44

“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” —2 Cor 11:14

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” —Hebrews 13:2

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’” —Revelation 5:11-12

“And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These words are true words of God.’ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’”
—Revelation 19:9-10

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

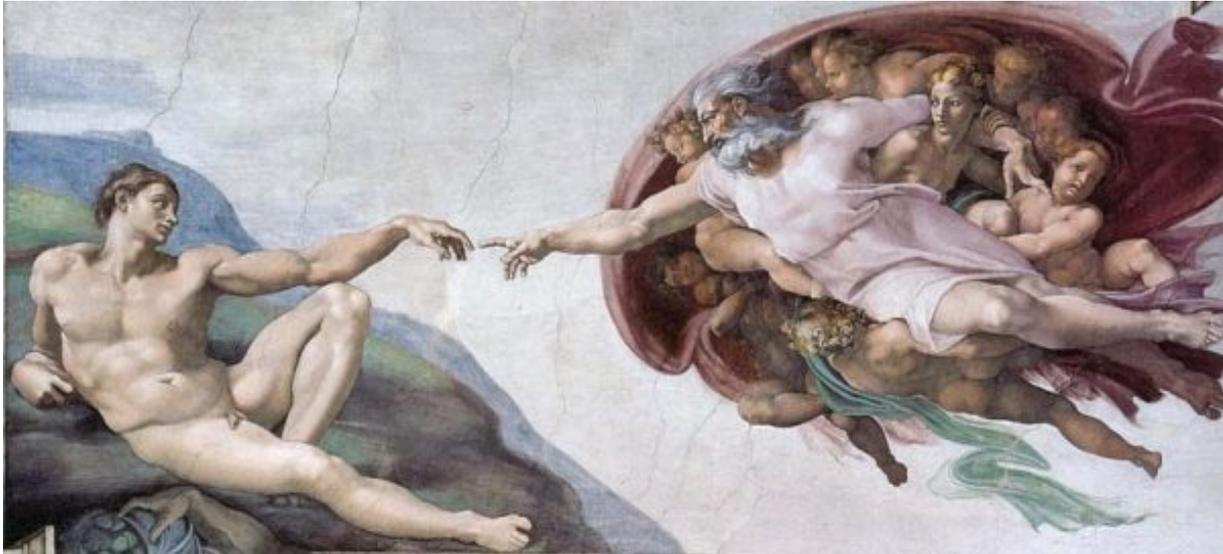
1. *How do angels fit into God’s plan for us?*
2. *How does devotion to the angels fit into the Christian life?*
3. *In what ways can we strive to be like the angels?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Psalm 139 / ***CCC:*** 355-384

HUMAN BEINGS

OUR IDENTITY, DIGNITY, AND DESTINY



In addition to creating *spiritual beings* (angels) and the *visible, material world* (which includes both living and non-living things), God created a being that is *both spiritual and material*, the *human being*. Like animals, we live, grow, eat, heal, reproduce, move, feel with our emotions, interact with the world through our senses, relate to other creatures, and socialize with our kind. We also have a spiritual soul, however, which enables us to rise above the level of animal existence. This spiritual soul enables us to think, to desire intellectual things, to have free will, to enter into personal relationships, to know and do what is right or wrong, and to come to know God. In a beautiful and mysterious way, the human being sums up in himself the whole material universe, and he bridges the visible and invisible dimensions of creation as well. Unlike the angels, we are formed and grow through time. We are beings that live in the drama of history under God's providence for us.

God created the universe in a special way for those beings who are able to know and love Him through grace, namely humans and angels. God created us in love, so that we might come to know and love Him in this life, and thereby come one day to share in His infinite joy forever. Every other part of creation is ordered to, and is at the service of, human beings and God's plan for them.

Each human being is unique and precious to God. At the same time, we are all alike and form a family. All human beings have a common origin. We all come from God. We also all have common human descendants, and therefore are all related. We all have the same human nature and dignity. Christ died and rose for us all. We are all called into the same Church. And we are all meant to share eternal life together, with God.

What does it mean to be made “in the image and likeness of God”?

Everything that exists resembles the mystery of God in some way. For this reason, we say that everything that exists is a *vestigium* (a “vestige,” literally a footprint). The human being resembles God in a special way, however. Over and above being a *vestigium*, the human being is made *ad imaginem Dei*, to the image of God. Since we are persons endowed with a spiritual soul, we are able to know and love on a rational level, and enter into personal relationships, like God. Being made “in the image and likeness of God,” as said before, means that we have an inherent orientation to God in the core of our being, and have the capacity to know and love Him through grace.

Besides *being made* in the image and likeness of God, we can also image God in a deeper way. Traditionally, we can speak about three different levels of imaging God. The first is called the *Image of Representation*. This is the image of God stamped in our human nature and is referred to in Genesis 1:26-31. Everyone, whether good or evil, has this image. The second level of imaging God is called the *Image of Conformity*, and is expressed in Ephesians 4:24. This is when someone is in a state of grace and actually loves God (and others in His love). These persons image God in a deeper way through actively loving God in their heart and actions, through Christ. Only persons in a state of grace (friendship with God) bear this image. Lastly, those in heaven image God in what we call the *Image of Likeness*, which is expressed biblically in 1 John 3:1-2. There is no part in these souls that doesn't reflect God, since they are totally perfected in love. This is the highest and most perfect way of imaging God. Christ is the Eternal Image of God within God. When we grow in grace and are more and more transformed into Christ spiritually, we more and more image God through Christ, until we image God perfectly in the eternal love of heaven. Thus, we all image God through our *nature* (representation). God progressively calls us to image Him further in Christ, through *grace* (conformity). This is supposed to lead us to imaging God perfectly one day in *glory* (likeness).

Why are human beings said to have a special dignity?

All created things are good and have value. However, because human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and are endowed with a spiritual soul, we have a unique dignity that animals don't have. God made us with a dignity and destiny worth creating a universe for. Christ also found us worth becoming man and dying for. Such is the value of human life! Every human being is worth more than the entire visible universe. Every human being is worth the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.

Because human beings have an intrinsic dignity, we are called to appreciate, reverence, and uphold the dignity of every human person and in every stage of life, from beginning to end. Because human beings have such dignity, it is always gravely evil to kill or wrong innocent human life at any stage.

What does the Catholic Church teach us about human nature?

The human being is a composite of body and soul. While one's parents cooperate with God in bringing about our bodies at conception, God directly creates our souls. The ability to create the spiritual soul is beyond the ability of every material and spiritual being and is therefore something only God can do. It is truly awesome to consider that God directly creates the soul of each person at the moment each one of us begins to exist, at the moment of conception.

A soul is a spirit that animates a body. This is in contrast to angels, whose spirits are not oriented to any body. Since the soul animates the human body, the body shares in the image and likeness of God. The human person is not two things (body and soul) stuck together. Rather, the human being is a unified being consisting of a body animated by a soul, or a soul animating a body. Death is therefore unnatural for us, since it constitutes the separation of body and soul. We will later learn that the whole person is destined to share in the glory of heaven, body and soul, not the soul alone. The soul is unique, in that it is not only spiritual, but also immortal (because it is essentially spiritual). It cannot dissolve and disintegrate as something material does. So, at death, while the body disintegrates, the soul endures. It is only by God's grace that one day our body will be reconstituted and reunited with the soul.

What are the powers of our soul?

In addition to having the general capacities of other animals (to sense, to reproduce, to heal, to move, to feel emotionally, etc.), the human being has the unique powers of *intellect* and *will*. The *intellect* or *mind* gives us the ability to know rationally. The *will* enables us to choose and love rationally. Together, they make free-will and acting personally possible.

Why did God make human beings male and female?

God made human beings male and female. Men and women are equal, equal but different, different but complementary. This "sexual dimension" of human nature is the basis for marriage and the family. Man and woman are inherently ordered to one another, not just for a moment, but for a lifetime. In the lifetime commitment to each other which we call marriage, spouses are meant to love and mutually enrich each other, and their love is meant to overflow to the begetting, raising, and formation of children. This loving and life-giving community of marriage and family, as we have seen, is reflective of the Trinity. Indeed, God made many human beings, so that in community we might learn to live out in our own way the inner loving Communion of the Trinity. In a special way, spouses are meant to reflect this loving inner Communion of the Trinity in their marriage and family life.

Although Jesus is male, and although God has revealed Himself in a special way as Father of the Eternal Son, and our Father, God in Himself is not male or female. Rather He possesses the perfections of both men and women in His infinite mystery. He also transcends the distinction of the sexes. Why God has revealed Himself mainly as Father versus Mother, and why God became man versus woman in Jesus is a mystery theologians seek to understand. It cannot be said that God is sexist, that women have any less dignity than men, or that God does not possess all the perfections of women in Himself on this account.

What is “Original Justice,” or “Original Holiness”?

The Bible reveals that God created the first human beings in *grace*, which is a special share in God’s life. This was a totally gratuitous gift above and beyond man’s nature. It is a sign that God called human beings to something *more*, to something above and beyond simply human existence, and to something more than this world has to offer. This original grace involved perfect harmony with God, with one another, and within themselves, in addition to being immune from death. This grace was a stepping stone meant to lead us to heaven, symbolized by the tree of life in the account of Genesis. As we will see, our first parents sinned, however. Instead of going forward toward heaven, they went backward. In so doing, they ruptured the harmony in which they were created. The original state of grace which God created the first human beings in is what we call “original justice” or “original holiness.”

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

Genesis 1:26-31 (*human beings made in the image and likeness of God and as stewards*)

Psalm 8 (*the wonder of our dignity*)

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” —Matthew 10:28

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.” —Matthew 10:29-31

“For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am wondrously made.” —Psalm 139:13-14

“You shall not kill.” —Exodus 20:13

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is unique about human beings, and why did God create us?*
2. *How can we become more aware of, and better respect and cherish, the dignity of every human being in every stage in life?*
3. *Why did God create human beings as male and female?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Genesis 2-4 / ***CCC:*** 385-421

THE FALL FROM GRACE



What is “the Fall”?

The Fall refers to the event, recounted in Genesis 3, when our first parents fell from a state of holiness, grace, and friendship with God to a state of sin, suffering, and death, at the prompting of Satan. God originally placed our first parents in a state of grace, so that through this grace they might say ‘yes’ to Him and advance toward heaven. In sinning, however, they went backward and turned their faces away from God.

What were the immediate consequences of the Fall?

The sin of our first parents ruptured the harmony that God had originally created us in. Before the fall, human beings are in harmony with God, with each other, with creation, and within themselves. They are also immune from death. After the fall, they find themselves alienated from God. They try to hide from Him (Gen 3:8-10). They become estranged from one another. Adam and Eve fail to take responsibility for their sin and blame each other for his/her own faults (Gen 3:12-13). Their relationship will now be marked by conflict and domination (Gen 3:16). They also become alienated within themselves. They find themselves naked and ashamed (Gen 3:7, 10). Finally, they find themselves at odds with the world. They depart from the state of harmony they were created in, and now go forth into a world of toil, disappointment, suffering, and death (Gen 3:17-24).

Their sin has a ripple affect as well. Their family will be affected. One son will kill another (Gen 4:8). Society will be affected. People will continually think evil in their hearts (Gen 6:5) and become ambitious and controlling (Gen 11:1-9). Their sin becomes like mold that spreads everywhere and affects everything for the worse.

How does the Fall affect us?

Because of the sin of our first parents, instead of being conceived and born in grace, which would have been the case had they not sinned, we are born into the aftermath of their sin, which state we call *Original Sin*. *Original Sin* can refer both to the original fall and to the state we are born into because of their fall. In this state of original sin, we are subject to suffering and death. We are conceived and born without the gift of grace. And not everything is in harmony within us. Our intellect is clouded. We often don't understand clearly and easily get misled. We also easily tend to justify ourselves when we do wrong. Our will is weak. Often enough, we find ourselves unable to do the good we want to do. Our emotions are often not in line with reason. Our actions often flow from a wounded heart. The way we think of God is also affected. We see Him as a tyrant who doesn't have our true good in mind, or as someone who doesn't love us. We call the combination of these fallen tendencies *concupiscence*. In short, it is our tendency to sin and selfishness.

Is there hope for us after the Fall?

For their own good, and for ours, God allows us to suffer the consequences of our sins and the sins of others, including those of our first parents. However, God did not abandon humanity. In the Genesis account, God speaks to Adam and Eve, helping them to learn from their sin (Gen 3:8-13). He makes clothes for them (Gen 3:21). He also promises that one day a descendent of our first parents would arise and "crush" the head of the serpent, that is, defeat the reign of the devil over humanity (Gen 3:15), saving humankind from the condition of sin, suffering, and death. Jesus Christ is this promised descendent.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

- Genesis 3-4 (*The Fall & Cain's struggle with sin*)
- Romans 5:12-21 (*Christ is the New Adam, reversing Adam's sin and restoring us to God*)
- Romans 7:13-25 (*the inner struggle of failing to do the good we want to do*)
- 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (*Death came through Adam, Resurrection comes through Christ*)

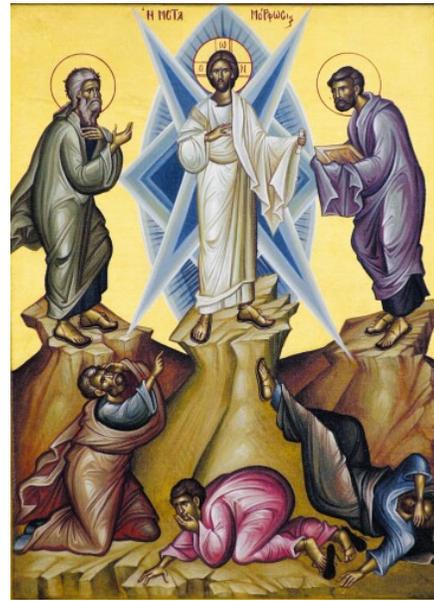
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. Where do you see the effects of Original Sin in our world?***
- 2. Why is it hard for us to do good, even when we want to?***
- 3. How can we overcome these tendencies to sin?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Exodus 3 & John 1:1-18 / ***CCC:*** 74-100

DIVINE REVELATION



What is “Divine Revelation”?

As Catholics, we believe not only that God exists and has created the universe, but that He has *revealed* Himself to the world as well. *Divine Revelation*, then, refers to God revealing Himself to the world, to God making known His mystery to us, to His self-disclosure to us in history for our salvation. And, just as when we come to know someone, there is an initial encounter, and then we come to know him or her better with time, so God has progressively revealed Himself through time, until He revealed Himself fully to us in Christ.

So, in contrast to *atheists*, we affirm God’s existence. In contrast to *agnostics*, we claim that we can know that God exists. In contrast to *deists*, who believe God exists but never revealed Himself to the world, we believe that God actually did make Himself known to the world, as Jews and Muslims also believe. God has both spoken to, and acted in, the world. Unlike Jews and Muslims, however, we believe that God not only revealed Himself to the world. He has even *given Himself* to the world. He has gone so far as to become one of us in Jesus Christ. He has become man. Jesus Christ is above all, therefore, *the revelation of God*.

Further, just as we communicate with others through both words and actions, so God has revealed Himself to us through *words* (spoken through messengers) and *actions* (His saving and miraculous deeds). In the most powerful way, God reveals Himself to us through the words and actions of Jesus.

What is the “Deposit of Faith”?

The *Deposit of Faith* refers to the fullness of what God has revealed to us, and in a special way through Christ. There is a certain *wholeness* or *fullness* to what God has revealed and which is passed down to us. The *deposit of faith*, then, refers to this whole.

What is “Sacred Tradition”?

“Tradition” literally means something handed down. *Sacred Tradition*, then, is simply *Divine Revelation passed down to us*. Jesus has provided a channel through which all that He has revealed

... *Creator of heaven and earth...*

(the *deposit of faith*) is passed down intact to every generation. *Sacred Scripture*, or the *Bible*, is sacred tradition insofar as it has been written and preserved. Since not all that Christ revealed has been written down in the first century by the apostles and their associates, however, *Sacred Tradition* can also refer to *Divine Revelation insofar as it has not been written in Sacred Scripture but has been passed down through word of mouth*. *Apostolic tradition* refers in particular to what has been passed down to us through the apostles, from Christ.

How do we know what God has revealed, and what He has not revealed?

Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the Church in order to guide her through the ages into all truth (John 16:13). In this way, He gave the Church the role of recognizing and clarifying what God has revealed, and of clarifying how it is applied to various issues that arise in each age. This gift of the Holy Spirit to guard and clarify divine revelation belongs to the Church, therefore. Since Christ established a Church through His apostles, gave the apostles authority to teach in His name, and gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles and their successors in a special way toward this end, the Church, through her shepherds, is the divinely appointed guardian of God's revelation. Christ gave the apostles, and Peter in particular, authority to teach and shepherd in His name. This gift (or *charism*) and authority is passed down to the successors of Peter and the apostles, which are the Pope and bishops of the Catholic Church. We refer to this *teaching office of the Church* as the *Magisterium of the Church*. In sum, the *deposit of faith* (all that Christ has revealed in *Sacred Scripture* and *Sacred Tradition*) is passed down in the Church, and is safeguarded and clarified by the *Magisterium* (teaching office) of the Church, the successors of Peter and the apostles in their roles as official preservers and teachers of the faith.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” —John 1:18

Hebrews 1:1-4 (*God has spoken to us in many ways, in these last days through His Son*)

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” —John 16:13

“. . . the Church, which is the pillar and bulwark of truth.” —1 Tim 3:15

“So, then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” —2 Thessalonians 2:15

“Contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” —Jude 3

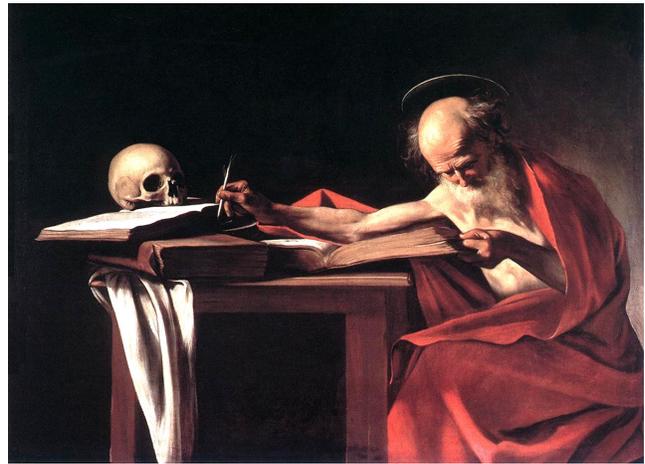
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is Divine Revelation?*
2. *What is contained in Divine Revelation?*
3. *How is it passed down to us?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Luke 24 / *CCC:* 101-141

THE BIBLE



What is the Bible?

The *Bible* is God's revelation insofar as it has been written down. The *Bible*, or *Sacred Scripture*, is a collection of 73 books (originally individual scrolls) which were written by many different human authors during a span of over 1000 years, and which the Church considers authoritative, inspired by God, and formative for Christian belief and life. This official collection of books, recognized by the Church and read in her official worship (*liturgy*), is what we call the *Canon of Scripture*.

What are the main parts, or divisions, of Scripture?

The two main divisions in Sacred Scripture are the *Old Testament* (everything before Christ and leading up to Him) and the *New Testament* (the books that flow out of the experience of Christ's first coming). The Old Testament contains 46 books, the New Testament 27 books.

What are the books of the Old Testament?

The books which the Catholic Church recognizes as part of the Old Testament are: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees*.

What are the different parts of the Old Testament?

There are different ways to divide the Old Testament. Perhaps the easiest way to divide the Old Testament is into historical, prophetic, and wisdom books. Among the historical books, the first five books are of special significance and are called the *Torah* or *Pentateuch*.

The *historical books*, which present the narrative of God's people through a theological lens are:

- *Genesis* (Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, Joseph)
- *Exodus* (slavery in Egypt, deliverance, flight into the wilderness, Mount Sinai)
- *Leviticus* (worship and laws are legislated and implemented at Mount Sinai)
- *Numbers* (the journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land)

- *Deuteronomy* (Moses exhorts the people of Israel before they enter the Promised Land)
- *Joshua* (Israel enters and settles in the Promised Land)
- *Judges* (wavering between fidelity and falling away under various judges)
- *Ruth* (a story about a female convert and David's great grandmother)
- *1 Samuel & 1 Chronicles* (Samuel, Saul, David)
- *2 Samuel & 1 Chronicles* (David's reign in Jerusalem over all Israel)
- *1 Kings & 2 Chronicles* (King Solomon to King Ahab, Elijah the prophet)
- *2 Kings & 2 Chronicles* (Elisha the prophet, King Ahaziah to the Babylonian Exile)
- *Ezra & Nehemiah* (Return from exile, rebuilding of the nation and temple)
- *1 & 2 Maccabees* (reclaiming Israel from foreign threats, fidelity to God, martyrs)

The *prophetic books* which record God's messages to His people during times of political and religious turmoil or restoration are:

- *Isaiah*
- *Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch*
- *Ezekiel*
- *Daniel*
- Twelve Minor Prophets (*Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*)

The *wisdom books* are:

- *Job* (suffering & loss, questioning, innocence asserted & debated, God's intervention, restoration)
- *Psalms* (150 prayers)
- *Proverbs* (sayings and reflections)
- *Ecclesiastes* (a philosopher king questions the purpose of life)
- *Song of Songs* (love song between a king and queen)
- *Wisdom* (reflections on God, Israel, and the idolatry of the nations)
- *Sirach* (collections of the sayings of Jesus Ben Sira)

How can we understand the whole Old Testament in a simple way?

Jesus recognizes the kind of threefold division of the Old Testament outlined above when he mentions "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" (Lk 24:44). However, most of the time Jesus and the New Testament writers summarize the Old Testament in terms of "the law and the prophets" (Mt 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; Lk 16:16; Jn 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom 3:21). In a similar way, the whole Old Testament can be divided into two parts revolving around two mountains, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Mount Sinai is where the people of Israel encounter God, receive his "law" (*torah*), enter into a covenant with Him, and receive from Him a way to worship Him. The second part of the Old Testament revolves around

Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where God's Temple is established, where David and his descendants rule God's people as kings, and which is the central place of concern for the prophets.

The Old Testament can also be seen in terms of building covenants, which are agreements involving a relationship and mutual commitment between God and His people. Thus, the following covenants are progressively established:

- Covenant with Adam and Eve ("One Holy Couple")
- Covenant with Noah and his sons and their wives ("One Holy Family")
- Covenant with Abraham and his kinsmen ("One Holy Tribe")
- Covenant with Moses and the people of Israel ("One Holy Nation")
- Covenant with David and Israel, and certain nations aligned with Israel ("One Holy Kingdom")

Despite sins and failures along the way, all this would lead up to the "new" (Jer 31:31; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24) and "eternal" (Heb 9:15; 13:20) covenant which Jesus would establish, and which would embrace all peoples through the universal church He would establish ("One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church").

What are the books of the New Testament?

The New Testament books, which were written at different times between 50 and 100 AD, are: *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.*

What are the different parts of the New Testament?

The New Testament can be divided into the following parts:

- The Gospels, or accounts of Jesus' Life (*Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*)
- An account of the early Church from the Ascension of Jesus until Paul arrives in Rome (*Acts of the Apostles*)
- Letters from various Christian leaders to different Christian communities or individuals
 - Paul's Letters (*Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*)
 - *The Letter to the Hebrews*
 - The "Catholic" Epistles (*James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude*)
- The Apocalypse (*Revelation*)

One can also group the New Testament books into the different authors associated with the different books. Besides individual books authored by, or associated with, various early apostles or disciples, there are four authors thought to be the source of more than one book:

- Luke (*Luke & Acts*)
- John (*John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation*)
- Paul (see above for the list of “Pauline” books)
- Peter (*1 Peter, 2 Peter*)

Why are there four different Gospels?

The Gospels are accounts of the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus written by different authors from different perspectives and to different communities. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the *Synoptic Gospels*, since they are similar (“synoptic” means to “see together”). Whereas the Gospel of John is different in many ways. With all four Gospels, we have a much richer perspective of Jesus than if we were limited to only one Gospel. Each Gospel is very powerful in its own right and gives us unique insights into Jesus.

How can the different letters of St. Paul be grouped?

In our New Testament, we have a collection of letters that St. Paul wrote to various communities and individuals during his missionary journeys in the Mediterranean world. Four letters are to individuals (*1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*). Three of these are instructions to co-workers of Paul and leaders of Christian communities (Timothy and Titus), and so are called the “pastoral epistles.” The other (*Philemon*) is a letter of appeal to a slave owner to free his slave. The rest of Paul’s letters are to communities. *Romans* is a unique letter which Paul wrote to a church (in Rome) he was traveling to and had not founded or visited. Paul’s other letters are to churches he founded or had a formative influence on. Some of these churches were in Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey (*Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae*). Some were in Greece (*Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi*). Some of Paul’s letters are called the “captivity epistles,” since Paul wrote them from prison (*Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, 2 Timothy*). We can also understand St. Paul’s letters in terms of the possible order in which they were written, namely *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Titus, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy*.

Why is the Catholic Bible different from the Protestant Bible?

The New Testament is the same for all Christian communities. However, there is disagreement about the books of the Old Testament. The Catholic Church has seven more books in its Old Testament canon than the Protestant communities have, as well as some parts in Daniel and Esther. The Catholic canon is essentially the same as was recognized in the early Church councils of Hippo and Carthage (393-414AD), and later most solemnly recognized and defined at the Council of Trent in the 1500’s. The Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, challenged the officially accepted list of Old and New Testament books in the 1500’s for three reasons. First, certain biblical books contained doctrines which Martin Luther rejected. Second, original Hebrew texts (or, rather, copies of original texts) were not at the time

available for these seven books. Third, Martin Luther thought that the Christian Old Testament should be identical to the canon of Hebrew Scriptures which the Jews had currently recognized and used. The problem with Luther's reasons are that, first, it is not legitimate to reject books of the Bible when they do not accord with one's personal theology. Second, the canonical requirement that an Old Testament book be written in Hebrew is arbitrary. In addition, in the twentieth century, ancient Hebrew texts were discovered for some parts of these seven books. Third, Jewish tradition was not in full agreement about the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures until after the first century, and the canon agreed upon presently in Jewish communities was officially recognized by Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. After the coming of Jesus, however, it is the Church that now has the authority to determine what belongs to Sacred Scripture, not any community which would not recognize Jesus. Lastly, while none of these seven books are explicitly quoted in the New Testament, there are several instances of passages implicitly referred to. There are many books in the Protestant Old Testament which are not quoted in the New Testament either. Such is not a basis from excluding them from the Old Testament.

Are there "missing books" of the Bible, or can the Bible be added to?

There were many circulated writings in the early Church which the Church was aware of but ultimately chose not to include in the canon of the Bible, either because a particular writing had problematic aspects to it (like the so-called "Gospels" of "Thomas"), or because the writing was felt to be too late or not connected closely enough with an early apostle or disciple of Jesus. So, the Church was very deliberate about which books were included or excluded from Scripture. Also, God's revelation comes to a fullness with the coming of Christ. Therefore, the Church has decided that divine revelation is considered "closed" after the last books of the New Testament were written, or with the death of the last apostle. From that point, all that God has revealed is complete and will be handed on to each generation. We can always understand God's revelation in deeper ways. But God will not officially or publicly reveal anything new about Himself or His plan for us until the end of time. Thus, there are no "missing books of the Bible," and the Bible cannot be added to.

Who wrote the books of the Bible?

At the deepest level, God is the author of the Bible. We therefore speak of the Bible as *inspired*. This does not mean that the books of the Bible were *dictated by God*, or that the human authors of Scripture were purely passive in the exercise of writing each book. Rather, God employed the human authors in their full humanness and with their strengths and limitations in knowledge and literary skill. Regarding the human authors of Scripture, most books of the Bible do not tell us who wrote them, and some books were written "in the name" of a certain author, but were understood not to be literally from that author, for example, the Book of Ecclesiastes, which we know was not written by Solomon. Many books have traditional authors associated with them. The Church allows reasonable scholarly debate about the possible authors of the biblical books, while respecting tradition. In the end, who the human authors actually were does not affect the *inspiration* of the Bible.

How should we read and interpret the Bible?

We see the Scriptures as the word of God. Therefore, we should reverence the Bible and look to the Scriptures for spiritual inspiration. It is important to understand and interpret the Bible correctly, however. It is important always to let the Church guide our understanding and interpretation of the Bible. The following approaches to Scripture should be avoided:

- The tendency to treat the Bible as a mere collection of human documents (secular approach)
- The tendency to insist upon taking all texts at face-value scientifically and historically, and the preoccupation in trying to harmonize all detailed discrepancies (fundamentalist approach)
- The tendency to take passages out of context and to use them for some agenda
- The tendency to make oneself the ultimate arbitrator of the meaning of the Bible, or to pit passages of Scripture against the Church

In contrast, we should read the Bible in light of Christ, Who is the one Word spoken in the many words of Scripture. We should read it with faith and reason, as well as with the guidance of the Church. We should read the Bible in continuity with the tradition of the Church, which includes many insights from the liturgy, teachings, and the Fathers of the Church. We should consider the text and context very carefully, and view each passage in terms of the whole of Scripture. To this end, studying our faith and the books of the Bible in light of our faith is invaluable. We should also read the Scriptures prayerfully, looking for what God is saying to us through the Scriptures. With some difficult passages, especially in the Old Testament, it can be helpful to remember that God progressively revealed Himself, and that God used and even allowed human limitations and imperfect understandings of God to come through at times. In the end, God has willed to use the Scriptures as a privileged instrument to speak to us, to inspire us, to enlighten us, to form us, to make us holy, and to lead us to eternal life. That should be the focus in our prayerful reading of the Bible.

How is the Bible used at Mass?

For Sundays, there are always three readings at Mass, the *First Reading*, the *Second Reading*, and the *Gospel*. There is also a psalm recited or sung between the first and second reading. The *First Reading* is usually from the Old Testament and is usually paired with the Gospel, although sometimes it is from the Acts of the Apostles. The *Second Reading* is always from a New Testament letter. The *Gospel* is always from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

For Sundays, there is a three-year cycle of readings, called Years A, B, and C. Year A is devoted to Matthew, Year B to Mark, and Year C to Luke. The Gospel of John is often read during the Lent and Easter seasons, and at other special times of the year.

For daily Mass during the week, there is a two-year cycle for the First Reading, called Years 1 and 2, while the Gospel is the same for both years. With regard to the Old Testament, Year 1 is mainly devoted to the first part of the Old Testament, to the “Law,” whereas Year 2 is mainly devoted to the second part of the Old Testament, to the “Prophets.” New Testament readings are also interspersed within these two years.

How do we highlight the Gospel at Mass?

The Gospels are at the heart of the Bible since they constitute the only four accounts of the life of Jesus we accept as canonical. For this reason, there are certain things we do for the Gospel at Mass that we don't do for any other readings:

- We stand, whereas we sit for the other readings.
- There is a procession, which can involve incense and candles.
- Only an ordained priest or deacon can read the Gospel at Mass and give the homily. If a deacon is present, it is his proper role to read the Gospel.
- If a deacon is present, he receives a blessing from the priest before processing to read the Gospel. If no deacon is present, the priest prays a special prayer in quiet while bowing to the altar before reading the Gospel.
- The *Alleluia* ("Praise the LORD" in Hebrew) is sung, with a Scriptural verse in between the *Alleluia* refrain.
- The deacon or priest says, "The Lord be with you" before reading the Gospel. He then traces the cross on the text of the Gospel with his thumb.
- After the priest or deacons says "A reading from the holy Gospel according to (*Mathew, Mark, Luke, or John*)," the people respond, "Glory to you, O Lord," while tracing the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart. Sometimes the Gospel is incensed at this point.
- There is a special *Book of the Gospels* that can be used which contains all the Gospel passages read at Mass for the three-year Sunday cycle and special feast days.
- The Gospel is kissed afterward, while the priest quietly says, "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away."
- At the end of the Gospel reading, we respond, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ," whereas we only say, "Thanks be to God" after the other readings.

How should I go about reading the Bible on my own?

It is a good spiritual practice to read a little of the Bible every day. It is generally advisable to start with the New Testament, especially with the Gospels, and slowly to make your way through the whole New and Old Testaments. It is also advisable to obtain good commentaries or guides to help you understand and rightly interpret the Scriptures.

There is a traditional method of prayerfully reading the Bible called *Lectio Divina* (“divine reading”). This method, either alone or in a group, involves reading a select passage slowly and prayerfully, taking some time to meditate on it, reflecting on how God is speaking to you through the passage, speaking to God from your heart in light of the passage, and ending with quiet prayer in the presence of God, allowing the passage to sit with you and to form you. (See the separate handout with more details about the method of *Lectio Divina*.)

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” —Romans 15:4

“Attend to the public reading of scripture.” —1 Timothy 4:13

“From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” —2 Timothy 3:15-16

“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” —2 Peter 1:20-21

“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” —John 6:63

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.” —Jeremiah 15:16

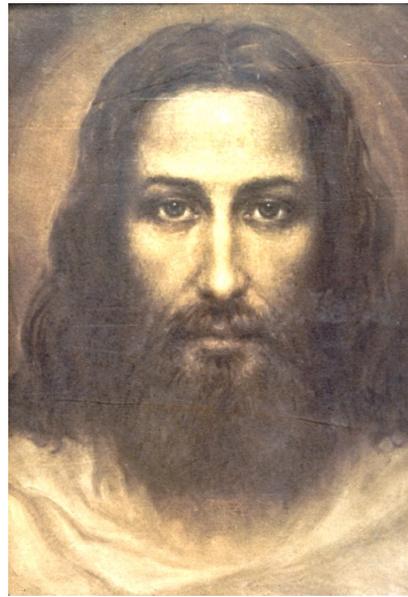
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What are some new things you learned about the Bible here?*
2. *How should we as Catholics read and interpret the Bible?*
3. *How might you find greater inspiration from the Bible, both at Mass and in your daily life?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: John 1:1-18 / *CCC:* 422-483

JESUS CHRIST



Who is Jesus Christ?

Historically speaking, and from an outsider's perspective, Jesus Christ is a Jewish man who lived from perhaps 4 B.C. to 30 A.D. in the nation of Israel, which at the time was under the control of the Roman Empire. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (which is a few miles south of Jerusalem) and raised in Nazareth (which is in the region of Galilee, a northern region in Israel). He was of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of King David. His mother and father were named Mary and Joseph. Jesus lived an ordinary life, working as a carpenter or laborer until about thirty years old. At that point, he began going about Galilee, preaching, teaching, healing, and gathering and forming disciples. About three years later, he made his way south to Jerusalem, where he would be put to death on the charges of sedition and blasphemy (the charge was that he led people to believe that he was the king of the Jews and the Son of God).

We Christians profess this Jesus, in fact, to be:

- The eternal Son of God who became man
- The long-awaited Messiah of the Jewish people
- The desire and hope of all peoples
- The Savior of the world, who, according to the plan of God, suffered and died for the sins of the world, but whom God victoriously raised from the dead three days later, so that one day we might rise from the dead and have eternal life through Him
- Our Lord

Where in the Gospels is Jesus referred to as the Son of God?

The Gospel of Mark calls itself “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The Angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that the One born of her will be called the “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” (Lk 1:32, 35). The voice of God at the Baptism and Transfiguration reveals Jesus as “my beloved Son” (Mk 1:11; 9:7). John the Baptist calls Jesus the “Son of God” (Jn 1:34). Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son” of the “Father” in His public ministry (Mk 12:6-8; Mt 11:27; 12:32; 22:2; 24:36; 28:19; Jn 5:19-27; 8:36; 10:36; 17:1). Demons recognize Jesus as the “Son of God” (Mk 3:11; 5:7; Mt 4:3, 6; Lk 4:3, 9, 4:41; 8:28). The disciples occasionally realize and profess Jesus as the Son of God (Mt 14:33; 16:16; Jn 1:49; 11:27). The Gospel of John calls Jesus “the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14). Jesus is condemned to death by the Jewish leaders on the charge of blasphemy, specifically for claiming to be the Son of God (Mk 14:64; Jn 19:7), which title Jesus acknowledges when directly asked (Mk 14:61-62; Mt 26:64; Lk 22:70). Jesus is ridiculed for this claim (Mt 27:40, 43). At the Cross, a Roman centurion strikingly acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God when Jesus has just died (Mk 15:39). When risen, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son within the Trinity (Mt 28:19).

Most often, however, Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man.” In the Old Testament, God calls Ezekiel “Son of Man” (Ezk 2:8; 3:1; 3:4, etc.). In that context the title means someone who comes from human beings and is mortal. Daniel however has an astounding vision of a figure called the “Son of Man,” who comes “from the clouds of heaven,” and to whom God, the “Ancient of Days,” gives an “everlasting dominion” that would never pass away or be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14). This figure is given divine-like dominion over all people, and yet is human and mortal as well. In calling Himself the “Son of Man,” Jesus identifies Himself with this divine-human figure who would die and yet would be given an “everlasting dominion,” implying resurrection and eternal exaltation.

What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God?

Occasionally in the Old Testament, humans or angels are called “sons of God.” However, in the case of angels, this simply indicates that the angels originate from God and are godlike. When referring to humans, it means that such human beings have been “adopted” by God in a special way, and/or that their authority derives from God. In no case are they thought to be eternal with God or to be part of God. When Jesus is referred to as the Son of God, however, He is not simply *a* son of God, or adopted, or possessive of divinely derived power. It means that He is *the eternal Son of God*. He is “part” of God. He belongs to God. He comes from God, but from within God. He preexists His human life on earth. He is not created, but He is part of the uncreated mystery of God. When learning about God as Trinity, we learned that all three persons are coequal and coeternal. So, the Son is fully God, since He shares or “possesses” the one divine nature shared or “possessed” by each Person of the Trinity. And yet, the Son, like each Person of the Trinity, is distinct from the other Persons. Since the Son of God has become man in Jesus, then, God has become man.

How do we know that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and therefore fully God?

The following things indicate that Jesus is more than merely human, and that He is in fact God:

- Jesus and John the Baptist refer to the preexistence of Jesus, that Jesus existed before becoming human (Jn 1:1, 15; 8:58; 17:5, 24).
- Jesus forgives sins. Yet only God can forgive sins (Mk 2:1-12).
- Jesus speaks with divine prerogatives in teaching and clarifying God's law originally given to Moses by God (Mt 5:21-48; 7:28-29).
- The Pharisees interpret the claim to be the Son of God as blasphemy (Mk 14:61-64).
- The Gospel of John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . all things were created through him. . . and the Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:1-14).
- Jesus is called "the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:18).
- The Gospel of John mentions that Jesus made Himself equal to God (Jn 5:18).
- Jesus is referred to as "the Bridegroom" of the Church. This is a divine claim, given that in the Old Testament God is referred to as the Bridegroom of His people (Mk 2:19-20; Mt 25:1-10; Jn 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17).
- St. Paul says that in Christ "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19).
- Jesus applies the divine name ("I AM") to Himself (Jn 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51, 8:12, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6, 15:1, 5; Rev 22:13).
- It was prophesied that God would become man (Is 7:14; 9:6; Ezek 34:11-16; Mic 5:2; Mal 3:1).
- The world is said to be created and is sustained through the Son of God (Jn 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2-3).
- Jesus is said to be superior to the angels (Heb 1:4-14).
- Jesus' miracles imply an internal source of divine power versus drawing such power from a source external to Himself (Mk 4:41; 6:2; Lk 7:16).
- Jesus is called Lord, clearly understood in some contexts to be a divine title (Mt 7:21-22; 22:43-45; Mk 16:19-20; Lk 1:43; 2:11; 6:46; 24:34; Jn 11:27; 13:13-14; 20:28; 21:7, 17; Acts 7:59-60; Rom 1:4, 10:9; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11).
- Jesus calls Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk 2:28).
- Thomas calls Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28).
- Jesus claims to be greater than Abraham (Jn 8:58), Moses (Mk 9:4; Jn 1:17; 5:46), David (Mt 12:37), Solomon (Mt 12:42), Jonah (Mt 12:41), and the Temple (Mt 12:6).
- Jesus is without sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5; Is 53:9).
- Jesus is given authority to judge the living and the dead (Mt 25:31-46; 28:18; Jn 5:27; Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1).

Other things that point to the divinity of Christ are scientifically verifiable miracles that happen in our day and age, the stability of the Church in spite of great challenges through the ages, the credibility of the apostles, the coherence and consistency of Church teaching, and the holiness of saints in every age. In the end, however, while all these things point to the truth that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and therefore fully God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, it is only by the Holy Spirit engendering faith in our hearts that we can have fully sufficient assurance that Jesus is God Who has become man.

A last thing to consider here is that Jesus cannot simply be a good man or prophet, since no authentic prophet would lead people to think he is God if he is not in fact God. There are only three possibilities for who Jesus is then: in the popular language of an argument made by C. S. Lewis, Jesus is either a “liar,” a “lunatic,” or “Lord.” Either Jesus knows full well that He is making a claim that is not true, meaning He is a liar. Or He is delusional, meaning that he thinks he is the eternal Son of God, but this is only because of some mental illness or psychosis. Or He is telling the truth and is actually Who He claims to be, the eternal Son of God. The Gospels portray Jesus as a figure who is neither a “liar” nor a “lunatic,” but rather One who truly is “Lord.”

How did God become man?

When we say that God became man in Jesus, we are not saying that God changed into a man. God is inherently unchangeable. Nor do we mean that the Father or the Holy Spirit became man. Nor do we mean that Jesus was eternally human and just came to earth to manifest His humanity to us. Nor do we mean that there was an existing man out there whom God adopted in order to call him His Son, or that God infused such a man with the divine nature. Instead, we mean that the Son of God, Who is fully God, *united to Himself* a human nature at a certain chosen point in history, without changing Who He was. Prior to this point, the Son of God possessed only the divine nature. After this point, a human nature, which did not exist before, is created and immediately united to the divine nature in the divine Person of the Son of God, through a virginal conception within Mary’s womb. So, two things are joined together, the human and the divine, from this moment. The human nature is created, limited, and changeable. The divine nature is uncreated, unlimited, and unchangeable. So, Jesus is one divine Person with two natures, human and divine. The two natures remain what they are without mixture or confusion, and yet they are united to the divine Person of the Son of God in such a way that they can fully be said to be His. This mystery of God becoming man is called the *Incarnation*, which denotes the event of God coming “in the flesh.”

Why did God become man?

Not only is it possible for God to become man in this way. He actually did become man in this way. God truly loved us to the extent of becoming one of us. Why? There are many reasons. First, the Son of God became man in order to save us from sin, suffering, death, and every other form of evil. The angel Gabriel told Joseph to name the child born of Mary, his wife, "Jesus," explaining that He would "save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Second, to reveal God to us. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, as St. Paul tells us (Col 1:15). Jesus reveals God to us in and through our human nature. In Jesus, we can see the face of the invisible God. We can touch the intangible God. We can hear the God Who is beyond words. We can speak and relate to God in human form. Third, the Son of God became man in order to give us a visible example of the way God wants us to live (Jn 13:15). Fourth, so that God could live in solidarity with us (Heb 2:14-18). Fifth, to assist and increase our faith (Jn 20:28). Sixth, to give us hope of attaining eternal life, through the Resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:20). And seventh, so that, having seen how much God loves us, we might be moved to love Him in return (Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 4:10).

How does Jesus fulfill the Old Testament?

Jesus is "the one who is to come" (Lk 7:20), or the "Messiah," which means "the Anointed One" in Hebrew, translated as "Christ" in Greek (Jn 1:41). The term, "Christ," then, summarizes this dimension of Jesus, that He is the fulfillment of the Jews.

Specifically, we can see Christ as fulfilling the prophecies, figures, sacred objects, and feasts of the Old Testament.

So, first, Christ fulfills the *prophecies* of the Old Testament. Putting the prophecies together, we discover that it is prophesied that God would become man (Is 7:14; 9:6; Ezek 34:11-16; Mic 5:2; Mal 3:1), that He would be of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10) and of David's lineage (Is 9:7; Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:15; Ezk 34:23-24; 37:25; Amos 9:11; Zech 13:1), that He would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14) in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), that He would be a light to those sitting in darkness in Galilee (Is 9:1-7). He would open the eyes of the blind (Is 29:18; Is 42:7), and make the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the mute speak (Is 35:5). He would preach good news (Is 52:7) and teach in parables (Ps 78:2). He would be betrayed with silver (Gen 20:16; Zech 11:12). He would be scourged (Is 50:6; 53:5; Jer 20:2). Those who put Him to death would divide His clothing and tear holes in His hands (Ps 22:16, 18). He would be pierced (Zech 12:10; 13:1), but that not a bone of His body would be broken (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12; Ps 34:20). He would rise from the dead on the third day (Hos 6:2; Jonah 1:17; Ezek 37:1-14). He would pour out the Holy Spirit on all humankind (Joel 2:28). Through Him, the Gentiles would come to know the true God (Is 49:6). He would come one day to judge the living and the dead (Is 25:6-9; 66:22; Dan 12:1-4; Joel 3; Mal 4:1).

Second, Christ also fulfills the *figures* of the Old Testament. He is a New Adam through whose obedience He has come to reconcile us with God and one another (Gen 3; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22). Like Isaac, Christ is the “only son” who carries the wood of his sacrifice up a mountain (Gen 22). Like Joseph, he is betrayed by His own people (Gen 37:12-36), sold for silver (Gen 37:28), and condemned with two criminals, one who is saved, the other who is not (Gen 40-41). Like Melchizedek, Christ is a king and priest who presents a sacrifice of bread and wine—except that Jesus transforms the bread and wine into His Body and Blood (Gen 14:17-24; Heb 7). Like Moses, Christ has unparalleled intimacy with God and reveals God’s law on a mountain (Ex 33:11; 34:29-35). Like Aaron, Jesus is the High Priest of His people, in the case of Christ offering the acceptable sacrifice of Himself (Ex 28-29; 39; Lev 8-9; 16; Heb 9). Like Joshua, Christ is a Savior Who leads His people into the Promised Land (Num 27:12-23; Dt 3:28; 31:23; Josh 3). Like David, Christ unifies His people and shepherds them in righteousness and mercy (1 Sam 13:14; 2 Sam 5:1-5; Jer 3:15; Acts 13:22). Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus miraculously multiplies bread (1 Kgs 17:8-16; 2 Kgs 4:1-7, 42-44) and raises the dead (1 Kgs 17:17-24; 2 Kgs 4:18-37). Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale but then was delivered (Jon 1:17-2:10), Christ spends three days in the heart of the earth (in death) before He is raised from the dead (Mt 12:40). Like Jeremiah, Jesus is falsely accused, arrested, and flogged (Jer 37:11-38:6). Like Ezekiel, Christ is both a priest and a prophet (Ezk 1:3).

Third, Christ fulfills and embodies in Himself the *sacred objects and animals* of the Old Testament. Thus, Christ is the new and definitive Temple, the dwelling place of God on earth (Jn 2:18-22). Just as Aaron’s staff came to life and blossomed after being dead (Num 17), so Christ comes to life in Resurrection after death. Jesus is described as the Lion of Judah (Gen 49:19; Rev 5:5). He is also the Lamb of sacrifice Who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29; Is 53:7). He is also like the bronze serpent which Moses held up to the people after they were attacked by snakes, so that whoever had been bitten but looked up at the bronze serpent would be healed (Jn 3:14-15; Num 21:9). Similarly, Jesus in His suffering became sin, so to speak (He took on the suffering consequences of our sins), though He knew no sin, so that we could look to Him for salvation (2 Cor 5:21).

Fourth, Jesus fulfills and completes within Himself the *Jewish feasts* of the Old Testament. Thus, He is the new Passover Lamb by which we pass from death to life (Jn 1:29, 36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pt 1:19; Rev 5:6, 12). He transforms the Jewish Feast of Pentecost by sending the Holy Spirit upon the Church on that day (Acts 2). On the Feast of Booths, Jesus, the dwelling of God, speaks of Himself as the light of the world, and says that from His side rivers of living water will flow (John 7:37-39; 8:12). On the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukah, Jesus speaks of Himself as “consecrated” to God (Jn 10:36), like the Temple, which was re-consecrated to God by the Maccabees at the origin of this feast (2 Macc 10:1-8). He also says that He and the Father are one, on this very nationalistic feast which strongly affirmed that God is one (Jn 10:30). Jesus fulfills all the different dimensions of the various Jewish feast days and is Himself the new place of worship for all humanity, since He is the new Temple, wherein all the Jewish Feasts are centered. In these four ways then, Jesus completes and perfects the plans and work of God in the Old Testament. St. Paul says, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor 1:20).

How is Jesus also the desire of the nations and the fulfillment of all people?

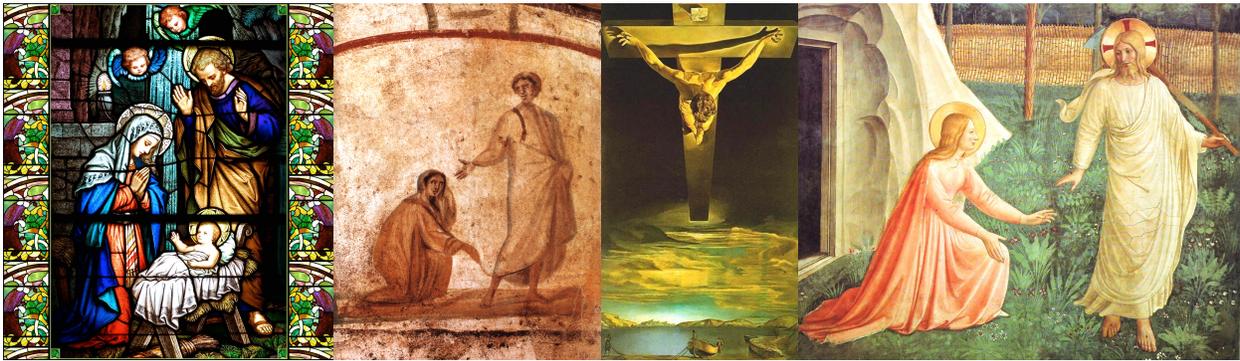
God created human beings so that they might one day come to share in His life and love forever. Humanity fell away from God, however. Choosing the Jewish people was a stepping-stone in God's plan to recover all humanity for Himself. There are various foreshadowings of this fuller plan in the Old Testament. God tells Abraham that one day all the families of the earth will be blessed through his faith (Gen 12:3). Gentiles in Jewish territory were encouraged to become part of God's people and live according to God's ways (Ex 20:10; 23:12; Num 15:14-15; Dt 5:14). The psalms foresee a day in which all the peoples of the earth will praise God (Ps 22:27-28; 86:9; 108:3; 1 Chr 16:24). The prophets foretell this as well (Is 2:1-4; 60:3; Hos 2:23; Amos 9:12; Zech 14:16). They also reveal to us that the coming Messiah will be a light to the nations (Is 49:6; Dan 7:13-14; Mic 5:4).

Christ will fulfill all these prophecies. Magi from the East, likely Persian astrologers, seek to do Him homage at His birth (Mt 2:2-12). Jesus goes at various times to foreign, pagan territory to teach and heal (Mk 5:1-20; 7:24-8:10, 8:27; Mt 2:13-23). Jesus also goes into Samaritan regions and reveals God's plan for the Samaritans (Lk 9:52; 10:25-37; 17:11-19; Jn 4:1-42; Acts 1:8; 8:1-25; 9:31). Jesus heals a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30), as well as a Roman centurion's son, or servant (Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10). Greeks come to see Jesus in Jerusalem (Jn 12:20-22). And although He instructs His apostles to only go to the lost Sheep of Israel when He sends them out preaching and healing in Galilee (Mt 10:5-6), Jesus will send His apostles out to the ends of the earth when risen from the dead (Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47), in order to make disciples of all nations, teaching them all that He commanded, and baptizing them into the life of the Trinity (Mt 28:16-20).

Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of all peoples, since He is the fulfillment of the human heart. At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, some disciples tell Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you" (Mk 1:37). They mean literally that all the people in the area are seeking Him because of His teachings and miracles. But this is true on a deeper level, that everyone is looking for Christ in the depths of their hearts, whether they realize it or not.

The "I am" statements especially capture this. At various times, Jesus says, "I am Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 22:8), "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35), "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12), "I am the door" (Jn 10:9), "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11), "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), "I am the true vine" (Jn 15:1), "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13), and "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star" (Rev 22:16). In all these statements, Jesus is telling us, "I am the One you are looking for." St. John Paul II once said, "Jesus Christ is the answer to the question that is the human person."

... and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...



What is the outline of Jesus' life?

Jesus' life can be divided into five parts: His early life, His hidden life, His public ministry, His suffering and death, and His risen and exalted life.

Jesus' infancy and early life are only recounted in two places: in the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the *Liturgy* (the official worship of the Church), we read through these chapters every year in the seasons of Advent and Christmas, when we celebrate the Incarnation. These chapters tell us about the conception and birth of John the Baptist six months before Christ (Lk 1:5-38, 57-80), the *Annunciation*—when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she would be the mother of the Son of God (Lk 1:26-38), the *Visitation*—when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth and sings praise to God (Lk 1:39-56), the *Nativity of Jesus*—His birth celebrated by angels and shepherds in Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-20), the *circumcision of Jesus*—eight days after His birth (Lk 2:21), the *Presentation*—when Jesus is presented in the Temple forty days after His birth (Lk 2:22-39), the *Epiphany*—the visit of the Magi (Mt 2:1-12), the flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-23), the slaughter of innocent children in Bethlehem by Herod the Great (Mt 2:16-18), the return to Nazareth (Mt 2:22-23), and the *Finding in the Temple*—when Jesus was found teaching in the Temple at the age of twelve (Lk 2:41-52).

The *hidden life of Jesus* is the period between the infancy of Christ and when He begins His public ministry at about thirty years old (Lk 3:23). We know practically nothing about this period. Besides the *Finding in the Temple* when Jesus was twelve, we are only told that Jesus is an obedient child (Lk 2:52), and that He works as a carpenter in Nazareth in His young adult years (Mk 6:3), having learned from Joseph, His foster father (Mt 13:55). Still, it is very meaningful to realize that Jesus lived in solidarity with us through faithful family life and quiet daily work.

The *public ministry of Jesus* is divided into two parts and is about three years in length. The first part begins when Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Mk 1:9-11) at the approximate age of thirty (Lk 3:23). After His Baptism, Jesus spends forty days in the desert praying, fasting, and conquering the temptations of the devil (Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). After this, Jesus returns to Nazareth and Galilee where He begins manifesting the *kingdom of God* by preaching, teaching, healing, praying, and gathering and forming disciples (Mk 1:14-8:26; Mt 4:12-16:12; Lk 4:14-9:17). This first part is approximately 2-3 years in length.

The second part of the Jesus' public ministry consists in His last journey south to Jerusalem, where He will suffer, die, and rise (Mk 8:27-13:37; Mt 16:13-25:46; Lk 9:18-21:37). Jesus' parables and teachings change tone during this journey. They are now oriented toward His Death, Resurrection, and Second Coming. Jesus formally predicts His Passion and Resurrection three times (Mk 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). After the first time, He manifests Himself in transfigured glory to Peter, James, and John on a high mountain (Mk 9:2-10; Mt 17:1-8; Lk 9:28-36)—what we call the *Transfiguration*, which we celebrate as a Feast every August 6th.

The stage begins to be set for the *Passion of Christ* when Jesus enters Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-11), which triumphant entrance we celebrate on the Sunday which begins Holy Week, popularly called *Palm Sunday*. In this week, Jesus gives His discourse on the last things to his disciples as they marvel at the Temple (Mk 13; Mt 24). On Thursday evening, Jesus celebrates a last intimate meal with His disciples before His death, which meal we call the *Last Supper* (Mk 14:12-16). At this Supper, Jesus humbly washes the feet of His disciples (Jn 13), prepares them for His eventual departure from earth by speaking to them about the Holy Spirit whom He with the Father will send upon them (Jn 14-17), and gives them the gift of the Eucharist, His Body and Blood to eat and drink in the form of bread and wine (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23). After this Jesus takes His disciples to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is at the base of the Mount of Olives, the mountain that faces Jerusalem to the East (Mk 14:26-42). It is there that Judas, a disciple who betrayed Jesus, brings soldiers to have Jesus arrested (Mk 14:43-52). From there, Jesus is brought to the palace of the high priest, where He is tried and found guilty—in their minds—of blasphemy (Mk 14:53-72). In the morning, Jesus is brought to Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine, so that the Jewish leaders may prevail upon him to have Jesus crucified (Mk 15:1-5; Jn 18:28-32). Under pressure, Pilate decides to have Jesus scourged and mocked, in order to appease the crowd and Jewish leaders (Jn 18:28-19:11). They will accept nothing less than crucifixion, however, and Pilate gives into their pressure to have Jesus crucified (Jn 19:12-16). Jesus is then made to carry His cross to a place called Golgotha (Jn 19:17), a rock quarry right outside of the city walls of Jerusalem (Mk 15:22; Jn 19:20). It is there that Jesus is crucified. Mary, His mother, and some of the women stand at the foot of the Cross while most of Jesus' disciples watch from a distance (Jn 19:25-27; Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56). Jesus is taken down and buried in a new tomb nearby in the evening (Mk 15:42-47; Mt 27:57-66; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 19:38-42). All this happens on Friday.

Three days later, on Sunday, Jesus *rises from the dead*. Various disciples find the tomb mysteriously empty (Mk 16:1-18; Mt 28:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-10). Then Jesus appears to various disciples as bodily risen (Mk 16:9-20; Mt 28:9-20; Lk 24:13-53; Jn 20:11-21:19). He will appear to them over a forty day period (Acts 1:3), mostly in and around Jerusalem, but also in the north, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21; Mt 28:16). On the fortieth day, they are back in Jerusalem, and Jesus leads them to the top of the Mount of Olives. He instructs them to preach the Gospel to all nations, but first to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come upon them (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8). He then ascends to heaven in their midst (Mk 16:19-20; Acts 1:10-11). For ten days, the disciples then dedicate themselves to prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem where they celebrated the Last Supper and where Jesus appeared to them (Acts

1:12-14). On the tenth day, on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the disciples experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. There is a loud noise in the house, and a strong wind. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit, and tongues of fire appear over the top of each of them. They then go forth to preach and begin the mission that Jesus gave them: to preach the Gospel and make disciples to the ends of the earth (Acts 2).

What are the main themes of Jesus' public ministry?

Above all, Jesus reveals the kingdom of God to us, and God as our Father.

First, Jesus manifests the *kingdom of God* to us through three main activities in His public ministry: His teaching, His miracles, and His gathering and forming disciples. The kingdom of God is not something that can be defined in words, but it has to do with our participation in God and His ways. In His preaching, Jesus teaches us about the kingdom of God. Since it cannot be defined, Jesus gives us *parables*, which are comparisons. He compares the kingdom of God to things within our experience. Further, since there are many different dimensions to the kingdom of God, Jesus tells many parables, so that we might have a better understanding of what the kingdom of God is, and all the different dimensions to it.

Jesus also manifests the kingdom of God to us through His *miracles*. Miracles are something that only God can do. They are therefore a manifestation of God's presence and power in the world. But the miracles of Jesus are not performed to impress. They are rather expressions of love, mercy, and the awe-inspiring power of God. They are also always in the context of faith: they reinforce, reward, and/or engender faith. If one looks at the miracles of Jesus as a whole, one will see that Jesus heals all kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles, young and old, male and female, rich and poor. Jesus also heals every part of the body: eyes, ears, tongues, hands, legs, skin, and internal organs and tissues. This shows that He has come to heal the whole person, and every person, ultimately in the age to come, however. The external healings are also signs of the deeper, interior healing from sin that He has come to bring. Jesus also raises the dead, thus showing that He has power over death and is its Conqueror. Likewise, Jesus casts out demons, showing that He has come to overcome the power of the Evil One. Lastly, Jesus shows power over nature. From this we perceive the power of the Creator in Him.

Finally, Jesus manifests the kingdom of God by *gathering and forming disciples*. We will explore this dimension to the kingdom more fully in the section on the Church.

Another major theme in the public ministry of Jesus is the *revelation of God as Father*. Jesus is the eternal Son of God Who—now that He has become man—reveals His eternal love of the Father in and through His humanity. He calls God “Abba,” or “Father.” He also invites us to come to know God as Father in and through Him, so that we might be sons and daughters of God the Father in the Son, in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. He loves telling us about the Father. Jesus also embodies and communicates the Father's infinite mercy toward sinners and the outcasts. As Good Shepherd, He seeks out the lost sheep, to bring us back to the Father.

How does Jesus save us?

Because of the Fall, we human beings are subject to the evils of sin, suffering, and death. We also find ourselves in a situation in which we are unable of ourselves to make sufficient restitution for our sins, never mind the sins of the whole human race. Sin is a weight too heavy for any mere human to bear. We are also unable to save ourselves from death or give ourselves eternal life with God.

On the one hand, it is fitting that human beings make restitution for sin, since it is we human beings who sinned. On the other hand, we are unable to make sufficient restitution. In His great wisdom, God decided to save us and solve all these problems perfectly through the Incarnation. Since Jesus is fully human, He can make restitution as a man. Since He is God, His restitution is more than sufficient for the sins of the whole human race. He also has the power in Himself to save us from suffering and death, and to give us eternal life.

Salvation also has two elements to it: on the one hand we are saved *from* sin, suffering, and death. On the other hand, we are saved *for* holiness leading to eternal life. It is especially in His Passion and Death that Christ saves us *from* the evils of sin, suffering, and death. It is especially in His Resurrection that Christ gives us new life, so that we might be holy and attain eternal life (Rom 4:25).

Since Jesus is fully God and fully man, all His actions are *human* actions performed by a Divine Person. This makes each of His actions infinitely powerful and salvific, and therefore infinitely meritorious. So, everything Jesus does is saving for us.

At the same time, Jesus saves us especially through His Passion. It was unnecessary for God to become man to save us, but, as we have seen, it was the perfect plan of God. Further, having become man, it was unnecessary for Jesus to suffer so much, since each of His actions is more than sufficient to redeem the human race. Why then did He choose to suffer so much? The answer is simple: God wanted to show the extent of His love toward us. He could have gone no further. God has shown the fullest expression of love for us in laying down His life for us. In this tremendous love, the Son of God offers to the Father something so much more valuable than the sins of all humankind were offensive to God. In other words, the love that Jesus shows infinitely outweighs the sins of all humankind, and therefore was *superabundantly meritorious* for our salvation.

Even after Jesus has died and risen, we still struggle on this earth. God has willed to save us through the struggle of this life, so that we might learn to love Him through the struggle and so become more perfect and purer in our love for Him and others. Therefore, we experience many effects of His salvation now on this earth. At the same time, there are many effects of His salvation—such as freedom from suffering and death—that we will only experience after this life, when we will rise with Christ and experience His exalted life fully and eternally.

... and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...

Where is Jesus now?

Jesus ascended into heaven forty days after His Resurrection. The Creed says that He now “sits at the right hand of the Father,” which means that Jesus is forever exalted in His humanity in heaven with the Father and in the glory of the Holy Spirit (Mt 22:44; 26:64; Mk 16:19; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). He ever intercedes for us before the Father (Heb 7:23-25). He is also ever present to us in our souls (Jn 14:23; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 3:17), in the Sacraments—especially in the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:1), in the Church (Mt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20), and in the needy we serve (Mt 25:40).

What kind of relationship should we have with Jesus?

There is only one adequate response to God: trust and surrender. Since Jesus is God, we call Him “our Lord.” He invites us to trust in Him, and surrender to Him. He invites us to follow Him. He invites us to have—and grow in—a deep, intimate, loving, and joyful relationship with Him in the midst of our brothers and sisters in the Church. He wants us to come to know God in and through Him. He is also “our Savior.” He ever makes Himself accessible to us as an infinite source of forgiveness and healing. He also ever calls us forward, to be holy and grow in love of God and neighbor. He wants us to abide in Him, even as He lives within us and abides in our hearts. We are also called to conformity with His life, sufferings, and triumph over sin and death, so that we might live, think, act, speak, suffer, die, and rise in Him. Through surrendering and committing our lives to Him in faith, through coming to know Him more deeply through daily prayer, and through being conformed more and more to His image in the way we live, Jesus is leading us step by step to eternal life, where He now reigns eternally with the Father.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” —Gal 2:20

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” —Eph 5:1-2

Philippians 2:1-11 (*Christ humbled Himself for us, and was therefore exalted*)

Colossians 1:9-20 (*the preeminence of Christ*)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. What struck you about this overview of Christ?***
- 2. What dimension to Jesus would you like to learn more about?***
- 3. How can we deepen our relationship with Christ?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Romans 8 / ***CCC:*** 687-747

THE HOLY SPIRIT



Although the mystery of God as Holy Trinity was not yet explicitly known in the Old Testament, there are many intimations of the Trinity that we find therein. From the very first chapter of Genesis the Spirit of God is mentioned and becomes a theme throughout the whole Old Testament. Indeed, the Spirit of God permeates everything. With the New Testament, we learn that the Spirit of God is neither something created nor an impersonal force nor simply another name for God. Instead, we learn that the Holy Spirit is part of the very mystery of God. He is the Third Person of the Trinity, fully personal, and coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son, yet distinct from them. Through the whole of the Scriptures we learn of the special role that the Holy Spirit plays in the plan of God for us.

The Spirit of God is referred to, or symbolized, in the following passages in the Old Testament:

Gen 1:2, (6:3), 41:38, Ex 31:3, (35:21), 35:31, Num 11:17, 11:25-29, (14:24), 24:2, 27:18, Deut 34:9, Jdg 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14, 1 Sam 10:6, 10:10, 11:6, 16:13-14, 19:20-23, 2 Sam 23:2, 1 Kgs 18:12, 22:24, 2 Kgs (2:9 & 15), 2:16, (5:26), 1 Chr 12:18, 2 Chr 15:1, 18:23, 20:14, 24:20, (Ezra 1:5), Neh 9:20, 9:30; Job 27:3, 32:8, 33:4, Ps 51:11, 104:30, 139:7, 143:10, Is 4:4, 11:2, 28:6, 30:1, 31:3, 32:15, 34:16, 40:13, 42:1, 44:3, 48:16, 59:21, 61:1, 63:10-11, 63:14, Ezk 1:12, 20-21, 2:2, 3:12, 14, 3:24, 8:3, 10:17, 11:1, 5, 19, 24, 18:13, 36:26-7, 37:1, 14, 39:29, 43:5, Dan 4:8-9, 18, 5:11-12, 14, 6:3, (13:45), Joel 2:28-9, Mic 2:7, 3:8, (Hag 1:14), 2:5; Zech 4:6, 6:8, 7:12, 12:10

Note: The verses in parentheses indicate passages where the word spirit is used but which imply the activity of God's Spirit more indirectly.

And the following images are seen as symbols of the Holy Spirit in Scripture:

Dove: Gen 8:8-12; Song of Songs 2:12; 5:2; 6:9; Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:32
Cloud: Ex 13:21; 14:20; 16:10; 19:9; 24:15-8; 33:9-11; 34:5; 40:34-8; Lev 16:2; Mt 17:5
Fire: Ex 3:2; 13:21-2; 19:18; Lev 6:13; Deut 4:24; 36; Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16; 12:49; Acts 2:3
Water: Jn 3:5; 3:34; 4:14; 7:37-39; 19:34; 1 Jn 5:8 Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:1,17; Is 55:1; Num 20:11; 1 Cor 10:4; Ez 47:1
Anointing: Lk 4:18; Acts 4:26-7; 10:38; Heb 1:9; 1 Jn 2:27; Is 61:1; Dan 9:25-6
Finger: Ex 8:19; 31:18; Deut 9:10; Lk 11:20; 2 Cor 3:3

How is the Holy Spirit present in the life of Jesus?

It was prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah (the “Anointed One”) would be anointed by the Spirit of God (Is 11:1-2; 42: 1; 61:1), and that He would be both a Spirit-Bearer and a Giver of the Spirit, so that through Him God’s Spirit would be poured out on all humankind (Joel 2:28-29).

In the Gospels, we see that the Spirit of God is present from the very beginning of Jesus’ earthly life, and that every part of His life is marked by the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit brings about the virginal conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb (Lk 1:35; Mt 1:18), fills Elizabeth when Mary visits her (Lk 1:41), prophesies through Zechariah (Lk 1:67), reveals to Simeon that He would see the Messiah before death (Lk 2:26), and inspires the same Simeon to go to the Temple to find this Child (Lk 2:27). John the Baptist later says that, while he baptizes with water, the Coming One will baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt 3:11).

In the public ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in His baptism, to empower Him for the mission of salvation (Mk 1:10). After this, the Holy Spirit drives Jesus out to the desert for a period of prayer and fasting (Mk 1:12). Then Jesus returns to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14). Jesus teaches Nicodemus that one must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5-8). Jesus describes the Spirit as “rivers of living water” that would come forth from His Heart once He is exalted (Jn 7:39). Jesus rejoices and prays “in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21). The words He speaks are “Spirit and life,” and He says that, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (Jn 6:63). When Jesus sends His apostles out to preach and heal, He assures them that the Holy Spirit would speak through them (Mt 10:20). He warns His disciples about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:31-32). Jesus encourages us to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13), since “it is not by measure that he (God) gives the Spirit” (Jn 3:34).

At the Last Supper, Jesus tells His disciples about the “Spirit of truth” who dwells in them and will be with them after He departs (Jn 14:17). He says that, “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (Jn 14:26). This Holy Spirit will also bear witness to Christ (Jn 15:26), guide the Church into all truth, and declare the things that are to come (Jn 16:13). When risen, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon His apostles, giving them the power to forgive sins in His name (Jn 20:22). He then instructs His apostles to baptize all future disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). He instructs His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, until they are clothed with power from on high, before going forth (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8). Lastly, the cloud which takes Jesus up in His Ascension (Acts 1:9), and which was also present when He was earlier transfigured (Lk 9:34), is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

How is the Holy Spirit present in the Church?

In the New Testament, just as the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary to bring about the Incarnation of Jesus, and just as the Holy Spirit later descends upon Jesus in His Baptism to empower Him in His mission of salvation, the Holy Spirit also descends on the Church in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles in order to:

- fill the Church as the new Temple of God (Eph 2:22)
- empower and guide the Church's mission—which is an extension and continuation of the mission of Christ (Acts 2:17-18)
- witness to Jesus with the apostles (Jn 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; 5:32; 15:28)
- establish the apostles and future leaders of the Church (Acts 20:38)
- sanctify the members of the Church through the Sacraments (Mt 28:18; Jn 1:33; 3:5; 4:13; Acts 1:5; 2:38; 10:47; 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13)
- help the members of the Church to worship (Jn 4:23-24) and pray (Rom 8:26-27)
- form and build them up through the Scriptures (Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; 2 Pet 1:21)
- distribute spiritual gifts to all the members of the Church for the building up of the whole Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-13)
- sanctify the members of the Church with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:1-2), so that they may bear the fruits of the Spirit in their lives (Gal 5:22-23)
- be the seal and pledge of our eternal inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

From the Scriptures, then, we can witness the close relationship the Holy Spirit has with the Church, which relationship Jesus Himself establishes. Any attempt to pit the Holy Spirit against the Church, then, is completely foreign and antithetical to the Scriptures and to Christ, and should therefore be avoided. The book of Revelation, speaking of the Church as the Bride of Christ, says, "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (Rev 22:17).

What are all the passages where the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the New Testament?

You are encouraged sometime to visit and pray over the following passages in the New Testament, in order to better appreciate the presence, gift, and activity of the Holy Spirit in your life, and in the life of the Church:

Mt 1:18,20; 3:11,16; 4:1; 10:20; 12:18, 28, 31-2; 22:43; 28:19; Mk 1:8, 10, 12; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11; Lk 1:15; 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-7; 3:16,22; 4:1, 14, 18, Jn 1:32-3; 3:5-6, 8, 34; 4:23-4; 6:63; 7:39; 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; 20:22; Acts 1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 17-18, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 9, 32; 6:3, 5, 10; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17-19, 29, 39; 9:17,31; 10:19, 38, 44-47; 11:12, 15-16, 24, 28; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8, 28; 16:6-7; 19:2, 6, 21; 20:22-3, 28; 21:4,11; 28:25; Rom 1:4 ; 5:5; 7:6; 8:2, 4-6, 9, 11, 13-16, 23, 26-27; 9:1; 12:11; 14:17; 15:13, 16, 19, 30; 1 Cor 2:4, 10-14; 3:16; 6:11, 17, 19; 7:40; 12:3-4, 7-13; 14:2, 12; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:3, 6, 8, 17, 18; 5:5; 6:6; 13:14; Gal 3:2-5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5, 16-18, 22, 25; 6:8; Eph 1:13, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:5,16; 4:3-4,30; 5:18; 6:17-18; Phil 1:19; 27; 2:1; 3:3; Col 1:8; 1 Thes 1:5-6; 4:8; 5:19; 2 Thes 2:13; 3:16; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 1:7; 1:14; (4:22); Titus 3:5; Heb 2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8, 14; 10:15, 29; 1 Pet 1:2, 11-12; 3:18; 4:6; 4:14; 2 Pet 1:21; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:2, 6, 13; 5:7-8; Jude 1:19-20; Rev 1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:2; 14:13; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:17

How should we have a devotion to the Holy Spirit?

Jesus calls us to live a spiritual life, that is, a life animated by the Holy Spirit, the “soul of the Church.” We are therefore called to have a deep and intimate devotion to the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who dwells in our souls through grace, sanctifies us, guides us through prayer, inspires us with insights, speaks to us through the various people and events in our lives, forms us through the Scriptures and the Teachings of the Church, communicates God’s healing and forgiveness to us, transforms bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, showers us with spiritual gifts, helps us build up the communion of the Church, and moves us to bear fruit in a holy and charitable life lived for God and for others. It is recommended that we call upon the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit before we go about our day and before undertaking any significant actions.

We celebrate the presence, gift, and activity of the Holy Spirit each year on the *Solemnity of Pentecost*, fifty days after Easter, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and the early Church (Acts 2). On this day, the Church wears red as a symbol of the fire of the Holy Spirit. The nine days in between the Ascension and Pentecost are a special time to pray for the Holy Spirit in our lives, since that is when the apostles and early disciples, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, devoted themselves to prayer as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). We call these nine days a *novena*. Inspired by this first *novena*, various devotions have arisen in the history of the Church involving nine days of prayer. There are various novenas to the Holy Spirit, to Jesus, to Mary, and to various angels and saints. In each case, some particular favor is sought of God, often times either through invoking a Person of the Trinity directly, or through the intercession of a saint. There are also many traditional prayers to the Holy Spirit we are encouraged to say. Every Christian should speak often to the Holy Spirit more informally too.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” —Lk 11:13

“For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. . . No one understands the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” —1 Cor 2:10-11

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” —Gal 5:22-23

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Who is the Holy Spirit?*
2. *What role does the Holy Spirit have in God’s plan for our salvation?*
3. *How might our life be more animated by the Holy Spirit?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Mt 16:13-19; 1 Cor 12 / ***CCC:*** 811-945

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH



The Church is the communion of Christ's faithful. God laid the foundations for the Church in the Old Testament. Yet, it was not a fully established reality until the coming of Christ. The mystery of the Church is an essential part of Christ's mission, since it is the Father's will to draw all humanity to Himself through Christ. Therefore, the Church is not something man-made. Rather, the Church finds its origins and reason for being in Christ Himself. Just as Adam and Eve sinned and thereby brought about division between them and God, and between human beings, so Jesus came to reconcile us with God and one another. Drawing all people back into unity with the Father through Himself, then, is at the heart of Christ's mission of salvation and is what the Church is all about. This is why St. Irenaeus even says that God created the world for the sake of the Church.

Where does Jesus teach about the Church?

Jesus speaks specifically about the "church" (ἐκκλησία in Greek) in two passages in the Gospels (Mt 16:13-19; 18:15-20). The sense of the word is "assembly." The Old Testament background is the assembly of Israel which entered into covenant with God at Mount Sinai. So, when Jesus speaks of a "church," he is speaking of a new-covenant people centered in Him. Jesus says that He personally will build His Church on the "rock" of Peter. He also gives the Church, and Peter in a particular way, the authority to bind and loose, so that what Peter and the Apostles bind and loose on earth will be considered bound or loosed in heaven. Lastly, Jesus says that the gates of death will never prevail against His Church.

Although Jesus only uses the specific word "church" a few times in two passages, the word is abundantly used later on in the New Testament. Jesus speaks mostly about the Church using other language. When Jesus speaks about the social aspects to the kingdom of God, or when He refers to the city set on a hill (Mt 5:14), the vine (Jn 15:1-11), the flock (Lk 12:32; Jn 10:1-18),

and the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16; 21:33-44), or when He speaks of Himself as “the Bridegroom” of His people (Mk 2:19-20; Mt 25:1; Jn 3:29; Rev 21:9), He is teaching us about the mystery of the Church. Later in the New Testament, the Church will be referred to explicitly as the Body of Christ (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:16; 12:12-31; Eph 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Col 1:18, 24; 3:15), the Bride of Christ (Jn 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17), and the New Jerusalem (Gal 4:25-26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:2, 10).

Did Jesus give any structure to His Church?

When we examine the Gospels, we see Jesus clearly setting up a kind of structure for His new-covenant people. He not only gathers disciples. After spending a whole night in prayer, Jesus personally chooses twelve apostles to be closely associated with Him (Lk 6:12-16). The number twelve is significant, because there were twelve tribes in Israel (that had territory). The “twelve tribes of Israel” is a way of speaking about the whole people of Israel, and the leaders of the twelve tribes represented the twelve tribes to Moses (Num 1:44). When Jesus chooses twelve apostles to form, give authority to, and send out to preach and heal in His name, He is clearly laying the foundations for a New Israel, a new people of God that will include the whole world. In fact, Jesus specifically tells His apostles that they will “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28). Later on in the New Testament, St. Paul will speak of the apostles as forming the foundation of the Temple of the Church (Eph 2:20), and the book of Revelation tells us that the “names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” are written on the foundations of the Temple in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:14).

Among the twelve apostles, three are particularly close to Jesus: Peter, James, and John. They alone witness the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mk 5:37; Lk 8:51) and the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-2; Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28), and are closest to Jesus when He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:37; Mk 14:33). Among these three, Peter holds a special place. Jesus chooses Peter to be the leader of the early Church and, as we will see, sets up a kind of “office” of leading the whole Church, initially filled by Peter, and afterwards by someone who will take Peter’s place when Peter dies.

While the Church should not be thought of as reduced to its structure, or only as an “institution,” there is an essential structure to the Church as Christ established it. An analogy with the human body can be helpful. The body should not be reduced to the skeleton. However, the skeleton is essential to it. Imagine what would happen to a body without a skeleton! A good skeleton is at service to the whole body, and enables the body to function and thrive.

Where in the Gospels and the New Testament do we see this special role of Peter?

Peter's name from birth is Simon. When Jesus first calls him, Jesus renames him "Peter," which means "rock" (Jn 1:42). It is not until later—in Matthew 16—that Jesus explains *why* He renamed Simon "Peter." In Matthew 16, Peter, inspired by God (Mt 16:17), professes Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God (Mt 16:16). In other words, Peter declares Jesus' identity. Jesus will in turn use the occasion to declare Peter's identity: "And I tell you, you are Rock (Peter), and upon this Rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (death) will not prevail against it. I will give you (singular) the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you (singular) bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you (singular) loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:18-19).

Consider also the following points that demonstrate Peter's role as leader of the Church:

- **Peter's name in its different forms is mentioned around 200 times in the New Testament.** The next most frequent name of an apostle mentioned is John (about 50 times).
- **Peter's name is always first with every listing of the apostles, even as the order of the other apostles varies.** See Mt 10:2, Mk 3:16-19, Lk 6:14-16, Jn 21:2, Acts 1:13.
- **Peter alone is renamed by Christ.** See Mt 16:18 and Jn 1:42. His original name is Simon. Jesus calls him "Rock" (*Kepha* in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke, and *Petros* in Greek). There is no biblical record of anyone before Peter being named "rock." Abraham is metaphorically called a rock at one point (Is 51:1-2), as is God Himself in many places (Ps 18:31; 42:9; 78:35, etc.). However, "Rock" never became a name for Abraham or God. When Jesus calls James and John "sons of thunder," this is only a nickname (Mk 3:17).
- **Peter alone is given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" by Christ.** See Mt 16:19.
- **Jesus gives Peter the unique role of strengthening his brothers (Lk 22:32) and feeding Christ's flock when Christ is gone (Jn 21:15-17).**
- **Peter is the spokesman for the apostles in the Gospels (Mt 14:28-32, 17:24-27, Mk 10:23-28) and for the Church in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:13-26, 2:41, 3:6-7, 5:1-11, 8:18-23, 10:46-48, 15:7-11).**
- **Jesus teaches the crowds from Simon Peter's boat (Lk 5:3), a symbol of the Church.**
- **Peter is mentioned as a preeminent witness of the Resurrection (Mk 16:7, 1 Cor 15:5).**
- **Although Paul corrects Peter (Gal 2:11-14), Paul also defers to Peter's authority (Gal 2:2).**
- **That Peter will have a successor after his death is clearly implied in Jesus' words and in the Scriptures.** In the Old Testament, in the dynastic court of David,

there were various important roles. David—or a descendent of his—was king. This was the most important role, of course. But there was another important role, that of the Steward of the Kingdom and Keeper of the Keys to the King’s palace. This figure was second only to the king. It was understood that when the King was away, the royal steward was in charge. And, there was always someone to fill this important position. When one steward died or was removed, another was appointed. We are given insight into this role in Isaiah 22. There, God says that He will remove the current steward, Shebna, from his “office” (Is 22:19), and that Eliakim will replace him. Eliakim will inherit the “robe,” the “belt,” and the “authority” of Shebna. The Lord also says that Eliakim will be a “father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Is 22:21). Eliakim will also be given “the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Is 22:22). All this forms the background for Matthew 16. Jesus is the New David, Who is also a King, the King of Kings. In Matthew 16, He is clearly appointing Peter to be the “Steward” of His Kingdom, and the “Keeper of the Keys.” This means that Peter is second only to Jesus in authority. And, it is to be understood that when Jesus is away (when He ascends into heaven, that is), Peter is in charge. What Peter says goes. It is also to be understood that Jesus is setting up an office here, so that when Peter dies, someone would be appointed to take his place, just as in the dynastic court of David. Jesus also says that death shall not overcome the Church built upon Peter (Mt 16:18). The Church obviously outlives Peter. Lastly, after the death of Judas, the apostles pick Matthias as a successor (Acts 1:12-26). If Judas’ place had to be filled with a successor, how much more Peter’s place.

Why is the “pope” an essential part of Christ’s Church?

The *Pope* is the successor of Peter, on whom Jesus built His Church. It is therefore necessary to be in union with Peter, or his successor (the *Pope*), in order to be fully in union with Christ. Since Peter died in Rome, the bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter, whom we traditionally call “Pope” (father), or “Holy Father” (a title of respect), or “Vicar of Christ.” This is why St. Ignatius of Antioch in around the year 110 A.D. says that the church in Rome presides over the whole Church in love, and why St. Irenaeus in 180 A.D. says that every church must be in union with the Church of Rome. While all Christians should be in full union with the pope as Peter’s successor, as Christ intended, unfortunately, because of tragedies in history, there are many divisions of Christians who have broken away from the Catholic Church, who do not acknowledge the pope, and who are not in union with him. Only within the Catholic Church will one find the successor of Peter, the pope. From the present pope back to Peter, we can trace back one successor of Peter after another, going all the way back to Christ in an unbroken chain. In fact, it is St. Irenaeus who gives us the first list of the names of successors of Peter around the year 180 A.D.

In setting up the “Office of Peter,” Jesus was providing a way for the Church to be unified in truth and love from age to age. It was to prevent confusion and division. It was so that, as time went on, there would be a clear way to keep united and know with clarity what Christ taught and how it applies to the different situations that arise in each age.

Lastly, in addition to the pope being the successor of Peter, the bishops of the Catholic Church are successors to the Apostles. Each bishop of the Catholic Church has a chain of “ordination” that is traced back, and derives its power from, the apostles, and therefore from Christ Himself. This is what we call *Apostolic Succession*. The early Church saw this connection to the Apostles as an absolutely essential element of the true Church.

Why does the Church teach that the Pope is infallible?

The role of the pope as Peter’s successor is to shepherd the whole flock in the name of Christ and to guard and clarify the truths of the faith. The pope cannot and does not make up doctrine. Neither do we believe that Popes have any special “direct line” to heaven. Neither are Popes impeccable. In the history of the Church, some popes have been great saints. Some have been great sinners. And we have had everything in between. But, none of this has affected the doctrine of the Church. What *Papal Infallibility* means is simply that, because of the promise of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit will prevent the pope from speaking any error under certain conditions: First, the pope must be speaking of something that falls under “Divine Revelation,” or a matter of “Faith and Morals.” Second, the pope must speak consciously and freely, not under any coercion. Third, he must invoke the authority of Peter given him by Christ. That is, not everything that the pope says is necessarily or automatically correct. But when the pope speaks with the authority of Peter, or *ex cathedra* (“from the Chair”), the Holy Spirit will assure the truth of Revelation that he is clarifying, and prevent any error from being communicated. Most times in history, popes have only authoritatively confirmed things already clarified by Church councils or teaching. Rarely, they will authoritatively teach something without a Church council. All these conditions simply clarify what Jesus said, when He said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” When we look at the history of the Catholic Church, we see remarkable clarity, consistency, and coherence in Church teaching, which one will find nowhere else. Indeed, just as Jesus once taught the crowds on the Sea of Galilee from the bark of Peter, so Jesus continues to guide and teach His flock from the “Bark of Peter,” the Catholic Church.

Does Christ want all His followers to be one in His Church?

Yes. At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed that His followers would always be “one, as you Father are in me, and I in you” (Jn 17:20-23). And, every image of the Church found in the New Testament (Christ’s Body, His Bride, His Flock, the Temple, etc.) is inherently one. Jesus only has one Body. He only has one Bride. While there were many synagogues in ancient Palestine, there was only one Temple. In John 10, Jesus says, “There shall be one flock, one shepherd” (Jn 10:16). It is clear that Jesus wants us all to be one in the Church He established.

Why are Christians divided?

Christians were in fact unified in one Church, which called itself “Catholic” and was in union with the pope, for hundreds of years, with a few exceptions. In the 400’s, a group of Christians stemming from Alexandria, and a different group stemming from Antioch, broke from the unity of the Church. Today, these churches are collectively known as the Oriental Orthodox. In 1054, there was a tragic division between the churches in Rome and in Constantinople, which eventually led to a major division between the Church in the West, which remained united with Rome, and the churches in the East, which broke unity with Rome. We call the collection of these various Eastern national churches the “Eastern Orthodox.” With time, some groups within these Churches would reunite with Rome, thereby becoming fully Catholic, while retaining their Eastern traditions. Starting in the 1500’s in the West, individuals and groups began breaking away from the Catholic Church. This is known as the Protestant Reformation. It was headed by such figures as Martin Luther in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, John Calvin in Geneva, and King Henry VIII in England. Tragically, the Protestant Reformation has given rise to continuing divisions, resulting in over 30,000 different Protestant denominations today, including those which call themselves “non-denominational” or “interdenominational.” The chief Protestant divisions with their approximate starting dates are the Lutherans (1519), Anglicans / Episcopalians (1534/1789), Mennonites (1536), Presbyterians (1560), Congregationalists (1560), Baptists (1609), Methodists (1744), Seventh Day Adventists (1863), and Pentecostals (1901). Eventually, other sects arose which cannot, properly speaking, be called Christian, since they do not profess the divinity of Christ or the Trinity, such as the Mormons (1830), Jehovah Witnesses (1870), and Christian Scientists (1879), and other radical sects and cults.

As Catholics, we view other Christians as “separated brethren.” On the one hand, we have many things in common and acknowledge a common baptism and faith in Christ. On the other hand, we see all these other groups as incomplete, as having lost the fullness that is preserved in the Catholic Church because of Christ. We recognize that many founders and followers of these different denominations were or are well-intentioned. We should respect them, relate charitably toward them, cultivate good relationships with them, understand their beliefs accurately, work through dialogue towards greater understanding and unity, and occasionally pray and do charitable works together. We also acknowledge that Catholics are often partly at fault for the divisions that have happened or continue. We call the general, praiseworthy effort back towards Christian unity *Ecumenism*, or the *Ecumenical Movement*. It is important for us Catholics to be “ecumenical,” that is, to cultivate a good relationship with our separated brothers and sisters in Christ in the terms stated above, and to work toward greater understanding and unity. However, it is also important for us to remain firmly rooted in the fullness of our faith, and to try to draw those who are open to reunion with the Catholic Church. Being “Catholic” should not be thought of as one “option” among others of being Christian, nor as something added on top of being Christian. Rather, it should be thought of as the *fullness of Christianity*. This fullness is important, since Jesus instructed His apostles to teach “all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20), not just part of it.

What does the word “Catholic” mean, and isn’t the “Catholic Church” just another denomination like the others?

A “denomination” is something that “denominates,” or comes from, a larger whole, but which is a division away from it. But the Catholic Church is not from a larger whole, since it is the larger whole. It also does not have any human founder at its origin, but Jesus Himself who founded His Church on Peter, the Rock. It is the fullness of the ancient Church which Jesus established. Further, one should not be fooled by the names “nondenominational” or “interdenominational.” These are still denominations within the Protestant family of Christians. So, the only Church which is not a denomination is the Catholic Church.

The word “Catholic” (καθολικός in Greek) means “universal.” It is an adjective describing the whole Church. In the New Testament, the word “church” was used in two different ways. The first way was applied to local churches, such as the “church” at Corinth or Philippi. The second way was when Jesus or New Testament writers speak of the whole Church, or the worldwide Church (all the local churches). In order to clarify when the whole church was meant, the early Christians used the adjective “catholic.” The first time the word appears in writing is in the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch in 110 A.D. In short, then, the early Church called the whole body of believers the “Catholic Church.”

Is the Catholic Church necessary for salvation?

Since the Church is the one Body of Christ, it is the “ark of salvation.” Jesus saves us through His Body, the Church. He calls us all into unity with Himself and one another in His Church. For this reason, if a person was to see clearly, through grace, that the Catholic Church is the Church of Christ, and if he or she was still to reject it or to refuse to enter it with such clear knowledge, such a person would be rejecting the call of Jesus and the salvation Jesus is calling him to through the Church.

At the same time, it is God’s desire that “all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Because of this desire, we must say that in some way God gives the possibility of salvation to each human person. If a person is saved, it can only be through Christ. A person could be saved even through a kind of implicit and unconscious faith. If a person’s ignorance of Gospel is *invincible* (not easily and reasonably overcome), it is excusable. If, on the other hand, one’s ignorance is *vincible* (easy and expected to overcome), it is not excusable. God will save those who cooperated with the grace and truth given to them, despite the limitations of their circumstances. God will not reject those who, through no fault of their own, never accepted or entered His Church, but did their best to cooperate with His grace in the circumstances of their lives. In the end, God is the judge of hearts. Ours is the duty to attract and invite people to the fullness of what Christ wants for people in His Church. It is not ours to pronounce God’s judgment on people. We leave that to God. Our focus should be on cooperating with God’s grace and doing what we know is right through grace.

What are the Four Marks of the Church?

The four traditional “marks” or “characteristics” of the Church are the following:

1. **One.** We have already seen how the Church is inherently one.
2. **Holy.** The Church is holy, since the source of her holiness is the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to the Church by Christ, and Who is ever present as the source of holiness in the Church, producing saints in every age through His grace. Insofar as the members of the Church are not holy, it is because of human failure to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit within the Church.
3. **Catholic.** The Church is “Catholic,” meaning for everyone. It is the Body of Christ’s faithful that all are called into.
4. **Apostolic.** The Church is apostolic, both in the sense that it is “sent out” to continue the mission of Christ (the word “apostle” means one who is sent), and in the sense that it is built on the foundation of the apostles.

What about the problems and scandals in the Church?

Tragically, there have always been problems and scandals in the Church, and scandals are a terrible source of counter-witness to Christ. We should be deeply saddened by scandals, problems, and imperfections, certainly present also among the shepherds of the Church. We should not be surprised by these things, however. Even among the twelve apostles there is Judas, who betrayed Jesus. There is “Judas in every age,” so to speak. The other apostles certainly had their failings as well. Indeed, in every age of the Church, there are great saints and great sinners, and everything in between. In acknowledging the problems and scandals in the Church, we should also acknowledge the saints, and the many good things that the Holy Spirit is doing through many of the faithful throughout the world. And, a religion should not be judged according to those who fail to live its teachings. It should instead be judged by those who do live its teachings.

In this world, the Church is more a hospital for sinners needing mercy and conversion than a museum of saints. How should we respond to failures within the Church when we hear of them? We should remember our own struggles and failings. We should pray for conversion and healing for all. And, instead of being discouraged, we should seek to grow all the more in the living out of our faith. We don’t help the matter when we fail to live our faith because others have failed to live their faith. We would only be increasing the numbers of those who fall away and don’t live up to their faith. It does not follow that because others have failed, we should stop praying, going to Mass, serving, and actively participating in the communion of the Church. Neither should we break away and join another religion, or some denomination. Rather, we should feel compelled to play our part in the constant reform of the Church. We should be part of the solution, and not contribute to the problem. Finally, we should remember that Christ so loved the Church that He died for her (Eph 5:25). Should we love the Church any less? Despite her imperfections, Christ still died for her (Eph 5:25) and promised to be with her until the end of the world (Mt 16:18). Following His example, and knowing that it is His will, we should commit ourselves just as much to the Catholic Church, since it is and will always be the fullness of His Church.

Charisms and Vocations in the Church

All the followers of Christ and members of His Church are called to be holy. And, through our baptism, we are equipped with all the spiritual gifts we need to be holy. We are also called to be holy, not just for ourselves, but to live out holiness in the midst of our brothers and sisters in the communion of the Church. For this reason, flowing out of our baptismal grace and the universal call to be holy, all are given unique spiritual gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ, called *charisms*. These are often built upon our natural gifts and talents. Sometimes they are extraordinary. All Christ's faithful are called to *discern* their charisms, and to recognize their gifts and talents, so that they may contribute them to the good of the whole Church. The Church flourishes when everyone is striving for holiness and to build up the Church through their own love, service, and charisms.

In addition to the primary vocation to be holy, and the unique charisms of Christ's faithful, all have a kind of "secondary" vocation, which is a specific way of living out holiness, involving a state of life to which they feel called. The three main *Vocations* in the Church are the *Laity*, the *Ordained*, and the *Consecrated*. Each involves a life-commitment. *Lay People*, usually called to marriage, are called to be holy in the midst of the world, and to order temporal affairs to the kingdom of God. The *Ordained* are called to shepherd God's people in the name of Christ. The *Consecrated* are those who consecrate themselves to God in place of marriage to an earthly spouse, who take vows or promises of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and who often live in a community with a particular mission. All vocations are called to *communio*, that is, a deep communion among themselves and with the rest of the Church. All are also called to *missio*, that is, to some kind of mission for the good of the Church and the world. There are three aspects to the *missionary* dimension of every vocation: the *Priestly*, the *Prophetic*, and the *Kingly*. This is what we call the threefold *Munera Christi* (offices of Christ). God worked through three principal figures in the Old Testament to form His people: Priests, Prophets, and Kings. God forgave, blessed, and sanctified the people through priests. He exhorted and taught them through the prophets. He governed and served them through the kings. Christ fulfills all three roles. He is a priest, prophet, and king. He also gives us a share in this threefold mission. At our baptism, we are anointed as priest, prophet, and king in Christ. According to our own state of life, we are called to help others be holy (*priestly*), to evangelize and form others in our faith through word and example (*prophetic*), and to serve them through the *Spiritual* and *Corporal Works of Mercy*, which we will learn about later (*kingly*).

Does the Church only exist on earth? Is the Church only a temporary reality?

It is important to realize that the Church includes not only Christ's faithful on earth. The Church presently exists in three states. Christ's faithful still on earth are called the *Church in Pilgrimage*, or the *Church Militant* (since it still struggles against sin). Christ's faithful in heaven are called the *Church Glorified*, or the *Church Triumphant*. Christ's faithful who have died but are still being purified in preparation for heaven are called the *Church in Purification*, or the *Church Suffering*. As we will learn about in the next section, we live in communion with Christ's faithful on earth, in heaven, and in purgatory. Eventually, at the end of time, there will only be one state that the Church exists in: the *Church Glorified*, or the Church in heaven.

How can we live out the mystery of the Church in our own way?

We are called to have a kind of “spirituality of the Church.” This involves avoiding a “just me and Jesus” mentality. In being called into relationship with Jesus, we are called into relationship with all others who follow Christ in the Body of His Church. We are called to have *solidarity* with the members of the Church around the world, so that we “rejoice with those who rejoice, (and) weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). We are called to love the Church, and devote our life to her, according to our own state in life. It is important for us to be one in mind and heart, which involves believing in all official teachings of the Church, since it is Christ Himself who preserves His Revelation and teaches us through the “bark of Peter.” This also means loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, living in union with them, being patient with them, forgiving them, praying for them, and bearing the burdens of others, just as others often bear our burdens. It also means respecting, and cooperating with, the pastors of the Church. We are also called to be enriched through the gifts of others, and in turn to enrich others through our own love, charisms, and service, for the upbuilding of the whole Body of Christ (Eph 4:1-16). Finally, like the people of Israel, we are on pilgrimage together toward the Promised Land of Heaven. It is there that the plan of God for us, His people, will finally be complete. We will be perfectly one with God and one another, in love and eternal joy. It is good to keep this in mind when we relate to our brothers and sisters in the Church.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

1 Cor 12 (The Church is One Body with Many Members)

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” —Eph 2:19-22

Eph 4:1-16 (The one Lord showers gifts on His faithful for the building up of the Church)

Eph 5:21-33 (Christ loved and laid down His life for His Bride, the Church)

“... the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” —1 Tim 3:15

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. ***What is distinctive about the Catholic Church compared to other Christian communities?***
2. ***How should Catholics relate to other Christians?***
3. ***How can we better live out a “spirituality of the Church”?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Hebrews 12 / ***CCC:*** 946-962

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS



What is the “Communion of the Saints”?

The *Communion of the Saints* refers to the union of all the faithful in Christ, and the sharing of spiritual goods between them. The union between Christians through grace is actually deeper than the union of family members through blood, and God has willed that we would all be enriched through each other. Further, because the Church, as we have said, exists presently in three states (the Church on earth, in heaven, and in purgatory), we have communion with the faithful in all three states. This is because all those who are united with Christ are united with one another in and through Christ, whether they are here on earth, or in heaven, or in purgatory.

With the faithful on earth, we share the same faith and are called to build each other up in this faith (Rom 1:12). We likewise walk together in pilgrimage toward our heavenly homeland. In this way, we share the same hope (Eph 4:4). We also share in the same Sacraments (1 Cor 12:13; 10:17). As said before, we all have different *charisms* that we are called to put at the service of one another (1 Cor 12:7). We are also called to put our material and temporal goods at the service of one another and the Church (Acts 4:32). Lastly, we have communion in the same charity, which is the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us (Rom 5:5; Eph 4:16; 1 Cor 8:1).

We share this same bond of love with the faithful who have gone before us but who are presently being purified for heaven in a state we call *Purgatory*. We are called to be mindful of them and to pray for them. We will further explore Purgatory when we discuss “Life Everlasting” in the Creed, and the “Last Things.”

Those who have gone before us and are now in heaven are our older brothers and sisters in Christ. They pray for us and cheer us on in the struggle of our earthly pilgrimage. We can and should ask them to pray for us. They are also examples to us in the way they lived on earth.

Who are the “Saints”?

The saints, broadly speaking, are all those made holy by Christ in Baptism and who are in a *State of Grace*. The New Testament refers to saints in this broad sense in the following passages: Mt 27:25; Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25-26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13; Eph 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; Eph 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21-22; Col 1:2, 4, 12, 26; 1 Thes 3:13; 2 Thes 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Philemon 5, 7; Heb 6:10; 13:24; Jude 3; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20 24; 19:8; 20:9; 22:21.

More narrowly, those in heaven are called *Saints*, since they have been totally perfected in holiness and God’s love. In certain passages the New Testament refers to these saints in heaven (Rev 18:20, 24; 19:8).

In a yet narrower way, the Church recognizes particular individuals of different times and places as saints, insofar as they have been exemplary models of following Christ. The Church has examined their lives and declared them to be models of holiness. They are publicly held up as an example for all the faithful, and are celebrated in the *Liturgy* (the official worship of the Church). For hundreds of years now, the Church has had a process whereby a person of reputed holiness, after he or she dies, is examined and eventually publicly acknowledged as a saint. There are steps in this process. The present day process has four steps. In the first step, such a person is called a *Servant of God*. In the second step, the person is declared *Venerable*. In the third step, which is called *Beatification*, he or she is declared *Blessed*. In the fourth and final step, which is called *Canonization*, he or she is officially recognized as a *Saint* and is given that title before their name. Unless an individual is a *martyr* (one killed for Christ), a separate documented miracle through the person’s intercession is required for steps three and four, as a kind of “proof” that the person is in heaven. When persons are beatified, they can be officially venerated at the local level of the dioceses or the religious communities in which they lived. It is not until persons are canonized that they can be venerated universally throughout the Church.

Do Catholics worship saints?

No. We honor the saints with a special honor, but we do not worship them. We worship God alone. To worship anyone or anything other than God is the sin of *Idolatry*. In Catholic tradition, there are certain helpful Greek terms which distinguish between worship and different kinds of honor. *Latria* is worship properly speaking, or adoration. This is the honor due God alone. *Dulia* is not worship but describes the special honor we have for the saints. *Hyperdulia* is a special honor given to the Blessed Virgin Mary above the other saints. To honor a human person is not a sin. In fact, in the Ten Commandments, God commands us to “honor” our father and mother (Mk 10:19). Jesus also speaks about a certain honor due to a prophet (Mk 6:4). Jesus also says that He personally will “honor” those who serve Him (Jn 12:26). St. Paul says we should honor each other (Rom 12:10), and that certain missionaries deserve special honor (Phil 2:29). St. Peter exhorts believers even to honor the emperor (1 Pt 2:17). If it is fitting to honor all these, it is certainly fitting to honor those who have followed Jesus in an exemplary way through the ages, the saints.

Do Catholics “pray to” saints?

Catholics do not pray to the saints as though they were God. Rather, we ask the saints to pray for us, just as we ask other Christians on earth to pray for us. St. James tells us, “The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects” (Jas 5:16). Likewise, St. Paul exhorts Christians to pray for one another (or “make intercession for them”), not because asking others to pray for us detracts from Christ, but because Christ likes to work through others and has chosen to make our prayers for each other efficacious (Eph 6:18; Col 1:3, 9; 4:3; 1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 1:11; 3:1; 1 Tim 2:1; Heb 13:18; Jas 5:16; 1 Jn 5:16). If certain Christians have gone before us and their souls are glorified with God in heaven, they certainly do not cease praying for those of us still on earth. The Bible at times depicts holy people who have gone before us as interceding for us (2 Macc 15:14; Rev 5:8; 8:3). Indeed, when they die, they are not cut off from us and from the Church. Instead, they are made more perfect members of Christ and the Church. They are aware of us. They still care for us. They pray for us. Because of this, from the Church’s beginnings, Christians have asked the angels, and the martyrs and other saints, to pray for them.

Catholics often use the language of “praying to” a saint. They do not mean “praying to” the saint in the same way as “praying to” God. Unfortunately, this language can make it seem that this is the case to Christians from Protestant traditions. The root of the word “pray” means to “beg” or “ask.” For example, “I pray thee, lord,” in ancient English can be translated as “I beg you, sir” in modern English. With this understanding, it is not wrong for Catholics to use the language of “praying to” a saint in itself, as long as it is perfectly clear to all that this is different than “praying to” God. However, it is best to use different language around our separated brothers and sisters in Christ, so as to avoid confusion and misunderstanding.

It is sometimes objected that it is wrong to ask the saints to pray for us, since this involves calling on the dead, which is condemned in the Old Testament (Dt 18:10-11). However, the saints are not dead. While their souls are presently separated from their bodies (except in the case of Mary), they are alive with God in heaven. In fact, they can be said to be more alive than we are. And, there is no danger of the saints in heaven misleading us. They will always point us to Christ, and help us to grow in relationship with Him. Further, the closer we grow to Christ, the closer we grow to His family, including the saints in heaven.

Why does the Catholic Church venerate images of Jesus, Mary, and the Saints?

Images help us. Photographs help us to remember family members and friends. Statues and images help us to remember Jesus, Mary, and the angels and saints. Images are vehicles for us, therefore. We do not so much venerate the image as the person the image represents. The Old Testament forbade images of God, since it was important for the Israelites to know that nothing created is God or can adequately represent God.

However, not all images were forbidden in the Old Testament. In some cases, God directly commanded that images be made, as in the case of the *Cherubim statues* on top the *Ark of the*

Covenant (Ex 25:18-22), or the *Bronze Serpent* that God instructed Moses to mount on a pole for the healing of the people bitten by living serpents (Num 21:9). The *Cherubim Statues* represented angels and helped the people acknowledge Him Who is greater than the angels (Gen 3:24; Ex 25:18-22; 37:7-9; Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 6:2; 1 Kgs 6:23-36, etc.). The Bronze Serpent would serve as an image of Christ (Jn 3:14-15). Further, when God became man in Christ, *God became a visible image*. St. Paul calls Christ the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). In contrast to the phenomenon of idolatry, where someone is drawn away from God through images, through the Incarnation, people are now drawn to God through the Image of Christ, and by extension, through those visible images that represent Him and His servants. It is also fitting that those with artistic skill would glorify God through their art. If they were limited to non-religious images only, they wouldn’t be able to glorify God directly through their art.

Why do Catholics venerate the Relics of Saints?

The *Relics* of the martyrs and other saints are considered precious, both because our bodies will rise again in Christ, and because they were part of a holy person. And, just as God can and does work powerfully through the prayers of the saints, He can and does work miracles and answer prayers through the relics of the saints as well. We see this in the Bible. A Syro-Phoenician woman is cured simply by touching the hem of Jesus’ garment (Mk 7:24-30). A man is brought back to life through his body touching the prophet Elisha’s bones (2 Kgs 13:21). Many sick were cured, not only “by the hands of Paul,” but also through handkerchiefs or aprons that were touched to his body and afterward touched to the sick (Acts 19:11-12). God even used Peter’s shadow to heal people (Acts 5:15). A relic also helps us feel close to a saint, just as does a keepsake from a family member who has passed.

Tradition has categorized relics into three classes. *First Class Relics* are part of the body of the saint, such as a bone. *Second Class Relics* are something that belonged to the saint, such as a rosary or a piece of clothing. *Third Class Relics* are designated items touched to first class relics, such as a little cloth that has been touched to the bones of a saint.

There is an ancient practice of placing relics of saints in church altars, underneath where the presiding priest kisses the altar and where the Eucharist is celebrated. This signifies that the Eucharist is celebrated in union with the saints in heaven. Other relics are placed in *Reliquaries*, which are protected cases or holders for relics that allow the faithful to see and venerate them. Often the church where the main relics of a saint are is designated as a *Shrine*, and sometimes a *Basilica*. Often, many of the faithful will go on *pilgrimage* there to ask God for a special favor through the intercession of that particular saint. It is customary for the faithful to kiss relics as a means of veneration. In the end, relics are a *means* for us growing in our relationship with Christ and His saints, and occasionally instruments through which God works miracles. A Christian spirit must suffuse all religious practices surrounding relics. Any superstitious approach is antithetical to the faith.

How do Catholics celebrate the Saints throughout the year?

Each saint is assigned a day in the year to be his or her “feast day.” For example, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene is on July 22nd. The feast of St. Dominic is on August 8th. The feast days of the saints are spaced out throughout the year.

Some saints are only celebrated in a local region of the Church where the saint lived. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, for example, is only venerated in the United States, since she was a saint here in America. Many other countries have their own localized saints not celebrated by the larger Church as well.

Other saints are celebrated universally throughout the Church, since the Church has judged them to have a more universal significance. For example, the saints of the New Testament—such as Mary, Joseph, the Apostles and early Disciples—are celebrated universally. Early martyrs also tend to be celebrated universally. When we learn about the *Liturgical Year*, we will learn about how Christ and the mysteries of His life, as well as various feasts of Mary and other saints, are celebrated throughout the year and with different rankings of feasts.

On one day of the year we solemnly honor and celebrate all the saints in heaven, both known and unknown. This is what we call the Solemnity of All Saints on November 1st.

Is every Christian called to be a saint?

Yes. God calls us all to be saints, since God calls us all to be holy. St. Peter says, “As He Who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet 1:15-16). The same call is expressed in different language when Jesus says, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). This perfection means to be both “complete” and “fully developed,” like a fully mature and flourishing plant, versus a mechanical concept of perfection, like “dotting all of one’s ‘i’s” and “crossing all of one’s ‘t’s.” It is also the perfection of love of God and neighbor. An overly self-focused idea of perfection is also completely excluded from what Jesus means. Further, this call to perfection certainly does not involve having a kind of “holier-than-thou” attitude or only having the external appearance of holiness. These are caricatures of holiness, but not real holiness. True holiness and perfection involves being humble and real, even as it involves being “fully developed,” and “flourishing” in all areas of one’s life. Another way of thinking about this is that Jesus does not want us to be incomplete, inconsistent, or hypocritical, but rather to be fully healed and transformed by His grace and love. Lastly, one should not think that holiness is boring, or that it deprives us of our identity, happiness, freedom, and/or creativity. This is a total misunderstanding of holiness. The saints show us that to be holy means to be fully yourself, to be your “true self,” to be joyful, to be fully free, and to be creative. It involves God, through the grace of Christ, making you the “best version of yourself.” Above all, it is Christ shining in and through you.

We should neither be discouraged by our weaknesses, nor surprised that we do not become saints overnight. Becoming holy is a life-long process. We are called to be patient with ourselves and with others. At the same time, we are called to be open to God's call and help in making us holy, and ever encourage others to strive for holiness, even as we struggle and strive for it ourselves. The holier we are, the closer we will be to God and others, and the more integrated we will be within. The holier we are, the happier we will be. It is a temptation to be complacent, to give up, or to settle for anything less than what God has in mind for us. Becoming holy is difficult, yes, but Christ is the One who calls us to be holy, and helps us to be holy. Keep in mind that God often allows us to experience our weaknesses, in order that we may grow in humility, come to appreciate His mercy more fully, and rely on His grace more completely. Becoming holy is God's work, and yet it also takes a lot of work on our part, since God wills to work through us. Becoming holy requires great self-awareness and honest self-examination. It involves a kind of battle against our weaknesses. It involves God purifying us from all selfish tendencies, and transforming us into pure love. It is a journey, the most difficult and yet the most exciting of all journeys. It is a journey God calls us to ever advance in, following Christ, His Son, toward the perfection of love in eternal life.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

"The first (commandment) is this, 'Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." —Mk 12:29-31

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification." —1 Thes 4:3

"But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (Pr 4:18).

"Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more" (1 Thes 4:1).

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." —1 Cor 11:1

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Who are the Saints?*
2. *How do the Saints fit into God's plan, and our spiritual life?*
3. *Why does God call each of us to be holy?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Lk 1-2 / *CCC:* 487-511 & 964-975

MARY

THE MOTHER OF JESUS



In some Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, a woman is mentioned, a woman who would be the mother of the Messiah. Thus, Genesis foretold that a future descendent of Eve would crush the head of the serpent that overcame Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15). The Messiah would be the “seed” of a future woman. Isaiah foretells that the coming Messiah, who would be called Emmanuel (“God with us”), would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14). Micah also mentions a woman who, in Bethlehem, would give birth to a future “ruler of Israel,” whose “origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic 5:1-3).

In the New Testament, we discover that this chosen woman who would bear the Messiah is Mary of Nazareth (Lk 1:26-27; Gal 4:4). In the period of her betrothal to Joseph, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she is “full of grace,” that the Lord is with her, and that she has “found favor with God” (Lk 1:28-30). The angel then announces the mission God has chosen for her. She is to be the mother of the Messiah, Who is the Son of God (Lk 1:31-33). The angel explains that the Holy Spirit will bring about a virginal conception in her womb without the involvement of any man (Lk 1:34-35). The Holy Spirit will do this amazing thing, just as He has caused her older, barren cousin, Elizabeth, to conceive in her old age (Lk 1:36-37). Mary responds in perfect trust and obedience. She says, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Mary is the first one to hear the good news, then, and she is the first one to respond in perfect trust. After this event, which we call the *Annunciation*, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth in what we call the *Visitation* (Lk 1:39-56). After Christ’s *Nativity*, Mary and Joseph will have Jesus circumcised eight days after His birth (Lk 2:21). Forty days after His birth, Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the Temple in what we call the *Presentation* (Lk 2:22-38). After the visit of the Magi in Bethlehem (which we call the *Epiphany*), Mary and Joseph will flee to Egypt in order to protect their Child (Mt 2:13-23). Years later, when Jesus is twelve years old, Mary and Joseph, after losing track of Jesus, will discover Him teaching in the Temple (Lk 2:41-52). We call this event the *Finding in the Temple*. The Gospel of Luke tells us that “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51). Mary is also present at some points

in the public ministry of Jesus (Lk 8:19-21; Jn 2:1-5). Especially noteworthy is Mary's presence at the *Wedding Feast at Cana* (Jn 2:1-5). Mary will stand faithfully below the Cross while her Son is being crucified (Jn 19:25-27). We can assume that Jesus appeared in a special but unmentioned way to His mother after He was raised from the dead. Mary is with the apostles and early disciples at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Later tradition tells us that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her earthly life. Thus, we see that Mary faithfully fulfills her role to be the Mother of the Savior. She accompanies Him in every aspect of His life. She is the perfect disciple.

The New Testament portrays Mary as a kind of *New Eve*, just as Jesus is presented as a *New Adam* who comes to reconcile the human race with God. This time, however, we discover that the New Eve is the *mother* of the New Adam, and not His spouse, since the spouse of the new Adam will be the Church as a whole. In the Gospel of John, just as Jesus is referred to as "man" (Jn 19:5), Mary is presented as "woman," as Adam and Eve were called "man" and "woman," *ish and ishah* in Hebrew (Gen 2:23). In fact, "Woman" is a special title that Jesus gives to Mary in the Gospel of John. From the beginning of John's Gospel until the wedding feast of Cana, John uses numerous themes from the first chapters of Genesis. For example, John begins His Gospel in the same way that Genesis begins: "In the beginning" (Gen 1:1; Jn 1:1). Along these lines, the *wedding* at Cana is reminiscent of the *wedding* of Adam and Eve. At Cana, it is Jesus and Mary who are the prominent male and female figures. Jesus, as the New Adam, turns water into wine, a symbol of the new creation He has come to bring. He does this through Mary's bidding, through the "woman" (Jn 2:4). Significantly, Jesus calls Mary "Woman," not out of disrespect, but because she is the *New Woman*, that is, the New Eve. Jesus likewise calls Mary "Woman" at the foot of the Cross, and says "Woman, behold your son" (Jn 19:26), referring to the beloved disciple. This scene of the Passion of Jesus is also reminiscent of Garden of Eden. Both in Eden and at the Cross, there is a man, a woman, a garden, a tree, and death. Yet, whereas in Eden, Adam and Eve disobey God through eating from a tree of (apparent) delight, and thus will be subject to death, at Golgotha (where Jesus is crucified), Jesus and Mary are faithful to God unto death, through a tree of suffering, the Cross. Similarly, at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, an angel comes to invite Mary to say yes to God in obedience, in direct contrast to the way that Satan came to seduce Eve to disobey God. It is because of these parallels that St. Irenaeus, around the year 180 A.D., explicitly describes Mary as the New Eve. Finally, in chapter 12 of Revelation, a vision reminiscent of Genesis is described in which "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev 12:1) gives birth to a son who will rule the nations, evidently, Jesus (Rev 12:5). A dragon, described as the ancient serpent of Genesis (12:9), goes after the child but is unable to harm him (12:5). The dragon next goes after the woman, but she is protected (Rev 12:6, 13-17). The dragon is seen to have no power over Christ or His mother. The dragon then goes after the disciples of Jesus (12:17). This woman, who is described in such exalted terms, is called "the woman," like Eve, but, unlike Eve, she is not swayed in the least bit or touched at all by the serpent-dragon and his power. This figure is also called "woman," as Mary is in John's Gospel.

The New Testament also portrays Mary as a kind of *New Ark of the Covenant*. One can see this clearly by comparing 2 Samuel 6 and Luke 1:39-56:

- Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth in a town of Judah (Lk 1:39), just as David brings the Ark of the Covenant to a town in Judah (2 Sam 6:10).
- Elizabeth says to Mary, “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43), just as David says, “How can the ark of the LORD come to me?” (2 Sam 6:9).
- At the greeting of Mary, John the Baptist leaps for joy in Elizabeth’s womb (Lk 1:41, 44), just as David leaps and dances before the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam 6:16).
- Mary stays with Elizabeth three months (Lk 1:56), just as the Ark of the Covenant stayed for three months in the house of Obededom (2 Sam 6:11).

Luke is clearly portraying Mary as a kind of New Ark of the Covenant. Further, the angel Gabriel says that the Holy Spirit will “overshadow” Mary (Lk 1:35), just as the cloud of God’s glory overshadowed the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant at the time of Moses (Ex 40:34; Wisdom 19:7), and later filled the Temple at the time of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:10). Then, in the book of Revelation, John sees a vision of the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven (Rev 11:19), and the next thing he sees is the “woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1). There is clearly a connection. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant is the place where God was most present on earth, above the seat and the wings of the cherubim (Ex 25: 22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:5; 1 Ch 13:6; Ps 9:7; 22:3; 29:10; 33:14; 61:7; 80:1; 99:1; 102:12; 123:1; Is 37:16; Dan 3:55; Heb 9:5). Thus, Mary becomes the new place where God has come to “tabernacle” on earth (Jn 1:14). Lastly, within the Ark of the Covenant were placed the Ten Commandments, some of the Manna that fell in the desert, and Aaron’s Staff that blossomed (Heb 9:4). These are all symbols of Christ who dwells in Mary’s womb: Jesus is the Word of God, the Bread of Life, and our Great High Priest.

What does the Catholic Church believe about Mary?

In short, we believe the following things about Mary:

- *Predestination*: Because of God’s sheer grace, from all eternity, Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God (Gal 4:4; Rom 8:29-30). God chose her to have a special plan in the redemption of the human race. Just as in the beginning, a man fell through a woman, so God chose to redeem the human race by a New Adam, His Son, but through a woman, as a kind of *New Eve*. Indeed, He did not wish to save the human race without a woman being intimately involved. Mary is this woman.
- *Immaculate Conception*: Because of this special role, God gave Mary the grace to be conceived without original sin and to be without sin throughout her life. Just as Adam and Eve began their existence without sin, so Jesus and Mary would begin their human existence without sin. But, whereas Adam and Eve would fall into sin afterwards, Jesus and Mary would continue in faithfulness and holiness.

- *Perpetual Virginit*y: That Jesus was virginally conceived in the womb of Mary highlights the two natures of Jesus. That is, He receives His humanity from Mary, but He is also eternally begotten of the Father. In other words, Jesus' virginal conception highlights that Jesus is not only human: He is also divine. But, Mary was not just a virgin before Christ's birth. She was also a perpetual virgin, ever consecrated to God in virginity through the whole of her life. For a Catholic response to the common objections against Mary's perpetual virginity, see the separate handout titled "The Perpetual Virginity of Mary."
- *Mother of God*: Mary is the mother of God, because she is the mother of Jesus, Who is God. This is in no way to say that she is God, or greater than God, or that God receives His divinity from her. Rather, Mary is the mother of a Person, Who is the Son of God, Who is both human and divine. Analogously, your mother is a mother of a person who has a body and soul: you! We do not say that your mother is only the mother of a part of you, even though she did not create your soul, since only God can create a human soul. We rather recognize your mother as the mother of the whole of you, even though your soul does not originate from her. Similarly, Mary is the mother of Jesus in the complete reality of His Person, even though she is not the origin of His divine nature. Such a title underscores that Jesus is fully God and man. One will also remember that Elizabeth called Mary "mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43).
- *Mother of the Redeemer*. When Jesus was presented in the Temple forty days after His birth, the holy man Simeon predicted that Jesus would be rejected by many, and that Mary would share in His suffering one day—that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk 2:35). We see this fulfilled when Mary stands faithfully beneath the Cross of Jesus (Jn 19:25), enduring in her heart what He underwent in His body. In this way, she cooperates as a mother in His work of saving the human race. She is not the Redeemer. Yet, she has a unique role in sharing in His saving work and victory over sin as a woman, mother, and partner.
- *Assumption*: Because the corruption of the body in burial is an effect of original sin, Mary, like Jesus, has been preserved from the corruption and dissolution of the body in burial. Thus, as the earliest traditions of the Church about the end of Mary's life attest, Mary was not buried. Rather, God took ("assumed") her body and soul into heaven at the end of her life. Mary thus experiences now what we will experience at the end of time, namely the reunion of our bodies with our souls. Mary is, thus, the first one to share in the fruits of Christ's Resurrection through her own resurrection / assumption. From this moment on, Mary has been fully glorified in heaven, body and soul.
- *Mother of the Church*: Jesus entrusted His mother to the beloved disciple at the Cross. But this is a symbolic action by which Jesus was saying to all of us, "Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19:27). Indeed, Jesus gave Mary as a spiritual mother to all of us at the Cross. The book of Revelation also implies this, when the children of the woman clothed with the sun ("the rest of her offspring") are described as "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Rev 12:17). Next, just as the

Holy Spirit comes upon Mary to bring about the Incarnation and human birth of the Son of God in the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:35), so also the Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the early disciples to bring about the birth of the Church, the “Body of Christ,” in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:14; 2:4). Thus, just as Mary is highlighted as the mother of Jesus in Luke, so she is present as the mother of the Church in Acts. Lastly, if Eve, who sinned, was called “mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20), how much more should Mary, who was faithful, be called “Mother of all”? Jesus has indeed given Mary to the Church to be our spiritual mother. And Mary has fulfilled this role in every age by praying for her children, and by occasionally appearing in person in order to draw back wandering humanity to her Son. Both because she is glorified body and soul in heaven, and is a powerful and special motherly intercessor for us, we also call her *Queen*.

How do we know that Mary was immaculately conceived?

The following things point to Mary’s Immaculate Conception:

- Mary is depicted as the New Eve in the New Testament and in the Fathers of the Church. Being the New Eve, it makes sense that Mary would begin her existence without sin, just as Eve did. In Mary’s case, however, she continued without sin because of the special grace of God towards her.
- The Ark of the Covenant was covered with pure gold (Ex 25:11), a symbol of Mary’s all-holy purity.
- Mary is called “full of grace” by the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:28).
- If John the Baptist was sanctified even from his mother’s womb (Lk 1:15), how much more Mary?
- In the book of Revelation (chapter 12), in John’s vision of the “woman clothed with the sun” and her child, the ancient serpent (Satan) is shown to have no power over the child or His mother. He is not even able to touch them. Satan therefore goes on to try to sway the followers of Jesus, to tempt them to fall away.
- We never see Mary sinning in the Bible.
- The Fathers of the Church, and ancient liturgies, call Mary “all-holy,” and St. Augustine says that we cannot talk about sin and Mary together.
- The Church has confirmed the truth of Mary’s Immaculate Conception with the highest authority when Pope Pius IX solemnly declared and defined it in 1854.
- Visions and miracles attest to the truth of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. For example, Mary appeared to a French girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in 1858, and told St. Bernadette, “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Many spiritual conversions and miraculous cures have come through this apparition.

How do we know that Mary was assumed into Heaven?

The following things attest to the truth of Mary's *Assumption* into heaven:

- The earliest traditions about the end of Mary's life, dating from the 4th century, all speak of her being assumed into heaven, and most speak of Jerusalem being the place where it happened.
- Mary's Assumption was celebrated liturgically as early as the 5th century.
- Although there are ancient claims about having relics of the apostles and early disciples, no one has ever claimed to have the relics (bones) of Mary.
- The woman in Revelation 12 is described in bodily terms. She is "clothed" with the sun, with the moon under her "feet," and on her "head" there is a crown of twelve stars. This is in contrast to the just "souls" crying out to God before the Day of Judgment in Revelation 6:9-11.
- The Ark of the Covenant, which is a symbol of Mary, was made of a hard and durable acacia wood which, when treated properly, would not decay.
- The Ark of the Covenant being brought up into Jerusalem to the place prepared for it by David (1 Ch 15; Ps 132:8), and eventually into the Holy of Holies in the Temple (1 Kgs 8:4-9), is a symbol of the Lord bring Mary, the New Ark of the Covenant, body and soul into heaven at the completion of her earthly life.
- If Enoch and Elijah were "taken up" to heaven at the end of their lives, how much more fitting is it that Mary, the mother of the Son of God, was as well.
- If Mary began her existence, like Eve, without sin, and if she lived a sinless life, since the "wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), it is fitting that God would glorify Mary's body at the end of her life rather than let it corrupt in burial.
- If Mary is the new Eve, it is fitting that she would be the first to share in the New Adam's victory over death.
- The Catholic Church, through Pope Pius XII in 1950 (*Munificentissimus Deus*), has confirmed with the highest authority that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven.
- Various visions of saints attest to Mary's Assumption.

What kind of devotion should we have towards Mary?

Mary is human. She is not God. Like all the saints, however, she is holy and prays for us. Yet, she is unique among all the saints, and the Church reveres her as greater than all the angels and saints, since she was immaculately conceived and lived a sinless life, since God chose and graced her to be the New Eve and Mother of the Redeemer, and since Jesus has given her to us to be a spiritual mother. Therefore, we should honor her with a special honor, as Jesus Himself has honored her. As mentioned before, while the term *dulia* designates the special honor due to the saints, the term *hyperdulia* designates a special honor due to the Blessed Virgin Mother.

Just as Jesus works through the prayers of others, especially the saints, He has chosen to work in a special way through the prayers and motherly intercession of Mary, His mother and ours. Therefore, like the other saints, we look to Mary as an example of discipleship and feminine spirituality, and as a powerful intercessor. In a special way, Jesus wants us to look to her as a spiritual mother. She should not be seen as a competitor to Jesus, but rather as someone who brings us closer to Him, since no one was, or is, or ever will be, closer to Jesus than Mary. Further, she will never draw our attention away from Him, but she always points us to Him. In fact, she ever tells us what she once told the servants at the wedding feast of Cana: “Do whatever He (Jesus) tells you” (Jn 2:5).

Mary also has a special relationship to the Trinity. She is the *Daughter of the Father*, the *Mother of the Son*, and is even referred to in Church tradition as the *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*, because of her unique relationship with the Holy Spirit who sanctifies her. She thus models for us the kind of intimate relationship we are called to have with the Persons of the Trinity.

Mary is the Mother of the Church, the Body of Christ, just as she is the Mother of Jesus. Because of this, the whole Church celebrates her spiritual motherhood. Liturgically, we celebrate Mary as *Mother of God* on January 1st, her *Assumption* on August 15th, her *Queenship* on August 22nd, her *Nativity* on September 8th, her *Presentation* in the Temple on November 21st, and her *Immaculate Conception* on December 8th. She is also celebrated in the feast days of the *Annunciation* on March 25th, the *Visitation* on May 31st, and the *Presentation of the Lord* on February 2nd. There are certain *Marian feasts* that are closely associated with a feast of Jesus. For example, on January 1st we celebrate Mary’s role in the birth of her Son with the *Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God*. The feast of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary* follows the *Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (after *Corpus Christi*). Likewise, we celebrate *Our Lady of Sorrows* on September 15th, a day after the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross* on September 14th. Finally, there are other optional feast days of Mary, such as the *Most Holy Name of Mary*, or those which celebrate Mary’s apparitions to certain persons throughout the history of the Church, such as *Our Lady of Lourdes* on February 11th, *Our Lady of Fatima* on May 13th, and *Our Lady of Guadalupe* on December 12th.

There are certain traditional and popular prayers invoking Mary that have arisen in the history of the Church, such as Hail Mary Prayer (*Ave Maria*), the Angelus, the Hail Holy Queen (*Salve Regina*), the Rosary, the *Memorare* (an expansion of the earliest known prayer to Mary called the *Sub Tuum*), the Litany of Loreto, and others. Christians are encouraged to incorporate these into their prayer life. See the separate handout with a collection of traditional Marian prayers.

In recent centuries, there is a beautiful tradition of “consecration to Mary.” This involves entrusting yourself entirely to Mary, so that she may entrust you more fully to Christ. It is a way of dedicating yourself to her, or—more accurately—of dedicating yourself more fully to Christ through her. This type of consecration involves preparation, making and renewing the consecration, and seeking to grow in and live out the consecration all the days of one’s life.

Above all, you are encouraged to get to know Mary as your mother; to love her deeply and tenderly; to talk with her often; to ask for her help in knowing, loving, and following Christ; and to ask her to pray for the needs of others. We honor Mary, then, not because she was simply the biological mother of Jesus, but because she heard the word of God and did it (Mk 3:31-35), as Elizabeth said: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). And, in honoring Mary, we are simply echoing Elizabeth, who said to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk 1:42). We also fulfill what Mary herself says in Scripture: "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

<i>Annunciation</i>	Luke 1:26-38
<i>Visitation</i>	Luke 1:39-56
<i>Nativity</i>	Luke 2:1-21
<i>Visit of the Magi & Flight into Egypt</i>	Matthew 2
<i>Presentation</i>	Luke 2:22-38
<i>Finding in the Temple</i>	Luke 2:39-52
<i>Wedding Feast of Cana</i>	John 2:1-11
<i>At the Foot of the Cross</i>	John 19:25-27
<i>Pentecost</i>	Acts 2:12-14
<i>The Woman Clothed with the Sun</i>	Revelation 12

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is special about Mary?*
2. *What strikes you about Catholic Teaching on Mary?*
3. *How does devotion to Mary fit into Christian discipleship and spirituality?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Luke 15 / ***CCC:*** 976-987

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS



We learn from divine revelation and the Scriptures that God’s mercy is part of His character and at the heart of the ministry of Jesus. Pope Benedict XVI has said that divine mercy is God’s love healing the wounds of sin. After our first parents sinned, God manifested His mercy by not abandoning them, and in aiding them and giving them the hope of future salvation (Gen 3:15, 22). God revealed Himself to Moses as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy and faithfulness, keeping merciful for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34:6-7). Through Moses, God set up a system of sacrifices through which the people could make “atonement for their sin,” and thereby be forgiven (Lev 4:20, 26, 35; 5:10, 13). The prophet Micah says that the Lord will “have compassion on us” and “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19). Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord says that He in no way wants the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn back to Him and live (Ezk 18:24, 32). Psalm 103 says, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Ps 103:11-12).

In the New Testament, mercy is at the heart of the mission of Jesus. He is named “Jesus,” because “He will save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). From the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus calls people to repentance and gives them the hope of being forgiven (Mk 1:15). Mercy is at the heart of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:7) and many of Jesus’ parables, such as the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son (Lk 15). Jesus makes it clear that He has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mk 2:10), and that He has come to call, not the righteous (since no one is righteous apart from Him), but sinners to repentance (Mk 2:17), and “to save and seek the lost” (Lk 19:10). He also says that every sin can be forgiven, except the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—which is presumed to be hardened unrepentance to the Spirit of mercy (Mt 12:31-32). Jesus manifests His mercy to Matthew the tax collector (Mt 9:9), the sinful woman (Lk 7:1-10), the adulterous woman (Jn 8:3-11), Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), many prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners (Mt 9:10-11; 11:19; 21:31-32; Lk 5:30; 7:29; 15:1; Lk

18:9-14), and to the disciples in their struggles, weaknesses, and falls (Lk 10:38-42; Jn 20:26-29; 21:15-19). One reason the Eucharist is given is the “forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). On the Cross, Jesus forgives those who crucified Him (Lk 23:34), and He forgives the repentant thief, assuring him that he will soon join Jesus in Paradise (Lk 23:39-43). On the Cross Jesus also makes expiation for the sins of the world, with the result that His Passion becomes a font of God’s forgiveness for every age (Heb 4:16; 5:9; 9:26). After His Resurrection, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on His apostles, giving them the power to forgive sins in His name (Jn 20:22-23), and He commands that the forgiveness of sins be preached to all nations (Lk 24:47).

Jesus also commanded us to be merciful like our heavenly Father (Lk 6:36) and made forgiveness toward others the condition of ourselves being forgiven (Mt 6:12-15; 18:21-35).

In the New Testament, we see the early Christians preaching and showing the mercy of Christ to each other and to the world. Indeed, the Church is the extension of Christ and the continuation of His mission of mercy in the world. What Jesus did on earth, He continues to do through His Church. This is why Jesus communicates the power to forgive sins to His apostles, which power is passed down to all bishops and priests in the Church, and which gift is the basis for the *Sacrament of Penance*, also called *Reconciliation* or *Confession*: so that Jesus might continue to communicate His mercy to souls in each age through His Church.

How can we live out a “spirituality of mercy”?

To show mercy, we first need to receive mercy. The more we are able to appreciate how merciful God is to us, the more we will be able to show mercy to others. Part of holiness involves knowing that we constantly depend on, and ever stand in need of, God’s mercy. We are therefore called to have *humility* in acknowledging this, and tremendous *confidence* that God loves us, wants to forgive us, and will forgive any sins we are repentant for.

We are also called to have the *joy* of knowing we are loved and forgiven, and of knowing that God forgives us, not reluctantly, but gladly and lavishly. God can bring good out of any evil we have done, and make us powerful witnesses of His mercy to others. In a particular way, He can use us to help others in the very areas in which we have fallen or struggled. For example, those who have struggled with alcoholism are often best able to help those who are struggling presently with alcohol abuse.

It is also important for us not to despair. If we struggle with something, it is important for us not to give up, but to keep returning to God, asking for His help in overcoming our sins. We might wish that turning away from our sins were as easy as turning off a light switch and walking away. However, we all have particular weaknesses that are hard for us to overcome and that we continually struggle with. On the one hand, we should not be surprised, nor despair. That is what the devil wants us to do, since if he can succeed in getting us to despair, he has won. Through despair, we give up trying, we continually beat ourselves up, we lose motivation, and we become more focused on ourselves than on Christ and His mercy. Before

we sin, God is warning us through our conscience that this or that thought, word, or action is not good for us, while the devil promises the skies. After we sin, however, the devil is the first one to point the accusing figure toward us. Meanwhile God extends His merciful hand to us, to forgive us and help us out. So, we need to have unfailing confidence in God and keep turning back to Him. On the other hand, we should never settle for sin and neglect doing our part in overcoming sin. Recovery and overcoming sin involves a lot of grace and a lot of hard work (cooperation) on our part. It isn't an easy journey. But it is a blessed one, at the end of which we will be stronger. For example, St. Francis de Sales was someone who struggled deeply with anger, but through constantly working on it with God's grace, by the end of his life he made great progress and was known to be one of the gentlest people one could meet. Through struggling with that particular weakness, his weakness, with time, became an area of strength. His example gives us hope, and can motivate us to work hard in overcoming our weaknesses with God's grace.

On the other hand, we should never presume on God's mercy, meaning having the attitude that it is OK to sin since God will forgive us. God's mercy is transformative. It does not leave us where we are, but heals us, so that we have the strength not to sin again. To use God's mercy as an excuse to sin and not strive for holiness is an abuse of God's mercy. This is one type of the sin of *presumption*. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between true mercy and false mercy. False mercy winds up "enabling," minimizing, or even tacitly approving sin. False mercy is not so much mercy as it is thinking that a particular sin is no big deal and that one need not change. For mercy to be authentic, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the sin that can be forgiven. Mercy is great precisely because it forgives sin, and even great sin. If the sin is not a big deal, neither is God's mercy.

Jesus never "enabled" sin. He never approved or minimized people's sins. He rather manifested true mercy toward people open to forgiveness and wanting to change by offering the depths of God's forgiveness, by calling people out of sin, and by giving them a way out of their past sins. True repentance wants out of the sin. If we "justify" our sins through a myriad of excuses, it is a sign that we are not truly repentant, nor fully open to God's mercy. It is a sign that we don't really want to change: we just don't want to feel guilty.

Jesus is a beautiful paradox: at the same time, He offers us the depths of God's mercy and calls us to the heights of God's holiness. This is one way we know He loves us. Someone once said that Jesus loves us right where we are, but too much to let us stay there. Many people fail to be true to both sides of the paradox. People who lean in the conservative direction tend to emphasize God's justice and Jesus' call to holiness. People who lean in the liberal direction tend to emphasize God's mercy, patience, and understanding. But both can wind up minimizing, not fully appreciating, or failing to uphold the other side. Both tend to view Jesus through selective and partial lenses. The truth is that the real Jesus both offers us the depths of God's forgiveness (and there is no limit to that forgiveness) *and* calls us to the heights of holiness (and there is no limit to that either).

... the forgiveness of sins...

In the history of ethical thought, often positions tend toward either *rigorism* or *laxism*. The strength of the rigorists is that they have high ideals and don't accept rationalizations for sin. The weakness is that they often fail to sufficiently appreciate both God's mercy and the extent of human weakness. Conversely, the strength of laxists is that they have an appreciation for God's mercy and human weakness. Their weakness is that they tend to leave people where they are and easily accept rationalizations for sin. When we look at the life and teaching of Jesus, we see that Jesus has the strengths of both positions while avoiding the weaknesses. This is one reason we know that He is the true Son of God and our Savior.

The Church celebrates God's mercy in a particular way each year on the Sunday after Easter, also known as *Divine Mercy Sunday*. On this Sunday, we read the Gospel about the risen Jesus bestowing the Holy Spirit on the apostles for the forgiveness of sins. Activities highlighting God's mercy on this day was inspired in recent times by private revelations of Jesus to St. Faustina Kowalska, a religious sister and mystic who lived from 1905 to 1938.

Since we all fall short in many ways, we should seek God's forgiveness whenever we do fall short, and, at the end of each day, examine our conscience, giving thanks for the day's blessings and asking forgiveness for any sins and shortcomings. It is also important to apologize and make restitution to whomever we have wronged. Lastly, when we consider the faults of others, we should remind ourselves of our own faults and of how much mercy God has shown us. We should not fail to address others about their faults when this is our responsibility, but we should always do so with humility and as God would have us do it.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

Luke 15 *The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son*

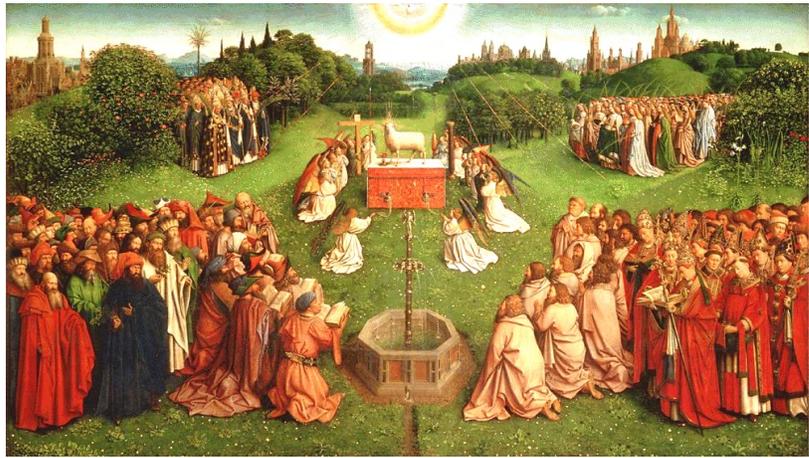
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *How do we know of God's mercy toward us?*
2. *How is it possible to forgive those who have wronged us?*
3. *How can we better live out a "spirituality of mercy"?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Mt 24-25 (chapters) / *CCC:* 988-1065

THE LAST THINGS



In this world we find ourselves in a state of mortality. Like all living things, we have a lifespan on this earth. None of us know exactly when, where, or how we will die, but we do know that time is short, and that every moment is closer to our last. We naturally wonder what happens after death: Is there some kind of afterlife? If so, will we be conscious? And, if so, will we be judged according to how we lived our life? Do we go to some better place or state, or perhaps some worse state? Will we be able to relate to others? Will we live forever? Will we be happy, or will we get bored? Will we be united with God? Or do we return to this earth, reincarnated as some other person or living thing? If so, how does this work, and do we keep on returning forever? Or, does everything end in nothingness, so that we only exist for a short time in this world? And, is there any way to know the truth? Or can all we do is guess? Lastly, in light of our true destiny (whatever it is), what is the meaning and purpose of this life?

In divine revelation, God has shed light on these questions. It is there that we learn that death was not a part of God's original plan for us. The book of Wisdom says, "Through the devil's envy death entered the world" (Wis 2:24). In the book of Genesis, we see that our first parents suffered death only as a consequence of their sin (Gen 3:3). The tree of life in paradise is a sign that God was calling them to something greater than the garden. The tree of life is, thus, a symbol of heaven. However, instead of going forward (toward heaven), our first parents sinned and went backwards. Thus, they were banned from the garden, and the tree of life that would bestow immortality was now barred from them (Gen 3:22-24). Being subject to death was one of the consequences of this original sin.

We have seen that God did not abandon humanity after this sin, but He had a plan to draw humanity back to Himself one step at a time, ultimately through redeeming us through Christ, His Son. For much of the Old Testament, however, there is an ongoing lack of clarity about the afterlife. In contrast to other cultures and religions which all seem to have had elaborate views of the afterlife, the Jews did not presume to know what happened after death, and they themselves wondered what happens (Eccl 3:20-21). The term "Sheol" was designated to denote a general place of the dead, where all go, both just and unjust. But there is no great clarity about what this was like and how conscious the souls of the dead would have been.

... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Later on in the Old Testament, in Daniel (12:1-3) and 2 Maccabees (7:9, 11, 14, 23, 29), a final resurrection and separation of the just and the wicked is foretold. In the book of Wisdom, we hear of the immortality of the souls of the just (Wis 3:1-9). In other passages, Jeremiah is described as praying for God's people from Sheol (2 Macc 15:15-16), Elijah is predicted to return to earth (Mal 4:5-6), and a day is foretold when God will destroy death forever (Is 25:7-8) and bring lifeless bones to life again (Ezk 37:1-14).

It is only in Christ that our ultimate destiny is fully revealed. In His teachings and parables, Jesus teaches us about a final resurrection from the dead, about a time of judgment in which all human beings will have to give an account to God for their lives, and about eternal life in heaven or hell, either with God or apart from Him. In His "eschatological discourse" during Holy Week (Mt 24), Jesus also predicts the destruction of the Jewish Temple, which would happen in 70 AD, and He teaches His disciples that He will come back again at the end of the world to judge all of humanity and to bring history and this world to a close.

In His Passion, Jesus undergoes our death, bearing upon Himself the sins of the world, thereby making atonement, so that we could be forgiven and eternal life made accessible to us again. Through His Resurrection, Jesus both conquers death and proves that He has power over death. His humanity also enters an eternally exalted state whereby He can be present to us in every age in His risen life and eventually raise us up with Him to share His glory forever.

Why do we have to die?

Our condition of being subject to death is part of the condition of original sin. However, this life was never supposed to be our final destiny. We were made for more than what this life has to offer. This life is by its nature temporary and transitional. We are only passing through. This life is like a hallway. No one likes to sleep or stay in a hallway. Instead, we pass through hallways to get to a bigger room. Similarly, this life can be compared to an engagement ring. It is good as is, but it is leading to a marriage. No one wants to be engaged forever. The engagement is supposed to lead to a permanent union of love. When we discussed why God created the universe, we mentioned that God made us for Himself, that He did not make us for His own benefit ("as though he needed anything" —Acts 17:25), but He created the whole universe out of nothing only so that we—who did not before exist—might one day share in His infinite love and happiness forever. There can be nothing greater than this. In short, God created in order to share, so that not only He, but other beings (ourselves) as well could experience something of the infinite love and joy He has and is in Himself. This is our destiny. This is why we were made. This is what Jesus reveals, and the reason He died and rose for us.

... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

How and when will we be judged?

The *Final Judgment* is when Christ will come again (Mt 24:30-31, 45-51; 25:29-30, 31-33; Jn 5:25-29; Rev 20:11-15). Since “the Father has given Him (the Son) authority to execute judgment” (Jn 5:27), “before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mt 25:32-33). All “the dead, great and small,” will stand before God, and all will be judged “by what they did” (Rev 20:12). For those written in the “book of life,” namely, “those who by patience in well-doing seek glory and honor and immortality,” God “will give eternal life,” while “for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and tribulation” (Rom 2:6-8).

In the end, those who die in a *State of Grace* will be saved, while those who die in a *State of Mortal Sin* and unbelief will be condemned (Mk 16:16). Those who are in a state of grace love God above all things and love others, on at least a basic level, through God’s grace within them. Whereas, those who are in a state of unrepentant mortal sin love themselves above all things, even above God. All those who die in a state of grace will go to heaven. However, if they are not fully perfected in God’s love and grace, they will need to be purified in a state we call *Purgatory* before entering heaven. Those who die in a state of unrepentant mortal sin immediately go to hell for eternity.

Those who die before the final judgment (when Christ comes again) will undergo *Particular Judgment* immediately when they die. Particular judgment means simply that everyone who dies before Christ’s second coming will be judged personally and individually when they die. This judgment is immediate and definitive, so that they do not have to wait around as unconscious souls before the final judgment, awaiting their reward or punishment. When the final judgment comes, their particular judgment is simply confirmed, since these souls will already be in heaven, hell or in purgatory before entering heaven. There are numerous Scriptural passages which affirm the doctrine of particular judgment (Lk 23:43; Acts 7:59; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; 1 Thes 5:10; Heb 9:27; 12:22-24; Rev 6:9-11; 13:6).

Will our bodies really be raised at the final judgment?

In the Creed we say explicitly that we believe not only in “life everlasting,” but also in “the resurrection of the body.” Indeed, just as Christ was raised from the dead in His real human body, our bodies will also be raised, reconstituted, and eternally reunited with our souls at the final judgment (Dan 12:2-3; 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 23, 29; Jn 11:24; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:35, 42, 44; Phil 3:21; 1 Thes 4:16). God made human beings distinctively as a unity of body and soul. Therefore, it is fitting that our final destiny would involve not just part of us (the soul), but the whole of us, body and soul. The bodies of all will be raised, both those saved and those not saved. If it is asked how God can reconstitute all human bodies, especially those which have been destroyed, we need to remind ourselves that “all things are possible for God” (Gen 18:14; Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 1:37; 18:27). The bodies of the saints in heaven will not be bodies subject to need, exhaustion, and corruption, but, as St. Paul says, will be some kind of glorified

... *the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.*

and “spiritual” body (1 Cor 15:40, 44). As far as we know, except for Jesus and Mary, those who die before the final judgment exist only in their souls in heaven, hell, or purgatory. After the final judgment, everyone’s bodies will be eternally reunited with their souls. Finally, Jesus teaches that “in the resurrection” to life, the elect “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30). This is because, all those in heaven, in a sense, will be “married” to God (Rev 19:9; 21:2).

How and when will Christ come again?

Jesus tells us that no one “except the Father” knows the day or hour of His *Second Coming* (Mt 24:36). However, we do know that He will not come like He did the first time, that is, by being born on this earth in a hidden and humble form. Instead, His second coming will be public, unambiguous, and glorious. He says, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Behold, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out; if they say, ‘Behold, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Mt 24:23-27).

On the one hand, there will be signs that precede and accompany His coming: Jesus speaks of false prophets, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, the “desolating sacrilege,” widespread wickedness, and a general coldness in the hearts of human beings (Mt 24:3-12). He also says that, “the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Mt 24:14). After these preceding signs and events, and “immediately after the tribulation of those days,” “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt 24:29-31). On the other hand, Jesus will come when people least expect it (Mt 24:36; 50), “like a thief in the night” (Mt 24:43; 1 Thes 5:2). Therefore, we are called to “watch” (Mt 24:42-43; 25:13) and ever be “prepared” and “ready” (Mt 24:44; Lk 12:40; 1 Pet 1:5) for that Day. On the other hand, it is important not to get overly anxious or worried about the end times, as St. Paul insists, since that would distract us from doing God’s will in the present moment, ironically (1 Thes 5:1-11; 2 Thes 6-15). If we are living the way we are called to live, we have nothing to fear. Jesus says, “Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk 21:28).

What is Heaven like, and who goes there?

Although St. Paul says that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9-10), Jesus and the Scriptures give us little glimpses of what heaven is like. Jesus speaks of heaven as “eternal life” (Mt 19:29; 25:46; Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; Jn 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24; 6:27, 40, 47, 54; 12:25, 50; 17:2), and as entering “into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:23), where the “blessed of my Father” will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:34) and “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43). St. Paul says that the slight momentary affliction of the sufferings of this life are “preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:17-18). He says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood” (1 Cor 13:12). He says that, “we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thes 4:17). St. John says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure” (1 Jn 3:2-3). Just as Jesus describes heaven as a wedding feast in His parables (Mt 22:1-14; 25:1-13), the book of Revelation, speaks of heaven as a “marriage” and “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9; 21:2). It is the “dwelling of God,” where God will “be with them” and “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3-4). In the last chapter, we are told, “They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). Finally, both St. Peter and the book of Revelation speak of a “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1; Is 66:22-23). Somehow the earth itself will be remade, or renewed, and made glorious.

In essence, heaven is being eternally united with God in love and joy, what theological tradition calls the *Beatific Vision*. There will be an abundance of “secondary” joys as well, such as being with all those who have died in Christ. heaven will be as creation was supposed to be, and creation having come to its final completion and destiny, where God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Does Hell exist, and who will go there?

Jesus teaches clearly that hell exists, and He forcibly warns people about going there. He speaks of it as *Gehenna* in Aramaic. *Gehenna* was literally a place in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, where great sin occurred in the past, such as idolatry and the sacrificing of children (2 Chr 28:3; 33:6), which place was therefore cursed (Jer 7:31; 19:2-6). But Jesus uses the term to refer to the place of the damned (Mt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Lk 12:5) and describes it as a place or state of suffering and punishment for sin where both body and soul can be destroyed (Mt 10:28) in unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43). But Jesus does not always use the term *Gehenna* to describe hell. Jesus also speaks of hell as the “outer darkness” and “furnace of fire” where men will “weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13:41-42; 22:13), and as the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” where the damned will “go away to eternal punishment” (Mt 25:41-46). St. Paul speaks of how the damned will “suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He (Christ) comes on that day to be glorified by His saints. . .” (1 Th 1:9).

The Church, faithful to Christ and the Scriptures, therefore teaches that we must believe that hell exists, that it consists essentially in being eternally and definitively separated from God, that only those who die in persistent and unrepentant mortal sin go there, and that no one is predestined for hell, since God wants no one to go there. It is reasonable to believe that those who sinned worse suffer more, while those who sinned less suffer less.

How can a loving God send people to Hell for eternity?

God wants no one in hell. But it exists because of human and angelic freedom. God will not force people to love and obey Him. If people have rejected God and chosen to live without Him in this life, preferring to love themselves above Him, then God gives them what they have chosen: to be without Him forever. Some saints have said that the damned would suffer more in coming closer to God, since they couldn't stand being so close to eternal love and purity. Things can change in this life. People can turn from good to bad and from bad to good. But we are only given until death to choose definitively for or against God and His goodness, truth, and love. We have a lifetime to form the decision we will make, for or against God. God created each one of us only so that we could be with Him forever in love and joy. And He sent His Son to suffer and die so that we could be forgiven, saved from hell, and be with Him forever in heaven. God loves each of us more than we love ourselves, and God more than anyone wants to prevent each person from going to hell. But, He made us free, leaves us free, and respects our freedom. hell is also punishment for great unrepentant evils men have done. These are the reasons hell exists.

... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

What is Purgatory?

In heaven, everything is perfect. Everyone loves God and others perfectly, and everyone there no longer has any faults. The book of Revelation says that “nothing impure shall enter” the city of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 22:27). However, those who die in Christ often die with many shortcomings, faults, un-atoned-for sins, and imperfect love. So, the Church teaches that all those who die in a state of grace will go to heaven. However, if they are not totally perfected in love of God and neighbor when they die, they enter a state of purification before entering heaven. We call this state of purification *Purgatory*. Purgatory is only for those who die in Christ, and it is only temporary. No one is in Purgatory forever. And Purgatory will cease to exist at the end of the world when everyone is fully purified. Some will need greater purification, some less. Thus, some will spend a “longer” or “shorter” time in Purgatory accordingly, although time is not the same in this state as it is on earth. This purification is a purification of love: it is God’s love purifying us of every stain of sin and selfishness, and a state in which we experience suffering for the sins we failed to make up for during our lives.

Although the word “Purgatory” is not found in Scripture, its reality is taught. St. Paul says that on the last day, the “work” of everyone who built their lives on the foundation of Christ will be tested. He says that different people build with different materials on the foundation of Christ, and he notes a descending order of quality in materials: “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor 3:12). He says that “each man’s work will become manifest”, since “the Day,” meaning Judgment Day, “will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.” He goes on to say, “If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward,” but “if any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:13-15). This is exactly what Purgatory is: the spiritual fire of God’s love purifying us to be with Him forever. Note that someone “will suffer loss” in such a purifying process, and yet the person will still be saved.

God gives us all the grace we need in this life in order to go straight to heaven when we die. However, many of us fall short and will need purification when we die, some more and some less. The teaching of Purgatory is beautiful, since it tells us that God doesn’t leave us imperfect, but will fully purify, perfect, beautify, and glorify us, no matter how imperfect we are, as long as we die in God’s grace. It also assures us that we will be purified of all our faults when in heaven, so that there will no longer be any conflict or tension. Everyone will live in perfect love and harmony.

Some saints who have had visions of Purgatory tell us that souls in Purgatory experience greater joy than they ever experienced on earth, since they are in God’s presence and know they will be saved, and that it is only a matter of time before they enter heaven. At the same time they experience more suffering than they ever experienced on earth, since they come face to face with themselves, without hiding or making excuses, and seeing the full consequences of their sins, and because the purification is deep, getting to the roots.

... *the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.*

The souls in Purgatory are our brothers and sisters in the *Communion of the Saints*. And God has willed that we can help them by our prayers, so that they can be more quickly purified—and their sins made up for—through our prayers (2 Macc 12:39-45). It is a good practice to remember the souls in Purgatory, to pray for them, and to have Masses said for them. All this profits them. We pray for all the dead, in fact, at a funeral Mass, and in the rites that follow. If a soul is already in heaven, God will benefit another soul by our prayers. No prayer is lost. We should note that we cannot benefit those who are in heaven by our prayers, since they are already fully perfected and glorified. Rather, the souls in heaven pray for us and for those in Purgatory. Our prayers, likewise, cannot profit souls in hell, since hell is definitive, and therefore our prayers would not do any good. It only makes sense to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are still on their way to heaven, both on earth and in purgatory.

The Church celebrates All Souls day on November 2. This is a special day to remember, honor, and pray for all the souls in purgatory.

What is the meaning and purpose of life?

Since we were made to be with God forever in heaven, this life is transitional. It is the way to our destination. It is therefore supremely important that we go the right way in life by following Christ, and allow His grace to convert and transform our life in all areas. God made us for Himself. And therefore, the meaning and purpose of this life is to love God in this life, so that we can be forever with Him in the next.

How should we live in light of the “last things”?

It is important that we remember why we are here and where we are going, that time is as nothing compared to eternity, and that the way we live this short life on earth in cooperation with God’s grace will determine where we will be for all eternity. God made us for heaven, and that is where He is leading us, if we follow Him, and keep on turning back to Him when we fall and hurt ourselves. It is easy for us to forget what is important. We get distracted and confused along the way. This is why the Church reflects on the “last things” (*Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and the Second Coming of Christ*) at the end of every Church year, and why we should keep them ever in mind. We should not live in fear and anxiety. We should have a healthy fear of sin and hell. However, we should have great confidence in God’s love and mercy toward us, and look forward to heaven. Nothing is greater than heaven, and that is what God wants for us.

... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“I am a sojourner on earth.” —Psalm 119:19

“For I am your passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers.” —Ps 39:12

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to His promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation.” —2 Pet 3:8-15

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *In summary, what does the Church teach about the “last things?”*
2. *What strikes you when thinking about all this?*
3. *How should we live in light of the “last things?”*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Hebrews 1-4 (chapters) / ***CCC:*** 1066-1209

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism
Confirmation
Eucharist

The Sacraments of Healing

Penance (*also known as Reconciliation or Confession*)
Anointing of the Sick

The Sacraments of Service to Communion

Holy Orders
Matrimony

LITURGY



What is “Liturgy?”

In ancient Greek, the word “liturgy” denotes a kind of public service. In the New Testament, the word is used to describe Zechariah’s priestly duty (Lk 1:23), the work of evangelization that the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to (Acts 13:2), Paul’s priestly service of evangelizing the Gentiles (Rom 15:16), the work of collecting alms for poor churches (2 Cor 9:12), the building up of the faith of the Philippians which Paul sacrifices himself for (Phil 2:17), and the assistance which Epaphroditus renders Paul (Phil 2:25, 30). In the Christian tradition, liturgy denotes *the official worship of the Church*, from which evangelization and deeds of charity flow. In this way, it is not only priestly, but prophetic and kingly, as well.

In short, liturgy is worship. It is the official worship of the Church. It is the worship which the “whole Christ,” Head and members, offers lovingly to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The latest Church council, Vatican II, describes it as the “exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ.”

It is important to understand that liturgy is not primarily the worship we offer God. It is rather the worship that Christ offers the Father, and we are joined to that worship through being members of His Body, the Church, through Baptism. *It is Jesus drawing us into His worship.* In the liturgy, Jesus offers up His great act. Which act? The greatest act of love that the world has ever known: the act by which He laid down His life on the Cross in perfect love of the Father and perfect love of us. In the Catholic tradition, we speak of the whole Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus as one great act, the *Paschal Mystery*. This great “act” is not only at the heart of history: it is at the heart of the Church’s worship. The *Paschal Mystery*, then, is the great act of love that Christ in His risen humanity offers unceasingly to the Father, involving His Church. As Jesus draws us into His worship, then, our worship is made and perfected through Him, and God heals, blesses, and sanctifies us through Him. So, in the liturgy, at the same time, God is glorified, and we are sanctified.

In the gift of the Eucharist, and with the command, “Do this in memory of me” from the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:24-25; Lk 22:19), Jesus has entrusted the Church with this great act of love, the Paschal Mystery. He has thereby given the Church the means of adequately worshipping the Father through Him in every age. In this way Jesus draws Christians of every age into His great act of love. And because this act is celebrated and offered in the liturgy, the liturgy is called the “source and summit of the Christian life.” The Christian life flows from the Paschal Mystery, and all Christian acts are ordered to the Paschal Mystery, which is celebrated and offered in the liturgy.

Christians are called to glorify God through Christ in everything they do and, so, live lives of worship. However, there are certain acts of the Church which make the Paschal Mystery present in an “official” and privileged way. These are the “instances of liturgy,” or “instances” of the official worship of the Church. These “instances of liturgy” include the celebration of each of the seven *Sacraments*. They also include the *Liturgy of the Hours*, which priests and religious, as well as some lay people, pray at different times of each day. They also include various kinds of *Blessings*.

Liturgy, then, is an act. It is an act of worship. It is the act of Christ offering up His Paschal Mystery to the Father in a way that involves the participation of the Church. In the Mass, we refer to this act as a *Sacrifice*, and it is for this reason that the notion of sacrifice is at the heart of the concept of liturgy. In order to better understand liturgy and the notion of sacrifice, it is helpful to understand how the Passion of Christ is a sacrifice. And in order to understand how Christ’s Passion is a sacrifice, it will be helpful to consider the background of ancient pagan and Jewish sacrifice.

Why did ancient cultures practice sacrifice?

The practice of sacrifice was universal in the ancient world and, yet, is almost entirely absent from the modern world. It is not surprising, then, that the idea and practice of sacrifice is so foreign to us and our sensibilities. Many people today mistakenly think that ancient sacrifice was all about doing violence to an animal. The essence of ancient sacrifice is not violence though. The essence of ancient sacrifice is, rather, *offering*—the offering of something good to a god. Because ancient gods were often thought of as above human beings, yes, but also very human-like, ancient peoples thought that the gods would like the same things that humans like, above all a good meal! In both ancient and modern times, we honor important guests by giving them a good meal. In the case of the gods, however, there is need to transfer the meal to their realm. This was done by fire. Hence, ancient sacrifice was mostly about offering edible things (the best of one’s domestic animals or grains) to the gods, and passing these things over to the gods by means of smoke generated by fire on an altar. So, the violence done to an animal was not the goal of sacrifice, just as the violence used in hunting and processing an animal is not the goal of hunting. Instead, whatever destruction is involved in hunting is simply a means to feeding people. Likewise, ancient sacrifice was all about presenting something good to a god, something the god would like, for the sake of swaying the god to bless you in some way or to abate his or her anger. Any violence done was only the means and preparation for offering something pleasing to the god, not the goal.

For important causes and pleadings, bigger and more valuable animals were sacrificed. Following this logic, some ancient cultures resorted to human sacrifice. When things got desperate, some people thought that perhaps offering up the most valuable thing of all—human life—would be pleasing to this or that god. So, if offering up many oxen didn't obtain the desired results, they sometimes tried offering up something yet more valuable, human beings. Perverse, yes, but their reasoning often followed these lines.

Why did the Jews practice sacrifice?

Because the Israelites and Jews believed in one all-powerful God who did not have human needs and desires like the gods of other cultures were thought to have, it is legitimate to ask why they practiced sacrifice at all. After all, God neither needs nor desires food. He needs nothing. This is affirmed very clearly in Scripture (see Ps 50). At the same time, the Pentateuch portrays the whole system of sacrifice as divinely instituted. Why would God ask for sacrifice, then, since He does not need it, and the Israelites know this?

The answer is that it is for our good, not God's good. The sacrifices were meant to function as *exterior signs of interior acts of worship*. That is, the various sacrifices of the Old Testament provided the people with a physical and tangible way to express their devotion to God. Because we are body and soul, it is fitting that we human beings express our interior worship of God in an outward and physical manner. Jewish sacrifice was a means of doing this. Thus, the *Whole-Burnt Offering*, where the whole animal or all the grains were offered up, was a way of expressing our total love for God. *Communion Sacrifices*, where part of the animal was offered and part eaten, expressed being in relationship with God. *Sin Offerings* were a means of expressing sorrow for sin, and of making atonement and obtaining forgiveness. *Thank-Offerings*, *Votive Offerings*, and *Free-Will Offerings*, were a means of expressing one's free, non-obligated thanksgiving to God for favors received. And so forth. In this way, the sacrifices were pedagogical and formative for the people of God. They taught the people how to relate to God. They were also a means of expressing worship to God.

At the same time, we know that an exterior act can be done without the heart being involved, or without a person having true repentance, embracing conversion, or having sincerity of heart. In such cases, the sacrifices became empty. The prophets would decry such empty and presumptuous devotion. They reminded the people that what God really wanted was conversion of heart and righteousness, not the blood of goats and calves (Ps 40:6; Ps 50; Is 1:10-17; Jer 7; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8). So, while it is fitting that we outwardly express our interior worship to God, the sacrifices do no good and become empty if not accompanied by conversion of the heart and righteous living.

In light of these dynamics of sacrifice, how can Christ's Passion be a sacrifice?

St. Augustine once articulated that there are four essential parts of sacrifice:

1. The *God* to whom the sacrifice is offered
2. The *People* for whom the sacrifice is offered
3. The *Priest* who offers the sacrifice to God for the people
4. The *Victim* (the sacrifice itself) offered upon an altar

When we look at the Cross of Christ, at first glance it looks nothing like a traditional sacrifice. There are Jewish priests present when Jesus is crucified, but in their mind they are putting a blasphemer to death, not offering sacrifice. There are people there, but many of them are in favor of Christ's crucifixion. Further, those who are not supportive do not see the Crucifixion as a sacrifice, but as a great travesty. God is present, but Jesus feels the forsakenness of sin in His sufferings, and cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" even though He is without sin and does not doubt His Father's presence. There is also no traditional altar, or animal or grain sacrifice being burned upon it. Thus, the scene of the Passion, on the surface level, in no way looks like a sacrifice.

The Last Supper, however, is the key to understanding how the Passion of Christ on the Cross is a sacrifice. At the Last Supper, Jesus takes bread and wine and declares them to be His Body and Blood. Since the context is a Passover meal, all is *offered to God* in prayer. *What is offered* (the *Victim* or the *Sacrifice* itself) is His Body and Blood, which is Himself. *Who offers* it (the *Priest*) is seen to be Jesus Himself. This means that Jesus is both the priest and the victim. It is also not only offered *to God*, but *for the people* as well: Jesus says that what He offers is "for many" and "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). And He is clearly identifying the transformed bread and wine with what will be given up and poured out the next day on the Cross. In other words, Good Friday is contained in Holy Thursday. The act of the Passion is contained in the Eucharist. Further, since Jesus is fully God and fully man, He is *one with the God* to whom the sacrifice is being offered, and *one with the people* for whom the sacrifice is being offered. Hence, at the Last Supper, Jesus is seen to embody all four essential aspects of sacrifice. He is the *Priest*, the *Victim*, and is *one with God and the people* in the sacrifice. The Last Supper, then, helps us to realize how Good Friday is a sacrifice.

The Passion of Jesus is the sacrifice that fulfills all ancient sacrifices. It fulfills the *Whole-Burnt Offerings*, since Jesus gives Himself totally. It is a *Communion Sacrifice*, since Jesus gives us Himself (the *Victim*) to partake of in the Eucharist. It fulfills the *Sin-Offering*, since on the Cross Jesus bears the sins of the world and says that the Eucharist is "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). It also fulfills the *Thank-Offerings*, *Votive Offerings*, and *Free-Will Offerings*, since Jesus "gave thanks" at the Last Supper and offers Himself to the Father freely and voluntarily. The very word "Eucharist" also means "thanksgiving." In a sense, Christ's Sacrifice also fulfills and corrects *human sacrifice*. It is interesting that the greatest and most perfect sacrifice in history did not involve an animal or grains, but rather a human being. The truth behind human sacrifice is that human beings are valuable, and that ultimately God wants *us*, not animals or

grains. Where human sacrifice went wrong is in the manner of offering. God does not want our death, or for us to be offered as food. He rather wants us to be given and “offered” to Him in love and in the manner of our life. Further, all animal and grain sacrifices, as we have seen, were meant to symbolize and express our interior worship, that is, the offering of ourselves to God. They were all supposed to be a means of us giving ourselves to God in love. In the Passion of Christ, Jesus gives Himself completely to God in love, faithful even unto death. The way Jesus was put to death was unjust. However, in this injustice, Jesus willingly offers Himself in love to God and for us and for our salvation.

It is also for these reasons that the Passion of Christ is the Sacrifice that puts an end to all other sacrifices, which were provisional and incomplete. This Sacrifice is what all other sacrifices were trying to achieve but fell short of. The Passion of Christ is true worship. It is true worship, because it expresses total love, faithful unto death. When we give ourselves to God, our self-gift falls short, because of our sins. But the self-giving of Christ to the Father is pure and perfect love without sin. It is fully pleasing to the Father, because it is the perfect expression of total self-giving love without selfishness and sin. Because of Jesus’ perfect love and worship, then, we can now offer up in our own way—in the Mass, through the priest, and in our lives—this perfect act of Jesus, the *Paschal Mystery*. And we seek to let this sacrifice, this act of perfect love, perfect our worship and purify our hearts and lives. This is the Sacrifice that purifies our worship, and teaches us to offer ourselves in love to God, in union with Jesus and for the good of others. It is also the act that teaches us how to live, since the Church calls us to *mirror in life what we contemplate in worship*. The perfect and total love that is at the heart of the Passion, and at the heart of all Christ’s deeds and words, is supposed to be at the heart of everything we say and do as well. In this way, through the liturgy, Christ draws us into His perfect and total love, helping us to love like He loves. It is a love that heals and sanctifies us, even as it glorifies God. So, in the liturgy, and in life by extension, we are called to offer ourselves to God in union with the offering of Jesus. In this way, we celebrate, receive, and seek to imitate and live out the perfect love that we see and experience in the Paschal Mystery. In every Mass, the Paschal Mystery becomes present on our altars in the Eucharist. We are then called to contemplate this great act of love, to unite ourselves with it, to be transformed by it, and to mirror it in our every day lives.

How is each Mass a sacrifice, then?

At each Mass, the same sacrifice is celebrated and offered over and over again. It is not that Jesus is sacrificed over and over again. He only offered Himself *once* upon the Cross. However, in the Mass, the one sacrifice of the *Paschal Mystery* is made present, offered, and applied to people in various times and places. It is a re-presentation of the one offering which was made at the Last Supper and which contains the whole Paschal Mystery. It is the worship of Jesus entrusted to the Church and celebrated by Her throughout history as the center of Her worship and life.

All the “instances of liturgy,” tap into and draw upon the inexhaustible font of grace that is the Paschal Mystery. The Mass, above all, contains and celebrates it. All other instances of liturgy (the other Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours, and Blessings) are united to, and directed to, the celebration of the Paschal Mystery in the Mass.

As we can see, the concept of liturgy is rich and deep. It can be difficult to understand at first. With time and greater understanding, however, its power opens up to us and attracts us into its inner riches.

What is the “Liturgical Year”?

Over the course of a year, the Church unfolds and celebrates the mysteries of the life of Christ. She also celebrates feasts of Mary and other saints as part of the mystery of Christ, since they belong to Christ’s Body, the Church. We call this organized year of celebration the *Liturgical Year*.

There are two main feasts of the liturgical year: *Christmas* (when we celebrate the birth of Christ into our world) and *Easter* (when we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, having defeated the evils of sin, suffering, and death). And because these feasts are so significant, we celebrate them, not for one day only, but for eight days solemnly. Hence, we have the *Octave of Christmas*, and the *Octave of Easter*. Even beyond that, we have a *Christmas Season* that extends up until the Baptism of the Lord. Likewise, we have a whole *Easter Season* that extends beyond the Octave all the way to the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. *White* is the liturgical color for the Christmas and Easter seasons. *Gold* can be used as well but is usually reserved for the greatest feasts.

Further, because the two feasts of Christmas and Easter are so important, we have whole “seasons” to *prepare* for them. *Advent* is the four-week season leading up to Christmas. *Lent* is the 40-day season that leads up to Holy Week and Easter. Advent begins the Liturgical Year. *Purple*, or *Violet*, is the color for the preparation seasons of Advent and Lent. On one Sunday just past the halfway point in both Advent and Lent, the color *Rose* is worn. This expresses the joy of anticipation as we near the great feasts of Christmas and Easter.

Between the end of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Lent (in the early Spring), and from after Pentecost (late Spring) until the next Advent (December), we have the “Time of the Year,” or “Ordinary Time.” During this time, we celebrate the public life of Jesus. The color *Green* is used for this time. There are 34 weeks designated for Ordinary Time. Toward the end of the liturgical year, we meditate on the “last things,” and on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before the next Advent begins, we celebrate the *Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe*. This feast crowns the whole liturgical year. Thus, the liturgical year with these seasons can be outlined in this way:

- Advent → Christmas
- Ordinary Time
- Lent → Holy Week & Easter
- Ordinary Time

With this ancient format, the Church celebrates the early life of Jesus at Christmas, the public life of Jesus during ordinary time, and the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, as well as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, in the Easter Season. She also reminds and prepares us for the second coming of Christ at the end of Ordinary Time (at the end of the liturgical year).

Why is Sunday so important and central in Christian worship?

Sunday is the constant throughout the liturgical year. Sunday is the day on which Christ rose from the dead. Sunday Mass is the main liturgy at which all Christians are expected to gather, following Our Lord's injunction, "Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25). It also fulfills the third of the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament, which is "You shall keep holy the Sabbath day" (Ex 20:8; Dt 5:12). For Christians, the Sabbath day (traditionally Saturday) has been transferred to Sunday because of Christ's Resurrection. Sunday then is the new "Lord's day" (Rev 1:10). It is the "first day of the week" (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:2, 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2), the "day" on which the universe was created as it were, the day on which Christ recreated the earth through His Resurrection, and the day that the Holy Spirit came upon the Church at Pentecost. For these reasons, attendance at Sunday Mass is a serious obligation for Catholics, unless someone is sick or has some other serious reason for not coming. But it should be thought of more as a joy, blessing, and privilege than simply an obligation and duty.

What is "Holy Week" and the "Triduum"?

Holy Week is the holiest week of the year. It begins a week before Easter on "Passion Sunday," or "Palm Sunday," which celebrates Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Mass on this Sunday begins with the reading of the account of Jesus' triumphal procession, the blessing of palms, and a procession into the church. The whole Passion account from Matthew, Mark, or Luke is read, according to whether the year is Year A, B, or C. Thursday of this week is called "Holy Thursday," and one evening Mass is celebrated which commemorates the Last Supper, with the washing of the feet, and the gift of the Eucharist and priesthood. At the end of Mass, there is a procession with the Eucharist, and veneration into the night. Earlier in the day, and sometimes earlier in the week, the *Chrism Mass* is celebrated in Cathedrals around the world. Priests gather with their bishop for this celebration. They renew the commitment of their priesthood and obtain *Holy Oils* for the Church's Sacraments. Friday is called "Good Friday," and it celebrates the Passion of Christ on the Cross. It is the one full day of the year when no Mass is

Liturgy

celebrated. We enter into the barrenness of the Cross. In the liturgical celebration of *The Passion of the Lord*, there is a liturgy of the Word, followed by a veneration of the Cross, followed by the reception of Holy Communion. The Hosts received, however, are consecrated from the day before. Saturday of Holy Week is called “Holy Saturday,” and no Mass is celebrated until the evening. *Holy Saturday* is a day of quiet when the Lord rests in death on the day of rest, the Sabbath. On that evening, the greatest and longest feast of the year is celebrated, the *Easter Vigil*. The Easter Vigil has four parts: the *Service of Light*, the *Liturgy of the Word*, the *Baptismal Liturgy*, and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. It usually begins outdoors, where a fire is prepared and blessed, from which a new Easter Candle, or *Paschal Candle*, is lit. All process into the Church following the Paschal Candle, which is a symbol of the risen Christ. After the ancient hymn, the *Exultet*, is sung, there are numerous readings from the Old Testament. Then, the Gloria is sung, a passage from Romans read, the Gospel proclaimed, and a homily given. After that, there is a baptismal liturgy when those who have been in RCIA officially enter the Church and receive her Sacraments. After everyone renews their baptismal vows, the Mass proceeds as normal with the Eucharistic Prayer and Holy Communion. A special, sung *Alleluia* is added to the dismissal.

The three great feasts of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, including the Easter Vigil, is called the *Sacred Triduum* (Sacred Three Days). Although Catholics are required to attend an Easter Mass, no one is required to attend the Triduum services. Rather, all are encouraged to come of their own volition, as they are able. The Triduum is at the heart of Holy Week, the Liturgical Year, the Church, and the Christian life.

What are “feast days”?

Feast days are special days that celebrate some aspect of the life of Jesus, or which celebrate Mary and the saints. Some are “moveable,” meaning that they fall on different dates each year, like Ash Wednesday, Easter, the Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Most are on the same date every year. The following are some significant feast days assigned to a certain date:

January 1	Mary, the Holy Mother of God
March 19	St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary
March 25	Annunciation of the Lord
May 31	Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 6	Transfiguration of the Lord
August 15	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
September 14	Exaltation of the Holy Cross
December 8	Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
December 25	Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Not all feast days are of equal importance. It is for this reason that there are three general rankings of feasts: *Solemnities*, *Feasts*, and *Memorials*. They are distinguished liturgically in the following ways, with regard to the Mass:

Liturgy

- **Solemnities:** Solemnities are the highest rank. Christmas, Easter, all Sundays, and the highest feast days celebrating Jesus, Mary, and certain Saints are ranked as solemnities. On solemnities, there are two readings which precede the Gospel at Mass. The *Gloria* and the *Creed* are also sung or recited. Six candles are fittingly used on or around the altar.
- **Feasts:** Feasts are the next highest rank. The Presentation, Transfiguration, feasts of the Apostles, and some other feasts are celebrated properly as “Feasts.” Usually on a Feast there is only one reading before the Gospel. The *Gloria* is sung or recited, but not the *Creed*. When Feasts are occasionally celebrated on Sundays, they are celebrated in the manner of a Solemnity. Four candles are fittingly used at the altar when celebrated on days other than Sunday.
- **Memorials:** Most saints’ days are celebrated as a Memorial. Neither the *Gloria* nor the *Creed* are sung or recited. There are two types of Memorials, *Obligatory* and *Optional*. The Memorial of St. Martha on July 29 is an example of an Obligatory Memorial. Whereas the Memorial of St. Patrick is on March 17 and is Optional. Obligatory means that a priest must celebrate the daily Mass on that day in honor of that saint, whereas he is not required if it is an Optional Memorial. Just two candles are used at the altar for memorials.

Whenever two feasts fall on the same day, the greater feast trumps the lesser.

The color *red* is used for Good Friday, Pentecost, and for feasts of martyrs. *White* is used for all other saints. *Violet, white, or black* can be used for funerals and for All Souls.

What are “holy days of obligation”?

Throughout the world, there are certain solemnities that fall outside of Sunday on which Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. In the United States, there are six:

January 1 (date varies)	Mary, the Holy Mother of God Ascension Thursday (<i>when it hasn’t been transferred to Sunday</i>)
August 15	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
November 1	All Saints
December 8	Immaculate Conception
December 25	Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Churches offer various times for Masses on these days, to make it convenient for people to go to Mass, given their work schedules. Evening Masses are often offered, including a Vigil Mass (the evening before, when the Solemnity actually begins), and often on the evening of the Solemnity as well.

Is Mass celebrated every day?

Yes, Mass is celebrated every day of the year except on Good Friday and Holy Saturday (before the Easter Vigil). Usually daily Masses are about thirty minutes in length. No Catholics are obliged to go to daily Mass. However, many people like to go and find great blessings in going. They are able to hear much of the Scriptures read, along with regular homilies, and are able to receive the Holy Eucharist every day. Many retired and unemployed people go to daily Mass, as well as many workers either before or after work, or on their lunch hour.

When do Catholics fast?

Fasting individually is a praiseworthy practice which can help us discipline ourselves, be more detached from earthly food and comforts, draw close to God, and open ourselves up to the needs of others. However, the Church calls us all to fast together at certain times. The Church calls us to fast from food for at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion, in normal circumstances, in order to better appreciate and prepare for the Eucharist. She also calls us to either fast from meat or make some other sacrifice every Friday of the year. On the Fridays of Lent, she requires us to give up meat completely. Fish is allowed. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, she requires us to abstain completely from meat and to limit ourselves to eating one full meal during the day, allowing two other snacks if needed for strength. This is something we all do together in order to honor the Passion of Christ. It should be seen as a blessing, not a burden. Jesus calls us to be joyful and unnoticed in our fasting (Mt 6:16-18).

What is the Liturgy of Hours?

In short, the *Liturgy of the Hours* involves praying the psalms at different times of the day, along with other prayers. The Church has organized a way of praying the psalms and other prayers throughout each day and throughout the liturgical year. Priests and religious are obliged to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours*. For most lay people, it is completely optional and not expected. The *Liturgy of the Hours* traditionally would have been prayed every three hours throughout the day. This created eight times when prayer was offered throughout the day. In our day, however, there are five main periods of prayer for diocesan priests and many active religious:

- Office of Readings (traditionally prayed at midnight but now prayed at any time)
- Morning Prayer (usually prayed between 6-9am)
- Daytime Prayer (usually prayed between 9am and 3pm)
- Evening Prayer (usually prayed between 5-7pm)
- Night Prayer (prayed before going to bed)

Each period of prayer takes about 5-20 minutes—depending on length, on whether it is sung or recited, and on how quickly or slowly it is prayed.

What are Blessings and Sacramentals?

We are called to use everything for the glory of God. Therefore, the Church provides blessings for persons, animals, plants, buildings, vehicles of transportation, tools, devotional items (such as rosaries or sacred images), water, and other items. There is an official *Book of Blessings* which the Church uses for all of these things, with readings from Scripture and prayers that accompany the blessing. Most blessings are reserved for priests and deacons to give, in virtue of their ordination. Some blessings are reserved to the Pope, to bishops, or to priests of particular religious communities. Lay people can give certain blessings. For example, we are all encouraged to “bless ourselves” with *Holy Water* as a reminder of our Baptism, and parents are encouraged to “bless” their children by tracing the *Sign of the Cross* on their forehead when their children go out, or before tucking them in to bed. Blessings are all about Christ blessing both us and the things we use in our daily lives, so that everything we do can be sanctified and better ordered to the glory of God.

At churches, Holy Water is regularly available to the faithful. They are encouraged not only to bless themselves with Holy Water as they enter and exit the church as a reminder of their baptism, but also to fill up a container of Holy Water to bring home with them. The faithful can have a little font or bowl of Holy Water in their homes and apartments, so that they can bless themselves there.

It is also recommended that the faithful ask to have their house or apartment blessed. You can make an appointment with the priest. It is fitting to invite family members and friends. It takes about ten minutes. After beginning in a central room and asking God’s blessing upon all who live in the dwelling, the residents guide the priest to all the rooms. The priest sprinkles the rooms with Holy Water. All come back to the central room and end with prayer and song.

You are also encouraged to seek blessings for new rosaries, sacred images, and other devotional items. A priest can usually do this quickly and easily after Mass.

Sacramentals include blessings and blessed things. They can be seen as an extension of the Sacraments and as a way of making one’s daily life holy. When used rightly, they are ordered back to the Liturgy and Sacraments as well. One should not use sacred and blessed items in a superstitious way, but as a means of growing in one’s faith and directing everything to God’s glory.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.” —Lev 4:20

“Sacrifice and offering you do not desire; but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’”

—Ps 40:6-8

Psalm 50 (the acceptable sacrifice)

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.” —Is 1:11, 16-17

“For by a single offering He (Jesus) has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

—Heb 10:14

“Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” —Heb 9:23-26

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the sons of Israel, and I will bless them.’”

—Num 6:22-27

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is Liturgy, and what are the different “instances of Liturgy”?*
2. *How are we called to participate in the Liturgy?*
3. *How do we live the Liturgy in our daily lives?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Jn 19 / *CCC:* 1113-1134

THE SACRAMENTS



What are the Sacraments?

A *Sacrament* is a channel of grace. Traditionally, a Sacrament has been defined as *sacred sign instituted by Christ to confer grace*. In every Sacrament, there is a visible element, and an invisible element. The visible is a sign of the invisible. What happens exteriorly points to what is happening interiorly. Christ acts upon us in the Sacraments on this deeper, invisible level, and we encounter Him therein. In the Sacraments, the love, power, and grace of the Paschal Mystery is applied to us in a particular way, for the sanctification of our lives.

Catholic Teaching names seven Sacraments: *Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony*. These are categorized under three headings:

The Sacraments of Initiation

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist

The Sacraments of Healing

1. Penance (*also called Reconciliation and Confession*)
2. Anointing of the Sick

The Sacraments of Service to Communion

1. Holy Orders
2. Matrimony

Why are there seven Sacraments?

In natural life, we are born, we grow, we are fed, we heal, we have different roles in life, and we die. The sacraments correspond to these dimensions. Baptism gives spiritual birth. Confirmation provides spiritual growth and maturity. The Holy Eucharist is spiritual food. Penance, also called Reconciliation or Confession, confers spiritual healing. The Sacrament of Matrimony is spiritual marriage. Holy Orders consecrates certain men to shepherd the Church in the name of Christ. It confers the grace of spiritual leadership. Anointing of the Sick spiritually strengthens, forgives, and sometimes heals a person in life-threatening sickness. It also consecrates one's death to Christ. So, through the Sacraments, Christ consecrates these different dimensions of our lives and elevates them, so that our lives might be sanctified by His grace.

Because Christ is the source of the seven sacraments, the sacraments are divine gifts, doorways into the mystery of God and encounter with Christ, and a font for the Christian life. The following explain how the sacraments originate from Christ:

1. ***Baptism:*** Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He instructed His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).
2. ***Confirmation:*** The gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Church at Pentecost. Confirmation is a share in the grace of Pentecost. In the Acts of the Apostles and elsewhere in the New Testament, we see this gift of the Holy Spirit being imparted after baptism through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-18; 19:1-7; Heb 6:1-2).
3. ***Eucharist:*** At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the Church the Gift of the Eucharist, His Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine, and He instructed His apostles to "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24).
4. ***Penance / Reconciliation / Confession:*** When Jesus appeared to His disciples as risen from the dead in the Upper Room, He breathed on them the Holy Spirit, imparting the power to forgive sins, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).
5. ***Anointing of the Sick:*** Jesus not only made healing the sick an essential part of His ministry; He sent His apostles out to anoint the sick with oil (Mk 6:13). It is for this reason that St. James says, "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas 5:14-15).

6. ***Holy Orders***: By choosing twelve apostles, by giving them authority to teach and heal, and by giving them the power to celebrate the Eucharist and communicate God's forgiveness, Jesus appointed and ordained men to shepherd His Church in His name.
7. ***Matrimony***: Jesus calls Himself "the Bridegroom" (Mt 9:15; 25:1-10). He is the Lord Who has come as the Bridegroom of His people. He, the Son of God, has wedded Himself to humankind in becoming man. As the faithful Bridegroom of His people, He lovingly and heroically lays down His life for His Bride, the Church (Eph 5:25). Christ also blesses the Wedding Feast of Cana with His presence (Jn 2:1-11). Marriage between believers, then, shares in the mystery of Christ's love for His Bride, the Church (Eph 5:21-33). In these ways, for believers who have been baptized, Jesus has elevated marriage to a sacrament.

Why are there three groupings of Sacraments?

Three of the seven sacraments are called the *Sacraments of Initiation*, because they are foundationally formative for the Christian life. They are Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Two are called *Sacraments of Healing*, since they impart healing, forgiveness, and strength in our struggle with sin, suffering, sickness, and death. They are *Penance* and *Anointing of the Sick*. Two are vocational (callings) and oriented toward the building up of the Church in different ways. These are *Holy Orders* and *Matrimony*.

Why are certain Sacraments repeated, while others are not?

Three sacraments are only given once and never repeated: *Baptism*, *Confirmation*, and *Holy Orders* (for the same degree). This is because there is something about these sacraments which marks us for God. In each of these sacraments, there is an imparting of a permanent *power*. This "mark" or "power" is what we call a *Sacramental Character*. Baptism inserts us into Christ's Body, the Church, and gives us the *power* to join in with the worship of Christ in Christian Liturgy. Confirmation gives us the *power* to witness to our faith, to defend it, and to live it among the challenges and temptations of the world. Holy Orders gives chosen men the power to bestow divine gifts (Sacraments and Blessings) upon the people of God, and to shepherd the flock in the name of Christ.

A similar mark, or "bond," is created between spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage, which bond endures until the death of one's spouse. Someone can be married again after one's spouse has died, since the former bond was only until death (see Rom 7:1-3).

Penance and Eucharist, in contrast, are repeated often, since we need constant forgiveness and spiritual nourishment and strength. Anointing of the Sick can be repeated when one's serious illness worsens.

What is the “form and matter” of a Sacrament?

The *Form* of a sacrament refers to the words used that contain the power of Christ. For example, the *form* of Baptism is the formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The *Matter* of a sacrament refers to the material used as a channel for the bestowing of grace. For example, the *matter* of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is bread from wheat and wine from grapes. The form and matter, along with the right minister of the Sacrament, and the right intention within the minister, are all essential parts of any Sacrament. If incorrect words or matter are used, the Sacrament is not valid. For example, if the one baptizing were to say “I baptize you in the name of Zeus,” the baptism would not be valid, even if water were used. Likewise, water is necessary for baptism. Using milk is not valid. Articulating the form and matter of each sacrament helps us to be faithful to what Christ handed on to us and not depart from that.

Why is disposition so important in the reception of the Sacraments?

People often doubt the power of baptism when they see people who have been baptized living sinfully and selfishly. And likewise with the other sacraments. However, the sacraments work *with* our free-will, not independent of it. If we reject the grace of any particular sacrament after having received it, it is our fault for not living according to its grace. It is not God’s fault. Neither does it prove that the sacrament is defective. There is a saying: “What is given is given according to the disposition of the receiver.” The more open we are to receiving the grace of a sacrament, the more we will receive, and the less open we are, the less we will receive. It is we who limit God, not God who limits what He can do in us. This is why it is important to realize that, as valid as each sacrament is in itself, its fruitfulness depends on the disposition of our hearts. Sacraments are not magic. We are called to approach them with faith. This also highlights the importance of forming people well in their faith, so that they can better prepare for—and live out—the grace of the sacraments. The sacraments also nurture and strengthen faith: they work toward our further spiritual healing and sanctification, and lead us to eternal life. In the end, the Sacraments are divine gifts and privileged channels through which God communicates His life to us, through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, so that we might be built up in faith and love and one day be united with Eternal Love, that is, with God. We are called to come to the Sacraments with open hearts, full of faith, reverence, eagerness, and love, so that we can be open to all God wants to give us—and do in us—through the sacraments.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. What are sacraments, how many are there, and why?***
- 2. Where do we see the sacraments as originating from Jesus?***
- 3. How are the sacraments related to life?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Romans 6 / CCC: 1210-1284

BAPTISM



“Baptism” means immersion. As spiritual birth, it is the first sacrament. It is the doorway into the life of Christ and the Church. It is also the doorway to the other sacraments. It is the entrance into covenant with God and the beginning of a journey that leads to eternal life.

What is the origin of Baptism?

While we find various kinds of washings of parts of the body or physical items in the Old Testament, baptism as a one-time washing of the whole person is found nowhere therein. The first time we hear of baptism in this sense is with John the Baptist, at the beginning of the New Testament. John the Baptist called people to be immersed in water while confessing their sins as an act of repentance. It was supposed to be a break from the old life (symbolically washed away with the descent into the waters), and an embracing of a new life seeking the kingdom of God (symbolized when one came up from the waters). It was also a way of preparing for the coming of the Messiah, the “Anointed One.” John the Baptist foretold that the Coming One would baptize, not just with water (as he had done), but “with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16).

At a certain point, Jesus also came to be baptized by John. This was the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Before this, Jesus led a hidden life. After this point, He begins manifesting the kingdom of God through preaching, teaching, healing, and gathering and forming disciples, which activities would lead to His suffering, death, and Resurrection.

If Jesus was sinless, why was He baptized?

It is true that the whole point of baptism, as John the Baptist practiced it, was for turning away from sin and living a new life. And it is true that Jesus was baptized like everyone else. However, unlike everyone else, Jesus did not confess any sins, since He had none (Mt 11:6; Jn 6:18, 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15, 1 Jn 3:5). Further, three things happened to Him at His Baptism which happened for no one else, which things give us the key to understanding the significance

Baptism

of His Baptism: the “heavens were opened,” the Father’s voice was heard, saying “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,” and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him “in bodily form, as a dove” (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:32). These things show why Jesus was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15).

What does the Baptism of Jesus tell us about Who He is and what He has come to do?

The phrase, “the heavens were opened” literally means that the sky was parted or opened in some way. But this is a symbol that, with the coming of Jesus, heaven itself is opened for us. This is truly momentous, since heaven was closed to us after the sin of our first parents. Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and a Cherubim angel was set up at the entrance “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). In this way, heaven—symbolized by the tree of life—was closed to humanity. That heaven is opened at the Baptism and arrival of Jesus illustrates that something truly groundbreaking is happening. Jesus is thus revealed as the Savior—as the pathway to heaven (Jn 14:6).

Second, God’s voice was heard. The last time that the people as a whole heard God’s voice was at Mount Sinai, well over a thousand years before Christ. Since the people at that time were so frightened by that voice, they insisted that God would speak to Moses, and then that Moses would relay the message to the people (Ex 20:18-26). From that time on, the people would no longer hear God’s voice directly, but only through a prophet or messenger. Now, with the Baptism of Christ, the people hear God’s voice once again. The long silence has been broken. And, whereas before, the voice spoke the “words of God,” namely, the Ten Commandments, now the voice reveals *the Word of God Himself*, Jesus. In this event, God the Father reveals His Son to the world, at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.

Third, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. In the Old Testament, we find a dove having an important place in the story of Noah and the Ark (Gen 8:6-12). Noah sends out a dove. The dove returns with an olive branch in its mouth. This is significant, since it is a sign of life, and that the flood is subsiding, since somewhere on the earth, green plants are now on dry land above the waters. Thus, it is a symbol that the old world is passing away, and that a new world—a new creation—is emerging. Also, olives come from olive trees, and olive oil comes from olives, and it was with olive oil that priests, prophets, and kings were often anointed in the Old Testament. In the Baptism of Jesus, then, we see the Holy Spirit coming specifically in the form of a dove, now not with an olive branch in its mouth, but pointing out the *True Olive Branch*, the “Anointed One,” Jesus, the Messiah and Christ (both words meaning “the Anointed One” in Aramaic and Greek, respectively). The dove also symbolizes that, through Christ, an old world is passing away, and a new world—a new creation—is emerging.

Two other points are worth mentioning. First, there is a constant theme in the Old Testament of *salvation through water*. At creation, the Spirit of God hovers over the waters, bringing forth life from them (Gen 1:2). In the story of Noah’s Ark and the Flood (Gen 6-9), in the crossing

Baptism

of the Israelites through Red Sea (Ex 14), in the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land (Jos 3), and in the curing of Namaan, the Syrian, in the waters of the Jordan (2 Kgs 5), we see this same motif of *salvation through water*. All this is imported into the Baptism of Jesus, in which ultimate salvation comes to us through water.

Lastly, the Baptism of Jesus reveals Jesus as the “servant” about whom Isaiah prophesied: “Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the islands wait for his law . . . I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness . . . Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Is 42:1-9; see also 49:5-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12, 61:1-4). The Baptism of Jesus is a sign of His humility in taking on our condition, and of His future death and Resurrection: His going down into the waters symbolizing His future death; His rising again from the waters symbolizing His victorious Resurrection.

What does the Baptism of Jesus tell us about the meaning of our baptism?

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, the heavens are opened to us. Indeed, baptism is the beginning of a journey that leads to eternal life.

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, God the Father says to us, silently yet truly in our souls, “You are my beloved son,” or “You are my beloved daughter.” In effect, God tells us, “You are my adopted children. You are now my sons and daughters in my Son. You are mine. You belong to me. I claim you as my own. I affirm you with my love in the depths of your being.” We “get in on” the intimate relationship that the Son had with the Father in eternity and which He expresses in and through His humanity since He became man. God invites us into the intimate relationship that His Son has with Him, so that the Spirit might cause us to cry out “Abba, Father” to God, as Jesus did (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-7).

As in the Baptism of Jesus, when we are baptized, the Holy Spirit descends upon us, filling our souls with His presence and grace. We thereby become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:12-20). The Holy Spirit comes in order to heal and forgive us, make us holy, give us spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church, work through us to touch the lives of others, and lead us to eternal life (Rom 8).

Finally, in our baptism, salvation comes to us through water; our mission in life and in the Church begins; and we are called to live in the image of Him Who came “not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). We are, thus, called into the humility, servanthood, and mission of Jesus.

What else does the New Testament teach us about Baptism?

Jesus tells Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus commands His apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). Likewise, at the end of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15-16). In baptism, Jesus gives us to drink of the spring of water welling up to eternal life, which spring He makes mention of to the Samaritan woman (Jn 3:13-14; Jn 6:25). The water that flowed from the pierced side of Jesus on the Cross is also a symbol of Baptism, just as the blood is a symbol of the Eucharist (Jn 19:24-27; Jn 7:37-39). Through Baptism, Jesus washes us in the font of mercy that flows from His side.

The following passages about Baptism are from later on in the New Testament:

- “God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, namely eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”
—1 Peter 3:20-21
- “For in Him (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised from the dead.” —Col 2:9
- “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” —Gal 3:26
- “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” —1 Cor 12:13
- “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” —Rom 6:3
- “He saved us... in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”
—Titus 3:5-6

Baptism

- “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” —Eph 5:25-28
- “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
—Acts 2:38
- “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” —Acts 22:16

It is very clear from these passages that baptism is not simply a symbolic action, but God really effects something in us in Baptism: He washes away our sins, He adopts us as His children in Christ, He gifts us with the Holy Spirit, He clothes us with Christ, He makes us a “new creation,” and we die and rise with Christ in order to live in the holiness and new life He bestows upon us. In this way, as St. Peter says, baptism saves us.

What does the Church teach about Baptism?

Based on divine revelation, the Church teaches the following things about baptism:

- Baptism removes the stain of original sin through the bestowal of God’s grace, although we still have to struggle—even with that grace—with the effects of original sin.
- In Baptism, God washes away all personal sin and punishment due to sin.
- Jesus Himself is the One who baptizes through the human minister.
- In Baptism, we become joined to Christ and His Body, the Church; we are adopted as God’s children in Christ; the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us; and we are filled with the Holy Spirit’s gifts, namely grace, infused virtues, and the gifts of the Spirit.
- We can only be baptized once, because of the sacramental *character* which Baptism bestows, which is an “indelible seal.” This seal is a sharing in Christ’s priesthood.
- Baptism is necessary for salvation. However, through an explicit or implicit “baptism of desire” God can save those who through no fault of their own did not know about the necessity of baptism or were not able to receive it before their death.
- While those in Holy Orders (bishops, priests, and deacons) are the proper ministers of Baptism, anyone can baptize in case of an emergency, as long as they have the intention of the Church in baptizing and pour water on the one to be baptized, saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Why does the Church baptize infants?

The Church baptizes children, because Jesus said, “Let the children come to me” (Mt 19:14). God wants us to belong to Him from the very beginning of our lives. It is not necessary to be conscious or to make an adult decision for God to bestow His grace on us. For a more in-depth explanation and defense of the Church’s ancient practice of infant baptism, you can visit www.catholic.com and search for the article on “infant baptism.”

What is the meaning of the rituals in the Rite of Baptism?

In the Rite of Baptism, many ritual actions full of symbolism are used. Everything starts at the door of the church, symbolizing that baptism is the spiritual doorway into the Church. Scriptures are read and a homily given, to help those present appreciate the meaning of Baptism. Before the actual baptism, we ask the saints to pray for the one to be baptized; there is a prayer of deliverance from evil spirits; typically, we are anointed on our upper chest, as a symbol that we are about to be clothed with the “armor of God” (Eph 6:11, 13; Rom 13:12) and the “breastplate of faith and love” (1 Th 5:8; Eph 6:14); the water is blessed and our faith professed. In the baptism, we are baptized with a name of a saint who will be a special role model and intercessor for us. After the baptism, adults are confirmed, while children are anointed with holy *Chrism* on their heads, symbolizing their participation in the priesthood of Christ; we are clothed in white to symbolize that we receive a “robe of grace” and are “clothed with our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:26); we receive a baptismal candle lit from the *Easter Candle*, a symbol that we have been enlightened by the light of Christ’s Resurrection (Mt 5:14; Jn 8:12); and, for children, the priest touches our mouth and ears, praying that we may soon hear, understand, and speak the words of God (Mk 7:31-37). The *Rite of Baptism for Children* ends before the Altar, since we look forward to the day in which the child will receive Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. An *Our Father* is prayed, and a special blessing for the parents and for all is given at the conclusion of the rite.

Why are we only baptized once?

We are baptized only once, because of the indelible character that is given. If we fall away from the grace of our baptism, the way back is not through being baptized again, but through receiving God’s tremendous mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession.

How do we live out and renew our Baptism?

The whole Church renews our baptismal vows every Easter. It is also fitting to do this for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. In a less solemn way, we renew our baptism every time we “bless ourselves” with holy water in our churches and homes. Above all we live out our baptism by constantly turning away from sin, growing in conversion and relationship with God, and living out our vocation in holiness in the Church and in the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the background to the Sacrament of Baptism?*
2. *What is the significance of Baptism?*
3. *How do we live out our Baptism?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Acts 2 / CCC: 1285-1321

CONFIRMATION



Moses once exclaimed, “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put His spirit upon them!” (Num 11:19). The prophet Joel likewise prophesied a day in which the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon humankind: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29). Ezekiel likewise prophesied a day in which the Lord would renew hearts through His Spirit: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezk 36:26-27).

Jesus, the One prophesied to bear God’s Spirit in its fullness (Is 11:1-3; 42:1; 61:1-2), would be the One through Whom the Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh.” For, “from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16).

It is on Pentecost that the Spirit came upon the Church (Acts 2). Jesus prepared the apostles for this event at the Last Supper, and before ascending, when He spoke to them about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8). With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early Church was filled with strength and boldness to proclaim the Gospel to the world, often in circumstances of great opposition. But, it was the desire of Jesus that all of His future disciples would receive the gift of the Spirit, not just those present at the event of Pentecost. Therefore, later on in the Acts of the Apostles we see the apostles laying their hands on new converts after their baptism, so that they would receive this special gift of the Holy Spirit. We see this in the following passages, the important phrases being highlighted in red:

Confirmation

- “Peter and John... came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then **they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit**. Now when Simon saw that **the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands**, he offered money...” (Acts 8:14-17).
- “While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ And they said, ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them**; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all” (Acts 19:1-7).
- “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, with instruction about baptisms, **the laying on of hands**, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Heb 6:1-2).

Such is the basis in divine revelation for the sacrament of Confirmation. In the sacrament of Confirmation, a bishop (or delegated priest), having the power of ordination passed down to them from the apostles and Jesus Himself, lays hands on a person already baptized, that he or she may receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a share in the grace of Pentecost.

What are the effects of Confirmation?

The following are effects of the sacrament of Confirmation:

- Completion of one’s Baptism through the reception of another sacramental *character*, which gives one the power to publicly witness to one’s faith.
- Deeper incorporation into the mystery of Christ, and into the Trinity through Him.
- Deeper share in the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially through the gifts (Is 11:1-3) and fruits (Gal 5:22-23) of the Holy Spirit, and through *charisms*.
- Spiritual strength: After childhood, starting especially with the teenage years and into adulthood, one is more exposed to the world and will therefore face greater temptations and challenges to one’s faith. A special strength, then, is needed, in order to stay strong amidst these challenges, to witness to one’s faith in a world often not open to it, and to defend one’s faith when it is attacked or challenged. Confirmation is the sacrament of spiritual growth and maturity that gives this grace.

Confirmation

- Deeper incorporation into the Church: When someone grows into being an adult in the Church, he or she should slowly discern and embrace the vocation that God is calling him or her to. He or she also becomes more aware of his or her spiritual gifts and the ways that he or she can contribute to and build up the Body of Christ, the Church. The grace of Confirmation helps one, then, to live out one's vocation and mission in the midst of the Church as an adult in these ways.

When should someone receive Confirmation?

There are two legitimate traditions for the reception of Confirmation. The Eastern Churches (both Catholic and Orthodox) confer the Sacrament of Confirmation on infants, right after Baptism. This tradition highlights the close link between Baptism and Confirmation.

Catholics in the Roman (or Latin) tradition, however, receive Confirmation later, at the age of reason (at about seven years old) or older. Most often it is the bishop who confirms. This tradition highlights the link with the bishop, as well as Confirmation as a sacrament of maturity.

Some people in the Latin Church mistakenly think that a person should be old enough to choose the faith for himself/herself in the Sacrament of Confirmation. But the Sacrament of Confirmation is not primarily about us confirming our faith. It is primarily about the Holy Spirit confirming / strengthening us. It is better to go through the teenage years and the years of young adulthood *with* the grace of Confirmation than without it. It is without question that all the Sacraments should be internalized. And the Church is called to do everything possible to help the faith and grace of the sacraments to be thus internalized in the young. Adults receive Confirmation right after being baptized, or after being received into full communion with the Catholic Church if they are already baptized.

Who confers the Sacrament of Confirmation?

In the Eastern Churches, priests have the *faculty* (delegated power) to confirm infants after their baptism. In the Latin Church, it is usually the bishop who confirms children or teenagers, whereas priests either are delegated to confirm, or receive it from Church law in certain circumstances.

How is the sacrament of Confirmation celebrated?

Very early on in the Church, the blessed, perfumed oil called *Sacred Chrism* was added to the laying on of hands. Therefore, following this ancient practice, the anointing and laying on of hands is combined. The minister of Confirmation lays his right hand on the head of a person while using his thumb to anoint the person's forehead with Chrism in the form of a cross, as the minister says, "(Name), be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." Meanwhile the sponsor stands behind the person and places his or her right hand on his/her shoulder in support. The name used is the name of the patron saint one has chosen. All this is preceded by a prayer which invokes the Holy Spirit and asks that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit be poured out on the person upon his/her Confirmation.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.” —Is 11:1-3

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” —Gal 5:22-23

“So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” —Rom 8:12-17

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” —Rom 8:26-27

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”
—1 Cor 12:4-11

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Where is the Sacrament of Confirmation found in the Bible?*
2. *What is the importance of the Sacrament of Confirmation?*
3. *How do we faithfully live out the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: John 6; 1 Cor 10-11 / ***CCC:*** 1322-1419

THE HOLY EUCHARIST



The Holy Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments, since it contains Jesus Himself. For this reason all the other sacraments are oriented to it: Baptism and Confirmation are completed by the Eucharist; Penance prepares us to receive the Eucharist worthily; the Eucharist crowns a couple's wedding vows, as well as the ordination of a man to the diaconate, priesthood, or episcopacy; and finally, when someone is dying and is given the "last rites," the Eucharist is the last Sacrament received, ushering the person into eternal life. The Eucharist is at the heart of liturgy and the Christian life, and it is a foretaste of eternal life.

When did Jesus give us the Eucharist?

On the night before He died, Jesus organized a "Last Supper" with His apostles. It took place in a specially prepared "large upper room" (Mk 14:15) in a house in Jerusalem, and it was in the context of the Passover. The Passover was an annual Jewish feast that celebrated the first Passover, when the Israelites slaughtered and roasted Passover lambs in the evening, sprinkled the blood from the lambs on their doorposts, consumed the lambs, and then departed from Egypt in haste. It was the night of liberation, when the Israelites left the plight of slavery in Egypt and commenced a journey that would lead to the Promised Land, where they could live and worship God in freedom (Ex 11-12).

The Passover was the greatest Jewish Feast, and it began a weeklong feast of Unleavened Bread. At the time of Jesus, the Passover involved lambs first being slaughtered and sacrificed in the Temple on the day of the evening feast. Then, each household would take a lamb to their home and celebrate the Passover meal, which included Scriptural readings, a memorial of the first Passover, various prayers, and the consumption of the lamb, unleavened bread, wine, and herbs. It was led by the head of the household.

Jesus celebrated a meal like this with His disciples on the night before He died. It was at this meal that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples (Jn 13), gave a last discourse to His disciples before His death (Jn 14-17), and gave them the gift of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23). At the end of this meal, Jesus added a completely new element: He took bread and wine and declared them to be His Body and Blood which would

be “given” up and “poured out” the next day (Lk 22:19-20). He then told His disciples to eat and drink and commanded them to “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24).

Where is the Eucharist mentioned or inferred in the Bible?

In the Old Testament, the Eucharist is prophesied or prefigured in the following passages:

- *The Sacrifice of Melchizedek (Gen 14:17-24)*: Jesus parallels the priest Melchizedek. Melchizedek is both a priest and a king. He is king of “Salem,” which means peace, and which is the future “Jerusalem.” His name means “king of righteousness” in Hebrew. He is greater than Abraham, since he blesses Abraham (Gen 14:19-20; Heb 7:6-10). David is considered a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). Melchizedek is eternal-like, since he seems to come from nowhere and returns to nowhere (Heb 7:3). His sacrifice, curiously, consists in the offering of bread and wine (Gen 14:18). Jesus, as the New David, is also a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:15-17). Jesus is both priest (Heb 4:14) and king (Jn 18:37). He is also the true King of Righteousness (Rev 19:11) and Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). He is the eternal Son of God (Heb 7:3). For this reason, He is also greater than Abraham (Heb 7:6-10). His sacrifice involves bread and wine changed into His Body and Blood and offered in Jerusalem (Mk 14:12-25).
- *The Passover Lamb (Ex 12-13)*: The Passover Lamb was the sacrifice that commenced the journey to the Promised Land, making it possible for the Israelites to be delivered. The lamb had to be unblemished (Ex 12:5). It was pierced for roasting, and hyssop was used to sprinkle its blood on the doors of the Israelites, marking them as the “firstborn of God” (Ex 12:22; 4:22). Jesus is the New Passover Lamb Whose sacrifice makes our journey to the Promised Land of heaven possible. He is unblemished in His sinlessness. He is crucified at the same time that the Passover lambs were slaughtered in the Temple (Jn 19:14). Hyssop was used to raise vinegar to the lips of Jesus (Jn 19:29). And we partake of this Passover Lamb in the Eucharist. With the blood of Christ through the Eucharist, we are marked as the “firstborn of God” in His Son, Jesus.
- *The Manna (Ex 16:1-36)*: In a barren, food-deprived desert, God provided His people with a bread-like substance called *manna* as “food for the journey” on their way to the Promised Land. This “bread from heaven” descended from the skies and settled on the ground six days of the week. A little manna was also preserved perpetually in the Ark of the Covenant as a kind of memorial (Ex 16:32-34). At the Last Supper, Jesus gives us the “true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32), His Body and Blood, as a “memorial” of His Passion and as the food for our journey to eternal life.
- *The Bread of the Presence (Ex 25:23-30; Lev 24:5-9)*: The Bread of the Presence (or literally “Bread of the Face”), was kept in the Tabernacle, and a special, continual sacrifice on the Golden Table within it. It seems to be “memorial” of the covenant of Mount Sinai when the elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel”, “beheld God”, and “ate and drank” (Ex 24:9-11). It was both a sacrifice and a meal. There were twelve

The Holy Eucharist

loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Lev 24:5-9). On the three great Jewish feasts, the Bread of the Presence was shown to the people while they were told, “Behold God’s love for you,” to fulfill the requirement for male Jews to see God’s face on these feasts (Ex 34:23; 23:17). The Eucharist is the true “Bread of the Presence” that is given to the twelve apostles at the Last Supper. It is the very Presence of Jesus. It contains the sacrifice of Jesus offered continually to the Father through the Church. In Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we gaze upon “God’s love for you.”

- *The Universal Sacrifice (Mal 1:11)*: While there were many synagogues in first century Judaism, there was only one Temple. And the Temple was the only place of sacrifice. Yet, Malachi foretold a day in which an acceptable sacrifice would be offered in every place around the world by the Gentiles. This is fulfilled in the Eucharist. Interestingly, this verse was the earliest Old Testament verse quoted as a prefiguration of the Eucharist by the early Church Fathers.
- *The Animal and Grain Sacrifices of the Temple (Lev 1-7; 16)*: As discussed in the section on liturgy, the Eucharist is the sacrifice that fulfills all the sacrifices of old.

In the New Testament, the Eucharist is mentioned or inferred in the following passages:

- *The Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-23)*: On the night before He dies, Jesus gives us the great gift of His love, His presence, His perfect act of worship in the Eucharist, and spiritual nourishment.
- *The Multiplication of the Loaves (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-15)*: Not only do the miracles of Jesus which involve the multiplication of the loaves resonate with certain Old Testament events, such as the provision of manna in the desert (Ex 16), or when Elisha multiplied barley loaves (2 Kgs 4:1-7; 42-44). They also resemble the Last Supper and the Eucharist in the early Church. In both the multiplication of the loaves and at the Last Supper, the “hour is late” (Mk 6:35), people “recline” (Mk 6:39; 8:6; Lk 22:14), and Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the apostles. In the Mass, those ordained by the successors to the apostles distribute the Bread of Life, just as the apostles distributed to the crowds the bread and fish Jesus had multiplied (Mk 6:41). The leftovers are all collected and consumed (Mk 6:43), as has always been the practice with the Eucharist in the Church.
- *The Bread of Life Discourse (Jn 6:25-71)*: Following the first multiplication of the loaves (vv.1-15) and in the context of the Passover feast (v.4), certain Jews challenge Jesus, expecting Him to perform something as spectacular as the miracle of the manna in the Old Testament (vv. 30-31). Jesus tells them that He Himself is the “bread of life” (v.35), that “whoever eats this bread will live forever” (v.58), and that He will give His flesh and blood as true food and drink “for the life of the world” (vv.55 & 51), through which believers will “abide” in Jesus and “live forever” (vv.56, 58, 54, 50). Not knowing what this means, many no longer follow Jesus after hearing this discourse (v.66). Jesus then turns to the apostles and asks, “Will you also go away?” On behalf of

the other apostles, Peter responds, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to know and to believe that you are the Holy One of God” (v.68). Although Peter and the other apostles don’t understand what Jesus means either, they trust. At the Last Supper, all is made clear in the gift of the Eucharist. It is also there that Judas will betray Jesus, at the most intimate moment of Jesus with His disciples. The mention of Judas in John 6 is just one of many connections between this chapter and the Last Supper. The greatness of the gift of the Eucharist contrasts with the greatness of the betrayal.

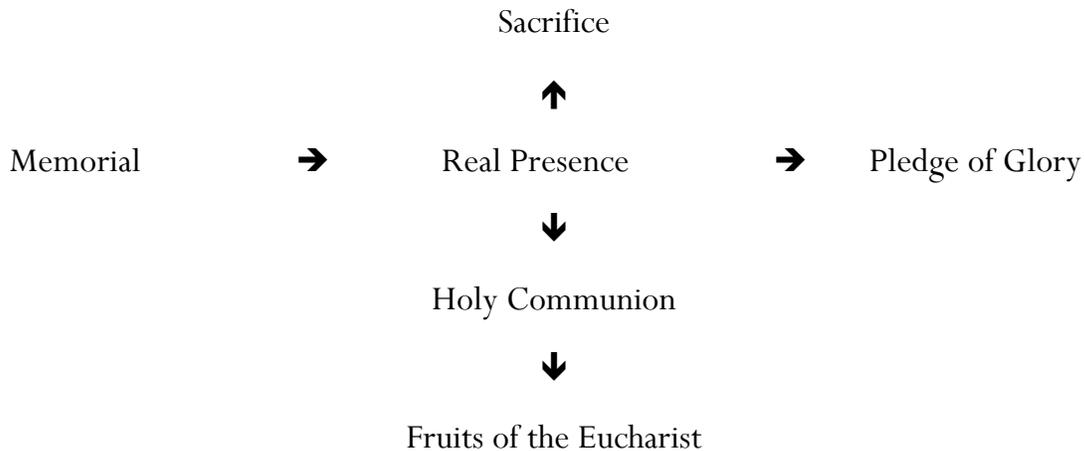
- *The Theme of the Chalice:* Jesus asks James and John if they are able to drink from the chalice that He will drink from and to be baptized in His baptism, which is a reference to Christ’s suffering (Mk 10:38-39). At the Last Supper, the disciples are given a share in the chalice of Christ, which is linked to His Passion. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays that, if it be the Father’s will, the chalice of His sufferings might be removed (Mk 14:36). And finally, on the Cross, Jesus says, “I thirst,” drinks a little vinegar, and declares, “It is finished” (Jn 19:28-30), referring to His sufferings but also, and above all, to the work of redemption. All these references to Christ’s “chalice” are intimately connected to the Eucharistic chalice we drink from.
- *The Road to Emmaus (Lk 24):* The appearance of the risen Jesus to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, and in Emmaus itself, parallels the Mass. Jesus first opens up the Scriptures to them, to show how He is the fulfillment of everything in the law, prophets, and psalms (vv.27 & 44). Reflecting on this, the disciples exclaim, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (v.32). After this exposition of the Scriptures, the disciples beg Jesus to stay with them. So, He does. And “when He was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (vv.30-31). The disciples later recount to others “how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (v.35). Likewise in the Mass, Jesus first speaks to us in the Scriptures, and then afterwards manifests Himself to us in the “breaking of the bread.” The first part of the Mass we call the *Liturgy of the Word*, the second the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*.
- *In the Acts of the Apostles:* In the road to Emmaus, and in the Acts of the Apostles, the Eucharist is referred to as “the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:30-35; Acts 2:42-46; 20:7). The disciples remember the specific action when Jesus “broke” the bread at the Last Supper (Lk 22:19), which action is a symbol of how Christ was “broken” for us. This being-broken, however, enables us all to partake of the One Bread, Christ, and thus be unified in Him.
- *Certain passages in St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (5:7-8; 10:14-22; 11:17-34):* In chapter 5, Paul refers to Christ as the Paschal Lamb who has been sacrificed, and which sacrifice we celebrate as a “festival,” and that we are called to celebrate this festival with the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” In chapter 10, Paul refers to the Eucharist as “spiritual food” (like the manna in the desert) and “spiritual drink” which we

drink from the Rock that is Christ (10:1-4). Paul also says that we have a real “communion” or “participation” in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist (v.16). In contrasting the Eucharist with food which pagans offered to idols, Paul implies that the Eucharist is a sacrifice (vv.18-22). He also connects the Eucharist to the Church, and sees the Eucharist as a sign and source of unity: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (v. 17). In chapter 11, Paul calls the Eucharist the “Lord’s Supper” and gives us the earliest account of the institution of the Eucharist we have (v.20). He speaks of partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ in a worthy manner, lest we be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord (v.27). He also emphasizes the social aspects of the Eucharist and our relationships in the Church, which should be marked by unity, humility, and charity, versus pride, selfishness, egoism, and division (vv.17-22).

- *In the Book of Hebrews:* There are many Eucharistic overtones in the Book of Hebrews. At the end of the book, the author speaks of a Christian “altar” from which “those who serve the tent” (the Jews who do not accept Jesus) “have no right to eat” (13:10). In chapter 6, after a reference to Baptism and what we now call Confirmation (“the laying on of hands”), the author mentions that Christians have “tasted the heavenly gift” (6:4). Throughout the book, Jesus is portrayed as a priest, first “according to the order of Melchizedek” (7:1-28), and secondly as a kind of New Aaron offering His Body (10:5, 10), His Blood (9:12-14; 10:19; 12:24), indeed Himself (9:26, 28) in heaven as a kind of new and fulfilled Day of Atonement (9-10). We will remember that Jesus, like Melchizedek, presents “bread and wine.” In the case of Jesus, bread and wine are changed into Christ’s Body and Blood. Finally, at the end of the book, the author prays that God may equip his hearers with every good thing “by the blood of the eternal covenant” (13:20-21). It should be remembered that Jesus speaks about the “blood” of the “new covenant” at the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:25). In short, the book of Hebrews portrays Jesus as both a priest and victim, elucidates how His passion is a sacrifice, implies that we partake of this sacrifice when we eat from a distinctively Christian altar, and that we are equipped with every good thing through “the blood of the eternal covenant” which Christians receive in the Eucharist.
- *In the Book of Revelation:* In the book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse into the worship that takes place in heaven. At the center of this worship is the “Lamb standing, though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6). The Lamb, Who is Jesus, is the central character throughout the book. We Catholics see the Mass as an earthly participation in this heavenly worship. As in the heavenly worship, in the Mass there is “silence” (8:1), revelation from a scroll (5:1-9; 6:14; 10:2, 8-10), the faithful united in “worship” (4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:1, 16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4; 22:3, 9), bowing down (3:9; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 19:4), singing (4:8, 10; 14:3; 15:3), incense (5:8; 8:3-4), and we all partake of a great “supper”: “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (19:9). In the book, there is also mention of a “hidden manna” and the “tree of life” which those who conquer in Christ are able to partake of (2:17; 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

What does the Church teach about the Eucharist in light of these passages?

There are many dimensions to the gift of the Eucharist. Two traditional ways of summarizing Eucharistic doctrine are (1) to speak of how the Eucharist connects to the past, present, and future, and (2) to speak of how the Eucharist “ascends” to God in sacrifice and “descends” to us in Holy Communion, from there overflowing into our lives. These two traditional summaries can be conveniently combined in the form of a cross:



Insofar as the Eucharist is connected to the past and makes it present, we call it a “Memorial.” Insofar as Jesus is present to us here and now in the Eucharist, we refer to the “Real Presence.” Insofar as the Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven and food for the journey, we call it a “Pledge of Glory.” Insofar as the Eucharist ascends to God in worship, we call it a “Sacrifice.” Insofar as it descends to us as a divine Gift that we receive, we call it “Holy Communion.” Finally, the “Fruits of the Eucharist” are a way of talking about the effects in our life that God intends to bring about through the Eucharist. Let us, then, explain each of these dimensions in more detail.

How is the Eucharist a “Memorial”?

In the section on the liturgy, we already discussed how the past, namely the Paschal Mystery, is made present in the liturgy and sacraments, above all in the Mass. It is important to realize that we don’t simply remember a past event in the Eucharist, but the past event becomes present to us here and now in a mysterious but real way. In the Mass and in all the sacraments, then, we are mysteriously and truly connected to the Paschal Mystery as it happened and as it in some way endures in the risen humanity of Jesus right now in heaven.

How is Jesus really present in the Eucharist?

The Bible very clearly teaches that the Eucharist is not just a symbol, but the very Body and Blood of Jesus. The Church Fathers are unambiguous and unanimous on this point as well. Church teaching has affirmed it with the highest authority, and many miracles and saints through the centuries have borne witness to the truth of the *Real Presence*. The following points clarify the Church's belief.

First, the Church teaches that Jesus is really present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist in His full humanity and divinity. The traditional language to express this is "body, blood, soul, and divinity."

Second, to explain the change, or transition, from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Church uses the term *Transubstantiation*. In short, this term literally means the process whereby one substance is changed into another. Simply, when bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, one thing changes and another doesn't. The Church says that the "substances" of bread and of wine change into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the "accidents" or "properties" or "qualities" or "appearances" (basically everything we can perceive with our senses) don't change. In other words, the underlying reality of bread and wine has changed into the actual Body and Blood of the risen Jesus at the words of Consecration, with the result that there is no longer any underlying reality of bread and wine, but only Jesus. At the same time, the Sacrament still looks like, and tastes like, and smells like bread and wine. There is no perceptible change. The change is on a level we cannot see and have no access to through our senses or even through the observational methods of science. It is only by faith that we know that the Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of Jesus. But this faith is most certain.

Third, although the bread turns into the Body of Christ, and the wine into the Blood of Christ, the whole of Jesus is present under the forms of both bread and wine. This is because all the dimensions of the risen Jesus are united in His Person. So, where His Body is, there also is His Blood, His human soul, and His divine nature. The same is true with His blood. This is what we call *Concomitance*. In short, where one part of Jesus is present, every part of Jesus is present.

Fourth, Jesus is entirely present under each part of the form of bread and wine. In other words, when the "bread is broken," Jesus is not divided. He remains whole and entirely present under each part, insofar as the form of bread and wine is retained.

Fifth, the Church teaches what we might call the "abiding presence" of Jesus in the Eucharist. That is, Jesus is not only present in the Eucharist at Mass. But once the bread and wine are consecrated, He is present until the Sacrament loses the qualities of bread and wine. This enables us to bring the Real Presence of Jesus to the sick who are unable to attend Mass. It also enables us to reserve some Hosts in the Tabernacle in our churches, and occasionally to expose a Host for the faithful to adore, which practice we call "Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament" or "Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament."

The Holy Eucharist

Sixth, one can think about the causes of the Eucharist. God is the main cause that changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is why we call down the Holy Spirit at Mass in what we call the *Epiclesis* (“calling down” in Greek), to effect this transformation. The priest, who is ordained in the name of Christ, acts *in persona Christi* (“in the person of Christ”) in the Mass, and since, through ordination to the priesthood, he was given the sacred power to consecrate (or “confect”) the Eucharist, the priest is the necessary instrument through which God effects the change of transubstantiation. The bread used for the Eucharist must be made from wheat, and the wine must be produced from grapes. The essential *form* of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is the words of Jesus: “This is my Body. . . This is my blood.” Finally, the priest must have the intention to consecrate this or that bread or wine, without which there is no transformation.

Seventh, the Church teaches that Jesus becomes present in the Eucharist as He presently exists in heaven. At the same time, the Paschal Mystery, as explained before, is mysteriously and truly made present, so that we can offer ourselves in worship along with Jesus’ perfect act of worship, through the priest celebrating Mass. Jesus is also not present in two different places at the same time, namely in heaven and in the Eucharist. Rather, He makes His Real Presence in heaven present to us sacramentally in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, His one real presence in heaven is made fully present and accessible to us.

How is the Eucharist a “Pledge of Glory”?

Just as the manna in the Old Testament was “food for the journey,” sustaining the Israelites through the desert until they reached the Promised Land, so the Eucharist is our spiritual food for the journey through this life on our way to the Promised Land of Heaven. Further, just as the manna ceased once the Israelites reached the Promised Land, since they were then able to eat from the land, the Eucharist will cease as a Sacrament when we reach heaven. This is because, as the Council of Trent in the 1500’s said, in the Eucharist we partake, under veils, of the God whom we will partake of without veils in heaven. In this way, the Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven.

What should we know about receiving Jesus in Holy Communion?

Bishops, priests, and deacons are what we call *Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*. Trained and designated lay people can help to distribute the Eucharist (in the Latin Rite) when there are not enough clergy to distribute the Eucharist. Such lay persons are called *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*. This is a special ministry, to be an assistant to the clergy in distributing Holy Communion at Mass when there is need, and in bringing Holy Communion to the sick.

One must be baptized before receiving the Holy Eucharist. In addition, under non-emergency circumstances, one must be Catholic to receive Holy Communion. Under certain conditions, the Eastern Orthodox can receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church. Only in an emergency situation and under certain conditions, Protestants can be admitted to Holy

The Holy Eucharist

Communion. The dignity of the Sacrament demands that persons at least need to be in a “state of grace” to receive Holy Communion, meaning that one is in God’s friendship, having turned away from all serious sin, and having confessed all known serious sins in Confession beforehand. For the Latin Church, it is required to abstain from all food and drink (except water) at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion. It is also good to long to receive the Eucharist during the week, to arrive early for Mass to give oneself sufficient time to prepare oneself in prayer to receive the great gift of the Eucharist, and to receive the Eucharist with the greatest faith, love, and reverence.

In the Latin Church, the general custom is to receive Holy Communion on the tongue. However, in certain countries, including the United States, it is permitted to receive Holy Communion in the hand. Those leading RCIA will go over how to properly receive on the tongue or in the hand, and the response (“Amen”) and gestures involved.

Lastly, after receiving the Eucharist, it is fitting to speak to Jesus intimately, since He is inside of you, to give thanks for such a tremendous gift, and to also be aware of your brothers and sisters in Christ also receiving such a great gift. It is a beautiful custom to spend a few minutes after Mass in silent prayer and thanksgiving.

What are the “Fruits of the Eucharist”?

There are many fruits, or intended effects of the Eucharist in our lives, when we are open to the grace Jesus offers us:

- Our union with Christ and the Trinity is augmented.
- We are given strength to overcome sin. The Eucharist forgives venial sin and helps to preserve us from both mortal and venial sin. We are thus given a greater share in the healing, forgiveness, and strength of Jesus.
- We are equipped with every good thing to do God’s will and live His charity in our lives.
- We are united more deeply to our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, the Church.
- We are impelled to feed those who cannot feed themselves, in imitation of the God who feeds us in the Eucharist. The Eucharist, thus, moves us to works of mercy.
- In our lives, we seek to mirror what we contemplate in worship, namely the total self-giving of Jesus in love.
- Transformation: Through the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit is seeking to transform us into what we eat: Jesus. We seek to become the Gift we receive.
- Through this spiritual “food for the journey,” God is leading us step by step to eternal life.

What are the different Eucharistic practices in the Church?

The Mass is the preeminent celebration of the Eucharist. There are two major feasts which celebrate the Eucharist in a more focused way, however: The *Mass of the Lord's Supper* on Holy Thursday, and the *Solemnity of Corpus Christi*. Since we remember and celebrate many things on Holy Thursday, the Church has a separate feast dedicated in a focused way only to the Eucharist, namely *Corpus Christi*, which means the "Body of Christ" in Latin. All the readings and prayers focus on the Eucharist. There is also a beautiful custom to have a Eucharistic Procession after the Mass, which can happen occasionally at other special times of the year as well. In the United States, we celebrate Corpus Christi two weeks after Pentecost.

Outside of the Mass, the Eucharist is preserved in a *Tabernacle*. In it, the Eucharist is kept present in every Catholic Church in the world continually except on Good Friday and for most of Holy Saturday. A *Sanctuary Lamp* (candle) continually burns near the Tabernacle to indicate that the presence of Jesus is there. The Eucharist is kept in the Tabernacle (1) to bring Holy Communion to the Sick, (2) so that we can have the comfort of the Presence of Jesus in our churches, and (3) so that at regular times we can expose a Host upon the Altar in a decorated display stand called a *Monstrance* for an extended period of prayer to Jesus in the Eucharist, which practice we call "Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament." At the beginning of this time, often an hour, the "Blessed Sacrament" is exposed. For this reason, we also call Adoration "Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament." At the end, usually a blessing with the Eucharist is given. We call this "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament." The priest covers his arms and hands with a "humeral" (shoulder) veil, in order to highlight that Jesus is directly blessing you in the Eucharist, versus Jesus blessing you more instrumentally through the priest. The practice of genuflection in church can be explained by your RCIA leaders. It is a great practice, as well, to attend the times of Adoration that are offered in your church, and also to pay a "visit" to the Blessed Sacrament present in the Tabernacle in our churches. It is also a beautiful practice for Catholics to make the *Sign of the Cross* whenever walking or driving past a Catholic Church, acknowledging the presence of Jesus therein.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. How do we know that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist?***
- 2. What are the essential elements that the Church teaches about the Eucharist?***
- 3. How is the Eucharist related to our daily lives?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

***Bible:* John 20 / *CCC:* 1420-1498**

PENANCE



In the Creed, we profess our belief in “the forgiveness of sins.” This “forgiveness of sins” and the tremendous mercy of God that we see displayed in Jesus is communicated to us in a powerful way in the *Sacrament of Penance*, which we also call *Reconciliation* or *Confession*. Penance is the first and primary Sacrament of Healing. Just as Jesus forgave the paralytic, the adulterous woman, and so many others in the Gospels, so He personally receives and forgives us in this Sacrament.

The basis of this Sacrament is the power to forgive sins that Jesus imparted to His apostles when He appeared to them as risen in the Upper Room:

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples of Jesus were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” —Jn 20:19-23

It is also noteworthy that, when Jesus heals the paralytic and reveals that He has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mt 9:6), the Gospel of Matthew concludes the story by saying that the crowds “glorified God, who had given such authority to men” (Mt 9:8). Interestingly, the text reads “men” in the plural, not “man” in the singular. Indeed, Jesus gives the apostles, and those ordained through them, a share in His power to forgive sins. St. Paul is also conscious of this authority when he writes to the Corinthians, “Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, to keep Satan from gaining advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor 2:10-11).

What Jesus did while He was on earth, He continues to do in every age through His Church, including and especially forgiving sins. This is why He gave the power to forgive sins to His apostles, which power is passed down to bishops and priests in every age through the *Sacrament of Holy Orders*. The Sacrament of Penance has been exercised in different ways throughout the history of the Church, generally in a more public form in the early Church, but in a more private form later on.

How is Penance related to Baptism?

Baptism washes away all sins committed before Baptism, as well as all debt of sin, or “punishment due to sin.” However, we Christians still struggle with sin after Baptism. Therefore, Penance is for the forgiveness of sins after Baptism. It is most especially for those who have sinned seriously after Baptism. Instead of being baptized again every time one strays, Jesus provided this Sacrament as the way back to one’s baptismal consecration. However, this sacrament is also for the forgiveness of less serious sins and for helping someone to grow in holiness and overcome their sins and weaknesses.

Why do I have to confess my sins to a Priest?

Each of us should be confessing our sins to God, and turning away from them by His help, every day. However, Jesus wants us to experience His forgiveness and mercy through the channel of this sacrament for the following reasons:

- Our sins are not just between “me and God.” We are all members of the Body of Christ. Every good deed builds up the Body of the Church. Every sin, no matter how private, also affects the whole Body for ill. So, the Sacrament of Penance is a way of also being *reconciled to the Church*, not only to God.
- In confession *we bring our sins to the light*, and this helps us overcome them. Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying: “You are only as dark as your secrets.” Similarly, the Gospel of John tells us, “For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God” (Jn 3:20-21). When we sin, we hide. We also become ashamed, but we often pretend that everything is OK. So, the inner shame we don’t share with anyone grows, and so does an inner voice of self-condemnation and the feeling of being trapped in the sin. We think to ourselves, “If others really knew who I was, they wouldn’t love me.” Confession helps us overcome this hiding, shame, pride, and inner self-condemnation. It assures us of God’s love, and that God loves us even in our brokenness and will help us to overcome our sins. It assures us that there is a way out. There is hope. And, instead of our sins having a secret power over us, we begin to expose them. We let God’s grace into the dark corners. The sin and darkness begin to lose their power. We can experience God’s forgiveness and begin to deal with our sins instead of ignoring them and allowing them to grow unchecked. All psychologists tell us that it is extremely helpful and important

to talk to someone else about our wounds, faults, and struggles. This is an important part of the remedy, of overcoming our sins and our inner self-condemnation. We are also surprised when the person listening doesn't reject us, but understands and has compassion. He or she communicates compassion and reflects the compassion of Christ. It is helpful to be accountable to some discreet and trustworthy person (a kind of spiritual friend) for this reason. This is why St. James says, "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (Jas 5:16). This is a helpful means of accountability, but in the Sacrament of Confession, the person to whom we are confessing our sins doesn't just listen and understand: he actually absolves our sins. Indeed, Jesus forgives us through him.

- *For assurance:* Even when we sin and ask forgiveness of God, we often doubt whether we are forgiven, even if we don't doubt God's mercy exactly. When we hear someone else tell us that our sins are forgiven, and when we know that he has power received from Jesus to absolve us from our sins, this is greatly relieving and assuring to our hearts.
- *For humility:* It is relatively easy to tell our sins to God. It is harder to tell our sins to someone else, because of our fear and pride: We think the other will think less of us, or even ridicule and reject us. Confession is a great way of growing in the humility that Jesus says is necessary to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3).
- *It is the will of Jesus:* Jesus clearly gave the power to absolve or retain sins to His apostles and to the Church. But the apostles wouldn't know which sins to absolve or retain unless they are told those sins. So, the confession of sins to one of Christ's representatives—the apostles or those following them who are ordained with this power—is an inherent part of this forgiveness being imparted. If Jesus gave us the gift of this great Sacrament, He obviously wants us to appreciate and make good use of the gift. Asking the question, "Why do I have to do this?" implies the wrong attitude. The proper question to ask is: "How can I best use this gift that Jesus has given us?"
- *For growing in holiness:* We tend to get complacent with time. By frequenting this sacrament, however, we are challenged to not let our sins remain and grow. We are challenged to constantly strive with God's grace to grow in holiness and love. Jesus also blesses and helps us through this sacrament to grow in holiness and love. In this way, this sacrament also helps prevent us from future sins, and Jesus graces us with His help to grow in the areas we struggle with.

When should someone go to Confession?

Someone should go to confession, above all, as soon as reasonably possible after having fallen into serious sin. When we sin seriously, our soul is spiritually in danger, and it is important to let Jesus save us from this state as soon as possible. It is important to turn back to God immediately, and then to make a good confession when this is reasonably possible.

The Church also requires that we confess in this sacrament all known serious sins committed after Baptism before receiving Holy Communion. So, if someone kills or seriously injures another, or if someone engages in sexual activity outside of marriage, or if someone steals or lies in a serious way, or if someone very intentionally hates or lusts after or refuses to forgive another in his/her heart, or if someone engages in idolatry or serious superstition, etc., he/she needs to bring this to Confession before next going to Holy Communion. Because going to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is considered a serious obligation, if we have missed Mass without a weighty reason, the Church expects that we will confess this before going to Holy Communion again. Because Holy Communion is such a holy and tremendous gift, it is necessary to receive Jesus in a “state of grace,” meaning a state of friendship with Christ, having turned away from all serious sin. It is not required that we be perfect and free from all sin to receive Jesus. Otherwise, none of us could receive. Yet, it is expected that we at least be free from serious sin to receive Holy Communion. Otherwise, to receive Jesus in a state of serious sin is itself a serious sin, which we are required to confess in Reconciliation next time we go.

Apart from serious sin, the Church asks all Catholics to go to Confession at least once a year. It is, however, very spiritually beneficial to go more often, even once a month, even if none of our sins is serious. We should never be afraid to go. And we should not see this sacrament as something negative. It is extremely positive. It is Jesus receiving and welcoming us, blessing us abundantly with His forgiveness, grace, and love, and helping us to grow and live His way of love in our daily lives.

If I tell my sins to a priest, will he remember and/or possibly share them?

The priest is under a very serious obligation to keep the *Seal of Confession*, which is *inviolable*. He cannot share the sins you tell him, either directly or indirectly. Even if civil authorities were to demand that he share what someone has confessed to him, he cannot share it and must be prepared to go to jail to uphold—and be true—to the seal of confession.

Priests often hear so many confessions that they don't remember which *penitent* (the person who confesses) told him which sins. Most often priests don't remember, even when a priest knows the person. Plus, the priest will admire you for confessing your sins, not think any less of you. He himself is very human and imperfect and only too glad to communicate God's forgiveness to you. The priest is also expected to go to Confession regularly.

People naturally fear going to confession because of embarrassment, or because they are afraid of being judged and looked down upon, or because they fear that their sins will be shared. But because of the seal of Confession and the humanness and compassion of the priest, there is really nothing to fear. The great grace of Confession is that you get to confess what is troubling you and what you are struggling with, that whatever you say is under the strictest seal of secrecy, that you get to say whatever you would like to a listening and compassionate ear, that you hear the forgiving words of Jesus through the priest, that you get to leave behind whatever you walked in with, and that you can move forward spiritually refreshed. And it's free and readily available to you!

What are the essential elements of a good confession?

A good and complete confession is what we call an *Integral Confession*. This involves three basic elements:

1. *Contrition*. God always offers His mercy toward us. But for us to receive His mercy, and for it to take effect in our lives, we have to be truly sorry for what we have done, turn away from it, and resolve with His grace to do better. In this regard, we say that true contrition (sorrow for sin) involves a *Firm Purpose of Amendment*. A firm purpose of amendment means that I am not only sorry for my past sins, but that I firmly resolve—with the help of God’s grace—to not go back to that sin and to do better. We also speak of “perfect” and “imperfect” contrition, or “attrition.” “Perfect contrition” simply means being sorry for the love of God. “Imperfect contrition,” or “attrition,” means being sorry and wanting to do better with God’s grace, but more from a fear of punishment than love for God. We are forgiven when we have the grace of perfect contrition. A special grace of the Sacrament of Penance is that it forgives imperfect contrition and provides the grace to have perfect contrition, that is, the grace to be sorry for the love of God.
2. *Confession*. “Confession” literally means vocally admitting our specific sins. We should do this internally to God every night before we go to bed. Verbally expressing our sins in the Sacrament of Penance is also an essential element to the Sacrament. We are only obliged to confess serious sins. Although unnecessary, it is very helpful and a good idea to confess all venial sins as well. The penitent is expected to confess the *number* and *kind* of serious sins. In other words, it is insufficient for a penitent just mention “stealing” when making his confession. He should specify what was stolen (money, pencils from work, etc.). There is a big difference between taking a paper clip home from work and not returning it, and stealing \$100 from someone’s wallet. The penitent should also mention how many times he/she did this. There is a big difference between stealing something just once and stealing things over a period of years. If the penitent can’t remember the exact number of times that he/she stole things, or got drunk, or committed adultery, etc., a good approximation is sufficient, or some indication of frequency and time period, such as, “Between the ages of 16 and 40 I probably got drunk a few times a year generally.” One should not be scrupulous about details here. The whole idea is that you want to turn away from each and every mortal (serious) sin you have committed, that you want each one forgiven, and that you want to receive the healing of Jesus for all your sins. Details of sins are not necessary to give, except insofar as they impact the sin’s gravity.
3. *Satisfaction*. It is fitting that we make restitution for our sins. If we have stolen something that is reasonably possible to return, we should return it. If we have damaged someone’s property, we should pay for repairs. Even when there is not physical restitution to be made (as when we have rash judgments), it is fitting that we try to make up for it with good thoughts. In Confession, the confessor will assign the penitent a “penance”—meaning some prayer, or set of prayers, or some good deed—

that will help us make up for what we have done and be a help for us in doing better and changing our behavior. We can never fully make up for our sins. And we need to remind ourselves that Jesus has made full satisfaction for our sins. However, it is fitting that we do our part to make restitution, to express our sorrow, and as a remedy in helping me break with the past and do better. *Indulgences* can also help with satisfaction for sin. See the separate handout on this.

How should I prepare for Confession?

We prepare for our confession best through examining our conscience. We should make a mental note to ourselves whenever we do wrong. At the end of each day, we should take some time to reflect over the day, to give thanks to God for His grace and love and for the times we did well, and to ask forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings, asking for His help in doing better in the future. If we do this every night, then preparing for the Sacrament of Penance becomes easier. We will know what to confess, because we are examining ourselves regularly. It is good to examine ourselves in terms of the different virtues of the Christian life, and in light of different categories of vice and sin. There are many good written guides for this, which we call an *Examination of Conscience*. You can find one that best helps you through looking over different printed or online versions, or from different Catholic apps.

Lastly, you are encouraged to be:

- Contrite (really sorry for your sins)
- Confident (in God's love and mercy toward you)
- Complete (not intentionally leaving out any serious sin because it is embarrassing)
- Clear (not fearing to name your sins; not being ambiguous or vague or giving excuses; but confessing your specific sins with clarity, simplicity, and humility)

How should I confess, “face-to-face” or “behind the screen”?

When going to Confession, you generally have the option of confessing behind the screen or face-to-face. Some people choose to go behind the screen for the sake of privacy. Some choose to do so in order to focus on God. Some choose to go face-to-face, because they feel it is easier to confess in a more conversational way. Some choose to go to a priest who doesn't know them. Some prefer to go to a priest who knows them. You can always experiment to see what seems to work best for you.

How do I “go to Confession”?

1. The priest will greet you, and then you begin by making the Sign of the Cross. Then, it is traditional and fitting to say:

“BLESS ME FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED. MY STATE IN LIFE IS (single, married, etc.) ... MY LAST CONFESSION WAS...” (weeks, months)

2. Now confess your sins to the priest. When you have said your last sin, say:
“I AM SORRY FOR THESE AND ALL OF MY SINS.”

3. The priest will assign you a penance and offer advice to help you be a better Catholic. It may be prayers, a kindness to perform, and/or a sacrifice to make. Be sure to listen carefully so that you remember what your penance is.

4. The priest will ask you to pray the Act of Contrition, which is an expression of sorrow for your sins. Make sure to bring a copy into the Confession. Here is one version:

“MY GOD, I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS WITH ALL MY HEART. IN CHOOSING TO DO WRONG AND FAILING TO DO GOOD, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST YOU WHOM I SHOULD LOVE ABOVE ALL THINGS. I FIRMLY INTEND, WITH YOUR HELP, TO DO PENANCE, TO SIN NO MORE, AND TO AVOID WHATEVER LEADS ME TO SIN. OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED AND DIED FOR US. IN HIS NAME, MY GOD, HAVE MERCY. AMEN.”

5. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, will then absolve you from your sins by saying the Prayer of Absolution. Listen for “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy spirit.” You make the Sign of the Cross and respond, **“AMEN.”**

6. The priest initiates a proclamation of praise, saying, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,” to which you respond, **“HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER.”**

7. The priest will then dismiss you by saying: “The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.” You respond, **“THANKS BE TO GOD.”** It is fitting to thank the priest as well.

8. Now you must make satisfaction for your sins by completing your assigned penance. You are also called to go forth in joy and peace, spiritually refreshed and strengthened.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not always chide, nor will He keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.” —Ps 103:8-12

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.” —Pr 3:7

“Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity, and hate abominations intensely.”
—Sir 17:26

“You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” —Mic 7:19

“Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the LORD GOD; so turn, and live.” —Ezk 18:31-32

“Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.” —Mt 9:2

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” —Lk 7:47-48

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” —Lk 15:7

“Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.” —Jn 8:11

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. . . . And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” —1 Jn 1:8-10; 3:3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What are your fears or hesitations about going to Confession?*
2. *What are the benefits of Confession?*
3. *How should you best prepare yourself for Confession?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: James 5 / *CCC:* 1499-1532

ANOINTING OF THE SICK



Anointing of the Sick is the second Sacrament of Healing. We have already mentioned how Jesus made healing the sick an essential part of His ministry, and how, in the Gospel of Mark, He sends His apostles out to anoint the sick specifically with oil (Mk 6:13). This is why the apostle James in his epistle says:

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.” —Jas 5:14-15

We have also discussed how, in the sacraments, Jesus comes to sanctify the different stages of our lives. Anointing of the Sick is about Jesus strengthening us in serious illness, and bestowing the forgiveness we need in our weakness. When we are close to death, it is a means whereby Jesus consecrates our transition to the next life with His grace. Occasionally, Jesus bestows physical healing through this Sacrament.

When is the Sacrament of the Sick bestowed?

When someone is seriously ill or dying, it is fitting that this sacrament be bestowed on him/her. This sacrament is also fittingly given to those of advanced age, since life is very fragile at this stage, and it is better to anoint too early than too late. Whenever someone has to undergo serious surgery, Anointing of the Sick is appropriate, since serious surgery is for a serious condition. Under serious circumstances of addiction, Anointing of the Sick might be appropriate. This sacrament is not for common, non-serious illnesses, however.

Can this Sacrament be repeated?

Yes, when one is diagnosed with a new serious condition, or when one’s illness takes a turn for the worse, or occasionally in advanced age, and especially when one is dying.

Anointing of the Sick

How is Anointing of this Sick bestowed?

The Anointing of the Sick can be bestowed in or outside of Mass, on a group of the sick or elderly, or on an individual. All must be past the age of reason. It can also be given in a church, home, hospital, or wherever the sick person is. After various prayers, readings, and intercessions, the priest prays over the sick person, laying his hands on his or her head, as St. James instructs. After that, the priest anoints the forehead of the person while saying, “Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.” The person responds, “Amen.” Then the priest anoints the person’s palms, saying, “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.” The person responds, “Amen.” It is fitting that family, friends, and parishioners support the sick person with charitable visits, and when the sacrament is bestowed, as is possible.

What are the effects of the Anointing of the Sick?

The effects of this sacrament are: the forgiveness of sins, spiritual strength, spiritual healing, sometimes physical healing, uniting the sick to God and the Church, consecration of one’s sufferings and dying to God, and preparation for eternal life when one is dying.

What kind of oil is used for the Anointing of the Sick?

There are three blessed oils used by the Church in various sacraments and blessings:

- *Oil of Catechumens (OS)*: used to anoint someone before Baptism
- *Sacred Chrism (SC)*: a perfumed oil (olive oil mixed with balsam) used to anoint the crown of the head of someone just baptized; for Confirmation; to anoint the hands of a newly ordained priest; in the dedication and blessing of an Altar
- *Oil of the Sick (OI)*: used in the Anointing of the Sick

Each year, the bishop gathers with the priests of his diocese during Holy Week for the *Chrism Mass*, in which priests renew their priestly promises and oils are blessed and distributed for the parishes around the diocese. Therefore, except in emergency situations when a priest does not have access to the blessed oils (when he will bless oil himself for a sacrament), the bishop blesses all of these oils in the Chrism Mass.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“I was sick and you visited me.” —Mt 25:36

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the purpose of the Anointing of the Sick?*
2. *What is the role of the priest and laity in this Sacrament?*
3. *When should you call a priest for the Anointing of the Sick?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: 2 Tim 1 / ***CCC:*** 1533-1600

HOLY ORDERS



Holy Orders is the first Sacrament of Service to Communion. Along with the Sacrament of Marriage, it is ordered to the salvation of others and the good of the whole Church. Through this sacrament, God shepherds His people in every age.

God worked through three principal figures in the Old Testament to form His people: Priests, Prophets, and Kings. God forgave, blessed, and sanctified the people through priests. He exhorted and taught them through the prophets. He governed and served them through kings.

Jesus Christ fulfills all three of these roles. In the New Testament, then, He is depicted as a priest, prophet, and king. He also passes on a share of this three-fold dignity to each baptized Christian. Through baptism, then, we all become priests, prophets, and kings in Christ. This is what we call the *Common Priesthood of the Faithful*. But Jesus also called apostles to share in His ministry and shepherd the Church in His name. This special, consecrated role to shepherd God's flock in Christ's name is what we call the *Ministerial Priesthood*. It is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful. The sacrament by which this sacred role is passed on is called *Holy Orders*. The imparting of this sacrament through a consecratory prayer and the laying on of hands is what we call *Ordination*. Ordination is the incorporation of a man into Christ's role of shepherding the Church. In ordination, a *sacred power* is given—in various degrees—to particular men in order to bless, celebrate the sacraments, preach, and shepherd and serve the Church as leaders in the name of Christ. Holy Orders also establishes one in an order, or group, with all others given the same gift and power. So, we speak of an "order" of bishops, or priests, or deacons. Hence, we call this sacrament *Holy Orders*. In the New Testament, the passing on of the sacred power and ministry of Holy Orders through the laying on of hands can be found in Acts 6:6 (deacons), 1 Tim 4:14, and 2 Tim 1:6.

What are the three degrees of Holy Orders?

There are three degrees of sharing in the ministerial priesthood of Christ, all of which are found in Scripture and rooted in the early Church:

1. *Episcopacy* (bishops): This is the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The bishops are successors to the apostles and the principal shepherds of the Church throughout the world. They are “overseers,” which is what *Episcopoi*, or “bishops,” mean. Often they are appointed as a bishop “overseer” of a diocese, which is an officially designated local region of the Church. The principal church of each diocese is called a *Cathedral*, since it is where the *cathedra*, or “chair” of the bishop, is. Bishops are given the sacred power to ordain bishops, priests, and deacons. They also have the power to celebrate Mass, absolve sins, and celebrate all the sacraments. At Mass, they often wear a *Miter* (pointed headpiece) and *Zucchetto* underneath (cloth skullcap) and carry a *Crosier* (decorative shepherd’s staff). They bless the faithful with a threefold blessing.
2. *Presbyterate* (priests): Priests are helpers to the bishops. Under the bishop, and on his behalf, they often shepherd or co-shepherd parish churches throughout a diocese. The main shepherd at a parish church is called the *Pastor*, while his assistant is called a *Parochial Vicar*, or “assistant pastor.” In Greek, presbyter literally means “elder.” Priests have the power to celebrate Mass, absolve sins in confession, anoint the sick and dying, bless persons and things, celebrate baptisms and marriages, and many other things. They can only confirm when given the “faculty” (delegated power) to confirm from the bishop or law of the Church. They cannot ordain other bishops, priests, or deacons. At Mass, priests wear a *Priestly Stole* that hangs down in front of them over their shoulders, and a *Chasuble* over the stole. Bishops wear the same for Mass, except that they add the miter, zucchetto, and crosier.
3. *Diaconate* (deacons): Deacons are assistants to the bishop and priests. The term Deacon means “servant.” It is the special role of deacons to read the Gospel at Mass and help with the Chalice at the Altar. They can bless most persons and things, celebrate baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and preside at Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. They can be given permission to preach the homily at Mass. They do not have the power to celebrate Mass, hear confessions, anoint the sick, or ordain. There are “permanent” and “transitional” deacons. Transitional deacons are only ordained deacons as a temporary step before ordination to the priesthood. Transitional deacons are only deacons typically for six months to a year and a half before being ordained to the priesthood. In contrast, permanent deacons are ordained to function as deacons for life, with no transition to the priesthood. At Mass, deacons wear a *Diaconal Stole*, which is a stole that drapes across their chest and back and hangs to the right. Deacons also often wear a *Dalmatic*, which is like a chasuble, but has sleeves.

So, the episcopacy is the fullness of Holy Orders. The presbyterate, or priesthood, is a lesser share in Holy Orders. The diaconate is a yet lesser share. For most priests, priesthood is the terminal degree of Holy Orders they will receive. A few are asked to be bishops. A man is ordained in a lesser degree before being ordained in a higher degree.

If a priest sins or is a bad priest, are the sacraments he celebrates still valid?

As long as the matter, form, and intention of each sacrament retain their integrity, all the sacraments which a sinful priest celebrates are still valid. It is Christ's will that the faithful should not suffer because of the sinfulness of a priest. Therefore, the validity of the sacraments is not dependent on the worthiness of the priest, bishop, or deacon.

Can only men be priests?

Yes. Jesus treated women equally to men, affirmed their unique dignity, and called them to follow Him as disciples. At the same time, He chose only men as the twelve apostles, whom He appointed and gave authority to shepherd the faithful in His name. The Church feels obligated to follow His example. This in no way means that women have any less dignity than men. Priests are spiritual fathers in the image of Christ. All men, whether called to priesthood, religious life, or the lay vocation, are called to be spiritual fathers in a way. And women, whether called to the lay vocation or religious life, are called to be spiritual mothers. The Church calls women to flourish in their feminine nature and to be involved in all aspects of the Church. The Church sees the priesthood as a distinctively male vocation, because of its connection to Christ and spiritual fatherhood. As we have mentioned, in the sacraments priests act *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ. This doesn't take away from the special role of women in the Church, which men cannot fulfill. It is also noteworthy that the Church's holiest member, Mary, is a woman and was never a priest.

Why can't priests marry?

There have been times and traditions in the Church where certain men have married *before* ordination. However, it has never been the practice of the Church that men marry *after* ordination (except when a priest is "laicized"—when he is given special dispensation by the Church to return to the lay state, agreeing not exercising his priestly ministry anymore except for emergencies). In the Eastern Catholic Churches men are commonly allowed to marry before ordination. However, bishops are only selected from the celibate clergy. In the Latin Church, this was also the practice until a certain time, when celibacy before ordination was expected and required. In all Catholic and Orthodox Churches (with the exception of the Persian Orthodox after it had broken from the Church), it has been a practice, expectation, and requirement that a man will never marry again after ordination, even to the diaconate, even should his wife die. In recent years, the Latin Church has allowed married men who were ministers in Anglican or Episcopal, and sometimes Lutheran, communities, after having become Catholic, to be ordained priests and minister in the Church. In recent decades, the Latin Church has allowed married men to be ordained as permanent deacons.

The general requirement for men not to be married before ordination to the priesthood could be changed by the Church, since it is not Church doctrine but a specific discipline that does not have doctrinal implications. However, since Christ was celibate, celibacy for the clergy is generally considered ideal. Through celibacy, clergy can devote themselves entirely to God and service to the Church without having to worry about dividing time between their family and the faithful.

How should lay people relate to priests?

All vocations in the Church are supposed to mutually support and enrich each other. In our parish churches, priests and laity have the opportunity to collaborate for the building up and flourishing of the local Church. Priests are called to respect lay people, seek their advice and rely on their expertise, involve them in the ministries of the parish, form and guide them, bless them, and serve them. Lay people in turn are called to support and respect their priests, thank them, pray for them, listen to them, bring them ideas, and cooperate with them. At times, both priests and lay people can and should also challenge each other, but always with love, respect, and humility. They are also called to be patient with each other's imperfections. It is important above all to be focused on Christ and to work together to serve Him.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“And He (Jesus) went up on the mountain, and called to Him those whom He desired; and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, to be with Him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority over demons.” —Mk 3:13-14

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the Church first apostles . . .” —1 Cor 12:27-28

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” —2 Cor 5:20

“Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give an account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.” —Heb 13:7

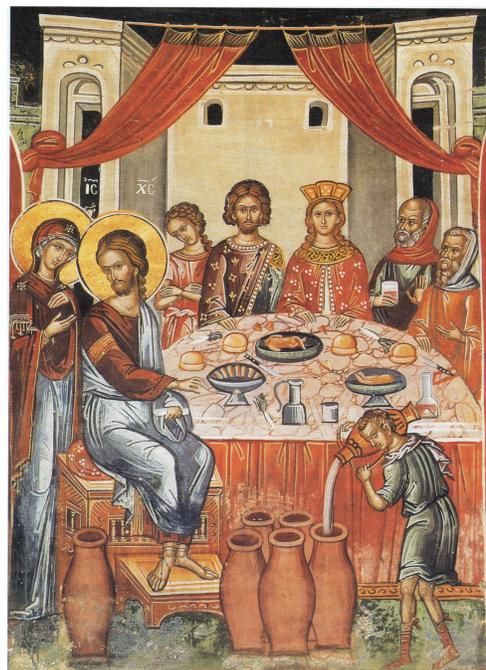
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the Scriptural basis for the sacrament of Holy Orders?*
2. *What is distinctive about each of the three degrees of Holy Orders?*
3. *How should priests and laity work together for the good of the whole Church?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Mk 10; Eph 5 / *CCC:* 1601-1637; 2331-2400; 2514-2557

HOLY MATRIMONY



Holy Matrimony is the second Sacrament of Service to Communion, and the seventh of the Seven Sacraments. Marriage is naturally ordered toward the mutual good of the spouses and toward the procreation and raising of children. But Jesus has elevated natural marriage to the level of a sacrament, so that it might be holy, that it might be “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39), and that it might be according to the kingdom, and not be dominated and torn apart by sin. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses are given a share in the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for His Bride, the Church. Spouses are called to contemplate that love, to imbibe it, and to express it toward each other in daily living, even as this total self-giving love is also meant to overflow to their children, and by extension from their family to the world.

The Bible begins and ends with marriage. It begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:22-25). It ends with the marriage between Christ, the Bridegroom and Lamb of God, and His Church, the Bride of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9; 21:2, 9; 22:17). Throughout the Scriptures, God has used different human relationships as images to communicate the kind of relationship He wants to have with us. One relationship is that of parent and child (1 Jn 3:1-2). God is a good and loving Father Who wants us, His adopted children, to trust and love Him. Another relationship is that of friendship. Through Christ, God is calling us into deep and intimate friendship with Himself (Jn 15:15). Yet, the most powerful image that the Bible speaks of is spousal. In the Old Testament, God speaks of His people as His wife. Unfortunately, His wife is often unfaithful. When Israel goes after other gods, it is analogous to committing adultery (Ex 34:15-16; Dt 31:16; Jdg 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Ch 5:25; Ps 106:39; Is 1:21; Jer 2:20; 3:1-8; Ezk 16:15-41; 23:3, 5, 19, 20, 44; Hos 2:5; 3:3; 4:12, 15; 5:3; 9:1). But God is always trying to draw His people back to Himself (Hos 2:14-20). When God becomes man in Jesus, our divine Bridegroom becomes visible to us. In the Incarnation, Jesus weds Himself to our human nature and our race. In His public ministry, Jesus refers to Himself as “the Bridegroom” (Mk 2:20; Mt 25:1-10; Jn 3:29). John

Holy Matrimony

the Baptist, Paul, and the Book of Revelation will also speak of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, His Bride (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 19:6-9; 21:2, 9, 17). Jesus' first miracle happens, significantly, at a wedding, the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-11). In His Passion, Jesus expresses the full extent of His love for His Bride, the Church, when He lays down His life for her (Eph 5:25). At the end of time, there will be a perfect union of Christ and His Church, and an eternal wedding feast (Rev 19:6-9; 21, 2, 9, 17).

God's beautiful vision and plan for marriage can be seen in these and other passages in the Bible. However, the Bible also depicts marriage and family life as affected by sin. Sin affects and spoils everything. Tragically, many feel the effects of sin bitterly within marriage. When Jesus came into this world, however, He came to renew all things, including marriage. He has come to save marriage from the destruction of sin, to infuse it with His healing grace, and to help couples live out their marriage with love and virtue, so that they might learn to reflect to each other the love that He showed us when He laid down His life for us. By letting Christ come to heal and sanctify their marriage, couples can find the peace and joy of true married love that they have longed for.

What is the meaning and purpose of Marriage?

The meaning and purpose of marriage is stamped in our very nature. God made human beings male and female. Man and woman are inherently oriented toward one another in their bodies. They are inherently oriented toward union with each other, and life naturally flows from this union. Further, because man and woman are inherently rational and personal, the union that man and woman are oriented toward is not just momentary or temporal, but life-long, committed, and permanent. The nature and dignity of persons demands this. In other words, man and woman, in contrast to all other creatures, are inherently ordered to the life-long relationship of marriage.

The union that man and woman are oriented to is also naturally ordered to the begetting of life. And because of the dignity and development of children, man and woman are called not only to conceive and bear life. They are called to raise and form children together.

Thus, marriage and family flow out of who we are, out of our very nature as male and female. Therefore, the purpose of marriage and the purpose of sexuality is the same, and it is twofold: *Union* and *Procreation*, or "love and life," or "babies and bonding." The purpose of marriage is simply the purpose of sexuality expanded: the unitive dimension involving a whole lifelong partnership of mutual love and enrichment; the procreative dimension involving not just conceiving and bearing children, but holistically raising, forming, and guiding them, both humanly and spiritually, ultimately preparing them for the kingdom of heaven.

The nature of marriage is, thus, rooted in our rational and personal nature, and in our sexual difference and complementarity.

How is marriage elevated to a Sacrament?

Just as Jesus changed something ordinary into something extraordinary by changing water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, so He takes our natural vocation of marriage and blesses it with His grace, so that a couple's marriage can receive His strength and healing, and also so that they can share in the love that Christ, the Bridegroom, has for His Bride, the Church, and that they might bear witness to this love to their children and to the world.

Toward this end, a Catholic couple is prepared for marriage, takes vows in the presence of a priest, is blessed in their commitment, and is given the Eucharist as the crowning of their vows. They are then called to live out their vows in daily life: in faithfulness, generosity, honesty, humility, faith, love, communication, collaboration, forgiveness, service, and virtue.

If two persons are baptized and validly married, their marriage is sacramental. If only one is baptized, it is considered a natural but not a sacramental marriage. If the non-baptized spouse becomes Christian, the marriage automatically becomes sacramental as soon as he or she is baptized. Further, the Church requires Catholics in particular to get married in the Church for a valid marriage. Dispensations can be given for a good reason.

What is the significance of Matrimony being a Sacrament?

For two baptized persons validly married, matrimony is a *Sacrament*. This means that their marriage is a sacred sign. A sign is something that points to something else, that points to a deeper reality. In a sacrament, there is a visible element, and an invisible element. And what happens invisibly resembles what happens visibly. Visibly, a couple enters into a life-long covenant with each other through the total giving of oneself and the total accepting of the other through the marriage vows: "I, N., take you, N., to be my husband/wife. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, to love you and to honor you all the days of my life." The vows are the *Form of the Sacrament*. Invisibly, through their vows, God creates a *sacred bond* between the spouses until death. Through consummation of the marriage, this bond becomes *indissoluble* (unable to be dissolved). In a mysterious way, the couple is also given the grace to spiritually share and participate in the union between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Spouses are called—and given the grace—to express the total self-giving love of Christ to each other, so that they can learn to love each other the way that Christ loved His Bride, the Church. And just as Christ's love is fruitful, leading people to become and live as children of God, the love of spouses is also meant to be fruitful, through the begetting of children and leading them to live as children of God.

Does the Church permit divorce?

Jesus taught that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of people's hearts. He also said that what God makes one, no one must separate. He even went so far as to say that if a husband divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery, and if the wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery, precisely because the bond of marriage is unbreakable (Mark 10:2-12). The Church is faithful to the teaching of Jesus and cannot change His teaching for the sake of convenience or popular opinion. The Church can help people to be faithful to Christ according to their circumstances, but the Church cannot change the teachings of the Lord.

The separation of spouses for the safety and wellbeing of a spouse and the children is sometimes necessary and can even be sanctioned by the Church. If the marriage was valid, however, the couple is still bound by their wedding vows, and to their sacred bond. There is always hope that things will improve, so that the family can be reunited.

While the Church does not permit divorce and remarriage, sometimes the Church can make a judgment that a marriage wasn't valid in the first place. For a valid marriage to take place, there are certain essential elements that must be present (freedom to marry, basic maturity, and the intention of fidelity, permanency, and children). If only one of these essential elements was missing in only one person, the marriage is considered invalid and can be declared as such when investigated by the tribunal in a diocese. The declaration that an apparent marriage was not valid because of the lack of one of these essential elements, after the investigation is finished, is called an *Annulment*. It is not a divorce. It is rather a declaration that the marriage never happened, although it seemed as if it did at the time. Couples and individuals are always urged to see a priest in their difficulties, so that he can guide and help them to be faithful to Christ, aligning their life with His teaching in their circumstances. In the end, a person is called to be faithful: If he or she is bound, he or she should remain faithful and not seek to enter another relationship, even if separation from a person is necessary. If one is not bound because of some invalidating factor, then the Church can help someone realize—and declare, after investigation—that he/she is not in fact bound, and therefore would be free to pursue another relationship.

Can a Catholic marry a non-Catholic?

Yes, as long as they obtain the necessary permissions and dispensations from the Church to marry. In this case, the Catholic must agree to do all in his or her own power to raise the children Catholic. The non-Catholic spouse needs to be informed of this intention. Marrying someone of a different faith can be difficult, however, and the difficulties that will arise should be understood, seriously considered, and not underestimated. Sometimes the non-Catholic spouse freely becomes a faithful Catholic. This is a great blessing and help toward greater marital and family unity and the good of the children.

What does the Church teach about sexuality?

Many people think that the Church's teaching on sexuality is rather negative, restricting, judgmental, strict, arbitrary, and even oppressive. Even many Catholics, unfortunately, dissent from Church teaching because of this misunderstanding. However, the Church is faithful to Christ, and what Jesus teaches us about sexuality through the Church is actually very positive, beautiful, and liberating. It resonates with what is true, good, and most beautiful in the depths of our hearts.

The teaching of the Church on sexuality is very simple actually: Sexual intimacy finds its place and fulfillment in marriage, and is oriented toward union and procreation, or "love and life." Let us unpack these two dimensions of sexuality, since there is depth to each dimension.

First, sexuality is oriented toward the union of *love*. The Church teaches that the *marital act*, or sexual union, is supposed to be a kind of *renewal of wedding vows*. That is, in the marital act, the couple is called to express in their bodies what they once expressed in their vows to each other before the altar. What did they say in their vows? In essence, "I give myself to you." And what are they called to echo in the consummation of their vows? "I give myself to you." Seen in this light, the marital act is something holy. It is fitting that a couple sees it as such, and that they pray beforehand. Sexual union within marriage, then, is supposed to be an expression of the loving gift each spouse made—and continually called to reaffirm—to the other, and enjoying that. The act becomes selfish, however, if it is motivated by lust and reduced to simply using the other for one's own momentary satisfaction. Further, if the couple, influenced by the culture, makes the maximization of pleasure their ultimate aim, then the sexual act becomes superficial, and even the thrill will get old quickly. Conjugal life is so much deeper—and is experienced as so much more satisfactory—when deep and genuine love of the other—echoing their vows—is the ultimate aim, and when this act is open to life. It is no wonder, then, that religious couples generally report being more satisfied with sexual intimacy than non-religious couples. The marital act is something holy and special. It is the unique act of the couple by which they renew and embody their wedding vows to each other.

Second, sexuality is oriented toward the begetting of children, toward *life*. It is truly amazing to think about how life comes forth from the marital act and the embodiment of the marital vows. This is how God intended life to come forth, not to come forth arbitrarily, mechanically, or in a laboratory, but springing from the couple's married love. And, since each of us has an immortal soul that can only come from God, God directly creates the soul of each human being at the beginning of his/her existence, which means that the couple cooperates with God in bringing forth life. Because of this, the marital act should always be approached with the greatest reverence, appreciation, and awe.

Because union and procreation, or "love and life," is the twofold purpose of marriage and sexuality, the Church teaches that these two dimensions must always be united in practice. Any attempt to suppress one aspect is inherently disordered, unnatural, and sinful.

Holy Matrimony

In our modern culture, there are many attempts to suppress one or both purposes of sexuality. The Church teaches that the following things are objectively sinful, because they inherently involve the suppression of one or both of these purposes of the marital act, or because they seek sexual intimacy out of its proper context, marriage:

- *Cloning* and *In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)* are attempts to bring forth life apart from the marital act of love.
- The use of *Contraception* is inherently aimed at suppressing life in favor of love (though it diminishes this as well, since it restricts the total gift of self).
- *Self-gratification* (i.e., “masturbation”) is neither unitive nor procreative. Its aim is simply pleasure divorced from both purposes of the marital act.
- *Homosexual Acts* are neither unitive (in any naturally oriented way), nor procreative.
- *Premarital and Extramarital Sex* is sinful, because sexual intimacy only finds its proper place within marriage, because the marital act is supposed to be a renewal of wedding vows—which renewal a couple cannot make if they are not married, and because the marriage is the only proper context for the bringing forth and raising of children.
- *Adultery* is a violation of the exclusivity of the marriage covenant.
- *Polygamy* likewise violates the exclusivity of marriage. It also introduces injustice and confusion for the wives and children in the family.
- *Lust* seeks pleasure in a way that is detached from the nature and purpose of sexuality, as well as the uniqueness of the other person. It is *adultery of the heart* (Mt 5:27-30). It is inherently selfish and dehumanizing, reducing the other to his/her bodily attraction and potential to give pleasure. One can lust through fantasizing thoughts. One can sin by looking lustfully at people. One can lust through reading or looking at lustful material, such as pornographic literature, images, and videos. One can express lust through words, in the way that one speaks about others or oneself or sexuality. One can lust in actions, through the various sins mentioned here. One can sin through immodest dress or mannerisms, when one seeks to use one’s own sexual attraction to manipulate and incite lust in others. One can even lust after one’s spouse, when one reduces him/her to a sexual object for one’s own satisfaction. In each case, lust causes disintegration within and disrespects the other, reducing him/her to a kind of commodity. Thus, *lustful thoughts*, *lustful looks*, *lustful words*, *immodest dress*, *inciting lust in others*, and *pornography* are all sinful.
- *Rape*, *Prostitution*, *Sexual Abuse of Minors*, *Sex Trafficking*, and *Sexual Harassment* are grave violations of the dignity, innocence and freedom of others, often resulting in great damage to the psyche and well being of others, often with long-lasting effects.

Holy Matrimony

The Church's teaching is fully consistent on these matters. Further, the Church doesn't teach that all of these things are wrong just to make things more difficult for us. Instead, the Church teaches that these things are wrong because they fall short of the real thing (the beauty of sexual intimacy lived lovingly and virtuously within marriage), because they won't make us happy, and because she is faithful to the teaching of Christ, Who knows what is best for us. Further, those who live according to Church Teaching experience happiness and fulfillment in this area, and are spared from much pain and suffering. The Church is simply calling us to what is best for us, what will fulfill us, and is warning against things that lead us astray.

Jesus also knows that we are weak in the area of sexuality, and many struggle with everything from occasionally looking lustfully at people to the plague of serial adulterous relationships. By both offering the depths of forgiveness and calling us to what is genuinely good, true, and beautiful, Jesus offers us liberation, conversion, clarity, self-mastery, and inner freedom in this area through the Church.

When clergy or lay leaders in the Church fall into sin in these areas, it is a terrible scandal. It does not nullify the teachings of Christ and the Church, but all the more reinforces the importance of them.

Lust, a disordered desire for sexual pleasure, is at the heart of sexual sin. *Chastity* is sexual desire rightly ordered, to love and life within marriage. We are called to be aware of, and battle against, lust in all its forms, whether it be in thoughts, words, or actions. We are also called to *purity* in all dimensions of our life, in our thoughts, words, and actions. We cannot be pure by our own power. Purity is the result of God grace healing and transforming us, and the fruit cooperating with that grace through virtue and discipline. With time, we will more and more experience the happiness of inner integrity through the grace and help of Christ. Chastity teaches us how to love freely and authentically.

Pleasure is not bad. It is good that we delight in good things. Pleasure is a motivator and an accompaniment of delight for certain good actions. It is good that a married couple takes pleasure in the love and life dimensions of sexual intimacy. Pleasure isn't an end in itself, however. It needs to be ordered to the higher goods of love and life.

Does the Church require couples to have as many children as possible?

Marriage and sexual union are naturally ordered to children, and each child is a gift of God. Couples should be open to children, even numerous children, since they are all blessings. However, there can be many weighty reasons (financial, health, social, and psychological) to postpone pregnancy and limit the number of children. The Church permits couples to use *Natural Family Planning (NFP)* to postpone pregnancy and limit the number of children for good, weighty, and unselfish reasons. Couples can also use NFP to achieve pregnancy if they are having trouble getting pregnant. NFP is a modern, scientific method of monitoring the woman's fertility. Couples can use this information for the purpose of achieving or avoiding

pregnancy. They decide to engage—or not—in sexual activity during the time of the woman’s fertility. NFP is completely different from contraception, since the couple is not suppressing any aspect of their fertility, since each and every marital act is open to life, and since it is not inherently wrong to have relations when the woman is infertile or to refrain when she is fertile. It is also worth noting that couples who use NFP on average report greater levels of satisfaction with it than couples using contraception, experience greater intimacy, have the same amount of relations as couples who contracept, and have a very low divorce rate. NFP also respects and works with the woman’s cycle. In contrast, every form of contraception suppresses or ignores the woman’s cycle. NFP is healthy and avoids the health problems associated with various forms of contraception. NFP is inexpensive and best for the environment. NFP is also as or more effective at avoiding pregnancy and limiting children than most forms of contraception, when used for this purpose.

What does the Church teach about “gay marriage”?

Marriage is inherently related to the sexual difference and complementarity of men and women. The body of a man is inherently related to the body of a woman, and vice versa. The bodies of men are not inherently oriented toward each other; neither are the bodies of women. Indeed, the reproductive system of our bodies is inherently relational and incomplete in just one gender. It is only complete in the union of a man and woman. We cannot detach marriage from the nature and purpose of sexuality. Otherwise there is no reason for marriage. To be good, all acts of sexual intimacy must be in accord with the nature and purpose of sexuality. Marriage also is inherently tied to the nature and purpose of sexuality. Therefore, in the Church’s eyes, “gay marriage” is not a reality, nor is it possible.

That being said, a small percentage of people struggle with *Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)*. Why they experience being attracted to the same gender is not fully known, although there seem to be many factors at play, and the factors are often different in different individuals. The ethics of homosexual behavior is not dependent on what the causes of SSA are, however.

The Church affirms the dignity of all people, and persons who struggle with same-sex attraction have no less dignity than anyone else. They should be shown respect and not be targeted, stigmatized, or ridiculed. Many of them are married (to a person of the opposite sex). Many of them have different ways of approaching their condition. Some regularly engage in homosexual activity. Some do not. Some form relationships. Some do not. Some promote “gay marriage.” Many do not. Above all, persons who struggle with same-sex attraction are seeking to be understood, accepted, respected, and loved. The Church can offer this to them. However, the Church insists that they will not be truly happy or find what they are really looking for by engaging in homosexual behavior—which is inherently unnatural. Neither will they be by seeking to enter marriage with a person of the same sex. They will find what they are looking for in being faithful to Christ and His Church.

Holy Matrimony

Having a same-sex attraction is not easy and is a special cross to carry. However, the Lord loves those who struggle, and wants to help them. Sexual intimacy only makes sense as ordered to love and life in marriage, however. Sexual activity outside of this context falls short of the nature and purpose of sexuality, and of God's plan for love and life. Jesus calls all, whether they have heterosexual or homosexual desires, to respect and be faithful to God's plan for marriage and sexuality. He gives us the healing and strength we need to live in accordance with this plan, whatever our condition be. We will find the happiness we seek only by living according to His will for us.

The Church does not teach that civil laws should penalize those living in a same-sex relationship. At the same time, it is fitting that marriage as correctly understood (between a man and a woman) should be respected and affirmed in law and a country's ideals.

What is God's plan for the family?

The family is a communion of persons made in the image of the Communion of Persons of the Trinity. The family is called to mirror the love and life of the Trinity. The Christian family is also the *Domestic Church*. As such, the family is a community of faith in which its members are called to fulfill their roles for the good of the whole family. Each member is enriched by the natural and spiritual gifts of the other members. Each member is also called to contribute to the good of the family through their service and through their own spiritual and natural gifts. Family members must learn to love, forgive, and be patient with each other's faults and shortcomings.

The family is also the cell of society. The Christian family is called to be a community of light within one's local communities, and within society.

Why do persons in consecrated life live a life of vowed celibacy?

Jesus Himself was celibate, and He said that some—like Himself—would give up marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus also said that this is not for everyone, but for those who feel called by God (Mt 19:10-12). Indeed, God calls most to marriage. He calls some to give up marriage for the kingdom of God though. These seek to direct their entire love toward God, as to a spouse. They also make themselves more available for service to the Church and the world. All vocations in the Church should support and enrich each other. Consecrated men and women can inspire lay persons to seek God first in their lives. Holy married couples can provide consecrated persons with an image the kind of spousal relationship they are called to have spiritually with God. The Church also knows by experience that the different vocations flourish and struggle together. When marriages are going well, vocations to priesthood and religious life also tend to be healthy, and vice versa.

Jesus also said that in heaven, people do not marry nor are given in marriage (Mk 12:18-27). So, consecrated souls seek to live here and now what will be in the life to come. They thus bear witness to the primacy of God and the coming kingdom.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

John 2:1-12 *(the wedding feast of Cana)*

Mark 10:2-12 *(Jesus on marriage and divorce)*

“Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from the law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.” —Rom 7:2-3

“For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.”
—Mal 2:16

Ephesians 5:21-33 *(St. Paul on how married couples should reflect the love of Christ to each other)*

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” —Mt 5:27-30

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” —Mt 6:22-23

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” —Mt 5:8

1 Cor 6:12-20 *(St. Paul on our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit)*

Matthew 19:10-12 *(Jesus on those called to give up marriage for the kingdom of heaven)*

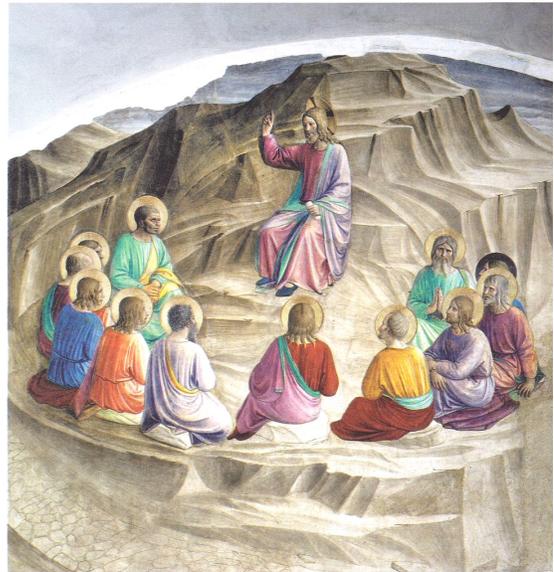
THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

FAITH

HOPE

LOVE

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



We have learned that God made us for Himself. He created all things in order to share something of the infinite love and happiness *He is* with created persons, both angelic and human. But He did not create us in our final end, in the state of heaven. Rather, He created us *in pilgrimage toward Him*, so that we could come to freely love Him through cooperating with His grace, and thereby come to our final end. In this way, the gift of heaven that God wants to share with us has the chance of being internalized within us, rather than externally imposed without our involvement. St. Augustine once said that although God created us without us, He did not will to save us without us. The whole purpose of this life, then, is to let God's love grow and be internalized within us, and to live in and by that love, so that we can one day be united with Him Who is Eternal Love. This is what the Christian life, or the "moral" or "spiritual" life, is all about. It is the journey of love toward Eternal Love.

We cannot make it to our destination by our own power, however. Eternal life, and the grace of God that leads us there is a gratuitous gift of God. We are also unworthy of heaven because of sin, as we have learned. In Christ, the Son of God—fully God—has become man, in order to forgive us, heal us, save us from sin, and sanctify us and our lives, so that He might lead us through this life to heaven, our ultimate destination. Jesus is the only way to eternal life, therefore, since it is only through Him that we receive God's forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). He is our Savior and the way to the Father. Thus, the whole Christian life can be summarized by Jesus' invitation to His disciples, "follow me" (Mt 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21, 28; Jn 1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 21:19-22). Jesus tells all of us, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). He is calling us to receive the healing of His light, to follow it in faith, to be transformed by it, and to radiate it to others, on our way to Eternal Light. Eternal life is the completion of a holy life lived now.

Jesus showed us how to live by His example, and He taught us how to live by His words. There are many aspects to the way of life He showed and taught us, and we find these throughout the Gospels and New Testament. Jesus also built upon and deepened the ideals of the Old Testament by stressing the interior dimension of the heart, and God's working therein. Although we find the call to holiness and the different dimensions of holiness all throughout the Bible, there are certain passages which give us certain lists, or summaries, of moral ideals. The following are some examples, which you are encouraged to read and pray over:

- Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2-17; Dt 5:6-21)
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:1-2)
- Cardinal Virtues (Wis 8:7)
- Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12)
- Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7)
- Other Discourses of Jesus (Mt 10; 13; 18; 24-25; Jn 14-17)
- Corporal Works of Mercy (Mt 25:35-36)
- Fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)
- Theological Virtues (1 Cor 13:13)
- Moral Exhortations of St. Paul (Rom 12; 1 Cor 13; Eph 4-5; Col 3)

When we assemble all of these passages and the spiritual and moral ideals found throughout Scripture, common themes emerge. Below we will attempt to list and summarize the moral and spiritual themes of Jesus and the Bible.

Love of God

Relationship with Christ:

- "Follow me." —Mt 9:9
- "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." —Jn 8:12
- "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."
—Jn 14:6
- "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." —Jn 15:4-5
- "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher." —Mt 10:25
- "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." —Gal 2:20
- "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as

refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that if possible I may attain the Resurrection from the dead.” —Phil 3:8-11

- “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?” —2 Cor 13:5
- “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” —Col 3:6-7
- “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” —Phil 1:21

Relationship with the Father through Christ:

- “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father who art in heaven. . .’” —Mt 6:9
- “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.” —Mt 11:25-27
- “In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall ask the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father.” —Jn 16:26-27
- “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’” —Gal 4:6
- “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” —Eph 3:14-19

Relationship with the Holy Spirit:

- “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you.” —Jn 14:16-17
- “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”
—Jn 14:26
- “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare

The Christian Life

to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.” —Jn 16:13-14

- “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” —Gal 5:25
- “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”
—Rom 8:5, 26
- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” —Gal 5:22-25

The Indwelling of God:

- “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” —Jn 14:22

Love of God:

- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” —Mk 12:30

Prayer:

- “And in the morning, a great while before day, He (Jesus) rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed.” —Mk 1:35
- “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” —Mt 6:6
- “And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this: ‘Our Father who art in heaven. . .’” —Mt 6:7-9
- “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” —Mt 7:7
- “Pray constantly.” —1 Th 5:23
- “And He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. . .” —Lk 18:1
- “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men.” —1 Tim 2:1

Gratitude / Thanksgiving:

- “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...” —Mt 11:25
- “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” —Jn 11:41
- “And He took a chalice, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them. . .”
—Mt 26:27
- “Give thanks in all circumstances.” —1 Th 5:18
- “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”
—Eph 5:20

Repentance / Conversion / Turning Away From Sin

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel.” —Mk 1:15
- “I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” —Lk 13:5
- “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.” —Jn 8:11
- “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” —Lk 18:13

Holiness

Seeking Perfection:

- “You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” —Mt 5:48
- “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
—1 Th 5:23-24
- “And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” —Jas 1:4

Holiness:

- “As He Who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” —1 Pt 1:16
- “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” —1 Th 4:3
- “For just as you once yielded your members to impurity, so now yield them to righteousness for sanctification.” —Rom 6:19
- “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” —Heb 12:14
- “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness.” —2 Pt 3:11

Growth in Holiness:

- “And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord Who is the Spirit.” —2 Cor 3:18
- “Excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us.” —2 Cor 8:7
- “Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more.” I—1 Th 4:1
- “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.” —Pr 4:18

Example:

- “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”
—Jn 13:15
- “Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”
—1 Tim 4:12

Righteousness / Goodness / Justice

Seek good, avoid evil:

- “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.” —Rom 12:9
- “Test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every evil.” —1 Th 5:21-22
- “He who does good is of God.” —3 Jn 11
- “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
—Mt 5:6

Bearing good fruit:

- “So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. . . Thus you will know them by their fruits.” —Mt 7:17, 20
- “But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” —Mk 4:20
- “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.” —Jn 15:8

Good Works:

- “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” —Eph 2:10
- “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” —Heb 10:24
- “All Scripture is inspired by God. . . that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” —2 Tim 3:17

Obedience / God's Will

God's Will:

- “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” —Mt 7:21
- “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” —Lk 6:46

Obedience:

- “He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”
—Phil 2:8
- “Love does not insist on its own way.” —1 Cor 13:5
- “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” —Eph 5:21
- “Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give an account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.” —Heb 13:17
- “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.” —Rom 13:1

Faith, Hope, Love

Faith:

- “Believe in God, believe also in me.” —Jn 14:1
- “We walk by faith, not by sight.” —2 Cor 5:7
- “Without faith it is impossible to please (God).” —Heb 11:6

Hope:

- “In hope (Abraham) believed against hope.” —Rom 4:18
- “Rejoice in your hope.” —Rom 12:12
- “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.”
—Heb 6:19-20

Love:

- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” —Mk 12:30
- “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” —Mk 12:31
- “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
—Jn 13:35
- “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”
—Jn 15:12

- “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” —Rom 5:5
- “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” —Lk 6:27-8
- “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” —Jn 14:5
- “And above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” —Col 3:14
- “Let all that you do be done in love.” —1 Cor 16:14
- “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” —Eph 5:1-2
- “Owe no one anything, except to love one another.” —Rom 13:8
- “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.” —Gal 5:6
- “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will all pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
—1 Cor 13:1-13
- “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”
—1 Jn 4:16

Love of Neighbor

Building up the Body of Christ:

- “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
—1 Cor 12:7
- “Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the Church.” —1 Cor 14:12
- “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him Who is the Head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.” —Eph 4:15-16

The Christian Life

Kindness: Kindness is listed as one of the “fruits of the Spirit” that St. Paul lists for us in his letter to the Galatians (5:22-23). It is also a virtue extolled in many other passages.

- “. . . but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way. . . by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God. . .” —2 Cor 6:4-7
- “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” —Eph 4:32

Gentleness: Jesus describes Himself as “gentle” (Mt 11:29). St. Paul also refers to the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor 10:1). Like kindness, “gentleness” is mentioned as one of the “fruits of the Spirit” and extolled in various passages in the Bible.

- “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted.” —Gal 6:1
- “But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” —1 Tim 6:11
- “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity.” —Jas 3:17
- “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence. . .” —1 Pt 3:15

Hospitality:

- “Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.” —Rom 12:13
- “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” —Heb 13:2
- “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.” —1 Pt 4:9

Fraternal Correction:

- “Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” —Lk 17:3
- “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” —Gal 6:1-2
- “My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” —Jas 5:19-20
- “He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace.”
—Pr 10:10

- “If I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life.” —Ezk 33:8-9

Mercy

Mercy

- “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” —Mt 5:7
- “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” —Lk 6:36

Compassion:

- “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them. . .” —Mt 9:36
- “And He arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”—Lk 15:20
- “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion...” —Col 3:12

Forgiving Others

- “. . . and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. . .”
—Mt 5:12
- “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you your trespasses; but if you do not forgive their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” —Mt 6:14-15
- “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” —Lk 6:37
- “Then Peter came up and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.’” —Mt 18:21-22
- “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’”—Lk 23:34
- “And he (Stephen) knelt down and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’” —Acts 7:60

Works of Mercy

- “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. . . Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”
—Mt 25:34-36, 40

Humility

Poverty of Spirit:

- “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” —Mt 5:3

Humility:

- “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” —Lk 18:14
- “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” —Lk 17:10
- “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.” —Phil 2:3
- “Cloth yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” —1 Pet 5:5
- “The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself.” —Sir 3:18
- “The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds.” —Sir 35:17

Childlikeness:

- “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” —Mt 18:3

Meekness / Lowliness:

- “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” —Mt 5:4
- “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” —Jas 3:13

Self-knowledge / Self-Examination:

- “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” —Mt 7:3
- “Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”
—1 Cor 11:28
- “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith.” —2 Cor 13:5

Patience / Perseverance

Patience:

- “And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.” —Lk 8:15
- “For He will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life.”
—Rom 2:7

- “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” —Eph 4:2
- “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience. . .” —Col 3:12
- “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”
—Jas 5:10

Perseverance:

- “But he who endures to the end will be saved.” —Mt 10:22 (& 24:13)
- “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” —Heb 12:1
- “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” —Rev 2:10
- “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” —1 Cor 10:13

Suffering / Self-Denial / the Way of the Cross

The Scriptures teach us that the way to heaven is by way of the cross, but that God blesses us through the cross. We can thereby always find meaning and even joy in the cross:

- “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.” —Mt 5:10-12
- “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?” —Mt 16:24-26
- “. . . and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on a rock.” —Mt 7:25
- “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away; and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” —Jn 15:1-2

- “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” —Acts 5:41
- “Suffering produces endurance.” —Rom 5:3
- “. . . we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified in Him.” —Rom 8:16-17
- “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.” —Rom 8:28
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” —2 Cor 1:3-5
- “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church.”
—Col 1:24
- “Indeed all who desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
—2 Tim 3:12
- “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” —Jas 1:2-4
- “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” —1 Pt 1:6-7
- “Those whom I love I reprove and chastise.” —Rev 3:19

Self-Control / Discipline / Fasting

Self-Control: Yet another “fruit of the Spirit,” and a commonly extolled virtue in the Bible:

- “Every athlete exercise self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” —1 Cor 9:25
- “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.” —2 Tim 1:7
- “For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” —2 Pt 2:10

Discipline:

- “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” —Heb 12:11
- “Be disciplined in all your conduct.” —Tob 4:14

Fasting:

- “The days will come, when the Bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” —Mt 9:15
- “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father Who is in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you.” —Mt 6:17-18

Simplicity of Life / Generosity

Treasure in Heaven:

- “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” —Mt 6:19-21
- “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.” —Lk 12:32-33
- “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money).” —Mt 6:24

Anxiety and Trust:

- “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Generosity:

- “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” —Acts 20:35
- “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.” —Lk 6:38
- “But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.” —Lk 11:41

- “Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you.” —Mt 6:2-4

Purity / Chastity / Marriage

Purity of Heart:

- “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” —Mt 5:8
- “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” —Mt 5:27-28
- “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” —1 Tim 4:12
- “Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.”
—1 Tim 5:2

Body as Temple of the Holy Spirit:

- “Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” —1 Cor 6:18-20

Marriage and Divorce:

- “For your hardness of heart (Moses) wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. . . . Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” —Mk 10:5-12
- “Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.” —Rom 7:2-3

Wisdom / Prudence

- “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” —Mt 10:16

- “Yet wisdom is justified by her children.” —Lk 1:17
- “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.”
—1 Cor 2:6-7
- “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.” —Is 11:1-3
- “And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for men than these.” —Wis 8:7

Courage / Fortitude

- “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. —1 Cor 16:13
- “I will make them strong in the Lord.” —Zech 10:12
- “The Lord is my strength and my song.” —Ps 118:14
- “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”
—Acts 4:31

Strength in Weakness:

- “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. . . for when I am weak, then I am strong.” —2 Cor 12:9-10

Joy

- “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” —Jn 15:11
- “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” —Jn 16:24
- “But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” —Jn 17:13
- “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”
—Mt 13:44
- “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” —Lk 1:46
- “God loves a cheerful giver.” —2 Cor 9:7
- “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” —Phil 4:4
- “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, but when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”
—Mt 13:20-21

Peace

- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” —Jn 14:27
- “I have said this to you, that in me you may find peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” —Jn 16:33
- “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” —Phil 4:6-7
- “May the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways.” —2 Th 3:16
- “. . . eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” —Eph 4:3
- You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in you.”
—Is 26:3

Silence and Speech

Silence:

- “Be still and know that I am God.” —Ps 46:10
- “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation.” —Ps 62:1
- “Aspire to live quietly.” —1 Th 4:11
- “Lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.” —1 Tim 2:2
- “. . . the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” —1 Pt 3:4
- “Work in quietness.” —2 Th 3:12
- “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” —Jas 1:19
- “(There is) a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” —Eccl 3:7
- “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” —Is 30:15

Speech:

- “Do not swear at all. . . Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’” —Mt 5:34-37
- “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” —Mt 12:34-37
- “When they deliver you up, do not be anxious about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” —Mt 10:19-20
- “(Strive) to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy to all men.”
—Titus 3:1-2

The Christian Life

- “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only as is good for edifying, that it may impart grace to those who hear.” —Eph 4:29
- “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.” —Col 4:6
- “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.” —Pr 10:11
- “If anyone makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man.” —Jas 3:2
- “Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.”
—1 Jn 3:18

Service

- “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” —Mk 10:45
- “For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.” —Lk 22:27
- “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.” —Jn 12:26
- “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” —Jn 13:14-17
- “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” —1 Cor 12:4-7
- “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” —1 Pt 4:11
- “Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers.” —3 Jn 5

Work

- “Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary...?” —Mk 6:3
- “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” —1 Cor 15:58
- “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.” —Col 3:23-4

Evangelization

- “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” —Mt 5:13-16
- “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.” —Mk 5:19
- “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” —Mt 28:18-20
- “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
—Mk 16:15-16
- “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” —Lk 24:46-49
- “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” —Jn 20:21
- “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” —1 Cor 9:16

Grace

Grace:

- “He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” —Eph 1:6
- “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast.” —Eph 2:5-9
- “But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”
—Eph 4:7

Salvation:

- “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” —Titus 2:11-14
- “God our Savior... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” —1 Tim 2:3-4
- “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds done in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might become heirs in hope of eternal life.” —Titus 3:4-7

Justification:

- “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” —Rom 3:23-4
- “For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.” —Rom 10:10
- “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” —1 Cor 6:11

Cooperation with Grace / Sanctification:

- “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” —1 Thes 4:3
- “For just as you once yielded your members to impurity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.” —Rom 6:19
- “And I am sure that He Who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” —Phil 1:6
- “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” —Phil 2:12-13

Summary

Reading through all of these themes, a general picture of the Christian life emerges. We can begin to better understand the whole and the parts, and to synthesize. Catholic spirituality and moral teaching provides us with this synthesis. The following page contains a kind of summary of the Christian life according to traditional lists of spiritual and moral ideals. One can better appreciate the depth and power of these ideals and lists after reading through the previously mentioned passages and verses from Scripture.

The whole Christian life, with all of these ideals, can be summarized by the two greatest commandments of love of God and neighbor (Mk 12:28).

After this initial overview, in this third section of the binder—on the Christian life—we will explore the different dimensions of the Christian life more in depth. Although there is overlap, for the sake of convenience, the material will be grouped into two main divisions, according to the two greatest commandments (Mk 12:28-34):

1. ***Love of God***, including: Our Relationship with God (Commandments 1-3), The Gift of Grace, The Guidance of God's Law, Virtue, Human Action, The Passions, Conscience, Sin
2. ***Love of Neighbor***, including: The Social Teaching of the Church, The Dignity of Life (5th Commandment), The Family (4th Commandment), Societies and Nations (4th Commandment), Creation and Material Goods (7th and 10th Commandments), Truth and Communication (8th Commandment), Service, Evangelization

Note that the spiritual and moral dimensions to marriage and sexuality (6th and 9th Commandments) are covered under the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What strikes you about this collection of Christian ideals from Scripture?*
2. *How might it help to memorize and meditate upon the spiritual and moral ideals found on the next page?*
3. *How is the Christian life related to Christian belief, worship, and prayer?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Ex 20 & Dt 6 / ***CCC:*** 2052-2195

The Christian Life

Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Theological Virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Faith
Hope
Love

Cardinal Virtues (Wisdom 8:7)

Prudence
Justice
Fortitude
Temperance

Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Wisdom
Understanding
Counsel
Might/Fortitude
Knowledge
Piety
Fear of the Lord

Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

Love
Joy
Peace
Patience
Kindness
Goodness
Generosity
Gentleness
Faithfulness
Modesty
Self-Control
Chastity

Evangelical Counsels (Matthew 19)

Chastity
Poverty
Obedience

Corporal Works of Mercy (Matthew 25:35-36)

Feed the hungry.
Give drink to the thirsty.
Clothe the naked.
Shelter the homeless.
Visit the sick.
Visit the imprisoned.
Bury the dead.

Spiritual Works of Mercy (Rom 12 & 1 Th 5:14-15)

Counsel the doubtful.
Instruct the ignorant.
Admonish sinners.
Comfort the afflicted.
Forgive offenses.
Bear wrongs patiently.
Pray for the living and the dead.

Ten Commandments / Decalogue (Exodus 20:2-17 & Deuteronomy 5:6-21)

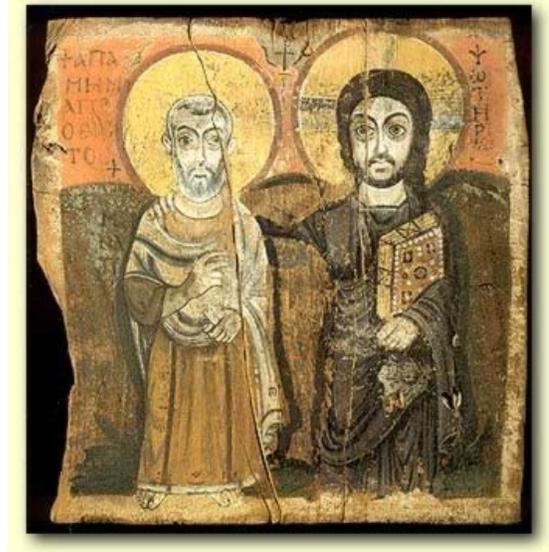
1. I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD’S day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.

Five Precepts of the Church

1. You shall attend mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and remain free from work or activity that could impede the sanctification of such days.
2. You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
3. You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.
4. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
5. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

Also: The Way of Humility (Luke 14:7-11) & The Way of the Cross (Matthew 16:24-26)

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD



The Christian life is *Theocentric*. That is, it is centered in God. Our creation flows from God. God calls us to Himself as our ultimate destiny. And, through the Son and the Holy Spirit, God saves us, accompanies us, and guides us to Himself.

And because God comes to us through the becoming-flesh of His Son (the Incarnation), the Christian life is also inherently *Christocentric*. That is, it is centered in our relationship with Christ and flows from this relationship. We are, thus, called to follow Christ, to confess Him as Lord, to pray to Him and constantly converse with Him, to center our life and activities in Him, to abide in Him, to imitate Him, to love and trust Him, to find healing and forgiveness in Him, to think according to the mind of Christ, to love with His love, to live by His grace and teaching, and to let Him sanctify us through the Church, Sacraments, Scriptures, and prayer, and to guide our lives to eternal life. We come to know the Father through Him, and through the Spirit Who unites us to Christ.

How do we relate to God?

It is important to realize that God first relates to us, and that He enables us to have a relationship with Him. He is truly desirous of having a loving relationship with us. He created us so that we can come to know and love Him. He revealed Himself to us so that we could come to know and love Him. He saved us through the blood of His Son, so that we might return to Him, come to know and love Him in this life through Christ, and to know and love Him for all eternity.

Our relationship with God, then, is always a response to His relationship with us. This is what grace is about, which we will explore in the next section. Grace enables us to know and love God in prayer, which we will explore later as well. For now, we will discuss our relationship with God in general terms, and how we are called to glorify Him in our lives.

In this section, then, we will cover certain aspects of our relationship with God, namely our *Filial Adoption* or *Adoption as Children of God*, the *Indwelling Trinity*, and our relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit. We will also cover the *Theological Virtues* and the first three of the *Ten Commandments*.

What is “Filial Adoption”?

We have discussed how, when the Son of God becomes man, He begins to live out in His humanity the intimate relationship which He had with the Father in eternity. We see this powerfully illustrated in the prayer and words of Jesus, Who is always speaking to or about the Father. Jesus used the Aramaic word “Abba” (father) when speaking to or about God, thus demonstrating the intimate way He related to God (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). This deeply impressed the disciples who desired a share in the intimate relationship that Jesus had with the Father. They expressed this desire when they told Jesus, “teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). In Baptism, as we have learned, we become adopted sons and daughters of God in the Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. We are indeed given a share in the relationship that Jesus has with His Father, so that we now relate to God the Father from the Heart of His Son, God having claimed us as His own in and through His Son. There are many passages of Scripture which highlight our identity as children of God through Christ (Mt 5:9; Lk 20:36; Jn 1:12; 11:52; Rom 8:14-21; 9:8, 26; Gal 3:26; 4:4; Eph 5:1; Phil 2:15; 1 Jn 3:1, 4:4; 10; 5:2). We are called to live out and grow in this relationship with God our Father, through His Son, all the days of our lives. We do this by praying frequently to the Father through the Son, and by letting His grace grow in our hearts. The Holy Spirit in particular helps us to grow in this living-out of our *Filial Adoption* by the gift of *Piety*, one of the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Isaiah (11:1-2). The Holy Spirit, indeed, unites us to Jesus and helps us to know and live out more deeply our graced identity as children of God.

What is the “Indwelling Trinity”?

Through grace, we are not only united with the Father through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. God comes to dwell within us. Jesus explains: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:22); and, with regard to the Holy Spirit: “you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you” (Jn 14:17). We are not always conscious of the Trinity’s presence within us, but God is calling us to become increasingly aware of His presence within, and to grow in our relationship with the Trinity all our life, until we are eternally united to the Trinity in heaven. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity is one saint who devoted her life to understanding this mystery, living in union with the Indwelling Trinity, and writing about this mystery.

How should we relate to Christ?

In Scripture, we find different aspects of the relationship with Christ we are each called to have and grow in:

- *Discipleship*: Jesus calls us to be His disciples. This dimension of our relationship with Christ is highlighted when Jesus invites us to follow Him (Mk 1:16-20), and when Jesus is referred to as our Lord (Mt 7:21-22; 12:8; 22:42-45; Lk 1:43; 2:11; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11), Savior (Lk 2:11; Jn 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 2 Pt 1:11; 2:20; 3:18; 1 Jn 4:14), Shepherd (Mt 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Jn 10:2-16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pt 2:25; 5:4; Rev 7:17), Leader, (Acts 5:31), Teacher or Rabbi (Mt 10:24-25; 26:18; Mk 4:38; Lk 6:40; Jn 1:38; 3:2; 11:28; 13:14; 20:16), illuminator (Jn 8:12), example to be imitated (Jn 13:15; 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Th 1:6; 1 Pt 2:21), etc. It is our task, then, to adore, learn from, imitate, obey, follow, surrender to, and be guided by Christ.
- *Friendship*: Jesus also calls us to have an intimate, confident, and loving relationship with Him. He calls us to divine friendship. At the Last Supper, He tells us, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). The “beloved disciple” in the Gospel of John is also a model for us, illustrating the kind of relationship we are called to have with Jesus (Jn 13:23). As His friends, we are called to gaze upon the radiant face of the risen Christ (2 Cor 4:6) and to speak confidently to Him, as one would do with a close friend (Mk 1:40; Mt 8:25; Acts 7:59).
- *Source of Grace*: Jesus is also a source of grace for us. Through Him, we have access to the Father (Jn 14:6). Through Him, we receive the grace and truth that come from God (Jn 1:17). Through Him, we are made righteous by faith (Rom 3:22; 5:17). Through Him, we receive redemption (Rom 3:24), justification and peace (Rom 5:1), joy in God (Rom 5:11), grace (Rom 5:15), eternal life (Rom 5:21), victory (1 Cor 15:57), and even our existence (1 Cor 8:6). Christ also works through us (Heb 13:21; 2 Cor 5:20). We are then invited to always pray to God our Father through Christ (Rom 1:8; 2 Cor 3:4), and to look to Him for grace and help in time of need (Heb 4:16). We therefore have a kind of *interior reciprocity* with God through Christ: God gives us spiritual gifts through Christ, while we pray, thank, and go to God through Christ.
- *Indwelling*: Christ not only works in and through us; He lives within us, as does the entire Trinity. In His priestly prayer at the Last Supper, Jesus prays that the love with which the Father has loved Him may be in His disciples, even as He may be in His disciples (Jn 17:26). St. Paul also mentions the following things: “But if Christ is in you. . .” (Rom 8:10); “Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Cor 13:5); “. . . that

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17). And, in the Gospel of John in particular, *mutual indwelling* between Christ and a believer is stressed: “In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20); “Abide in me and I in you. . . He who abides in me, and I in him. . . if you abide in me, and my words abide in you. . .” (Jn 15:4, 5, 7).

- *Union*: The New Testament calls us not only to follow Christ, to converse with Him in friendship, to look to Him as a font of God’s grace, and to dwell in Christ, even as He dwells in us. It also calls us to be “one with Christ,” that is, to be mystically united to Him. We hear about this mystical union of Christ in various expressions of St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:22); “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21); “But he who is united to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor 6:17). In other places, Paul speaks about being *conformed to Christ*: “For those whom He (God) foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren (Rom 8:29); “My little children, with whom I am in travail until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal 4:19); “I have been crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20); “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8); “. . . that I may know Him and the power of His Resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11). Thus, the Scriptures are calling us to be deeply united with, and conformed to, the risen Christ and the mysteries of His life.

We can see, then, that the Scriptures outline these different dimensions of our relationship with Christ. They also call us to grow in all of these areas through cultivating our relationship with Christ in these different areas, through grace, faith-filled reception of the Sacraments, prayer, love, and virtue.

How should we relate to the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit unites us mystically with Christ. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the guide and master of our moral and spiritual life, and helps us grow in the life of Christ. The Sacred Scriptures speak of the Holy Spirit descending on us (Mk 1:10; Lk 1:35; Jn 1:32-33; Acts 2; 19:6), resting on us (Acts 2:3), filling us (Acts 2:4; Eph 2:22), inspiring the Scriptures (Acts 1:16; 4:25; 28:25; 2 Pt 1:21) and us (Acts 1:2; 8:39; 19:21), establishing the Church’s leaders (Acts 20:38), teaching us (Jn 14:26), moving us (Acts 13:4; 20:22; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18), endowing us with spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1-13), praying in us (Rom 8:26-27), bearing fruit in us (Gal 5:22-23), strengthening us (4:31), empowering us to witness to Christ and our faith (Acts 1:8; 4:31; 10:44), and speaking in and through us (Mt 10:20; Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2). We in turn are called to be taught, formed, led, healed, sanctified, and gifted by the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. Yet, we are encouraged to always pray for a deeper share of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus instructs us to pray specifically for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13). The Church also encourages us to pray directly

to the Holy Spirit for His help and gifts. The spiritual life, indeed, is one that is inspired, led, and directed by the Holy Spirit. He is the Divine Guest and Artist within.

What are the “Theological Virtues”?

God calls and gifts us to know and love Him through the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. There are several places in Scripture where these three virtues appear together (1 Cor 13:13; Col 1:4-5; 1 Th 1:3; 5:8). St. Paul also accentuates their prominence and speaks of love as the most preeminent of all the virtues (1 Cor 13:13). Each of these virtues is also highlighted individually throughout the Scriptures.

In human life we speak of a kind of human faith, a human hope, and a human love. But when we speak of the “theological” virtues, we mean divine faith, divine hope, and divine love. In other words, the theological virtues are virtues that have been implanted within us by God. For this reason, they are called *infused virtues*. We cannot produce them within ourselves. They must come from God, as a gift of grace in our minds and hearts through the sacrament of Baptism.

As they come from God, they are also oriented back to God. God moves us to believe in Him through the faith He gives us. God moves us to hope in Him through the hope He inspires within us. God moves us to love Him with the gift of His love that He places in our hearts. God, then, is the author and the principal object of the theological virtues. God calls us to know and love Him through faith, hope, and love.

What is Faith?

In the Gospel, Jesus called His disciples to faith, that is, to respond in total trust to the God Who has come to us in Christ. Faith, then, is a response to grace. It is God moving us to surrender to Him. It does not only involve the intellect. It is necessarily total, involving the whole of ourselves: mind, heart, body, and life. *Personal faith* is this graced entrustment of our entire selves to God. Intrinsic to this personal faith is the faith by which we believe everything that God has revealed to us through Christ and His Church. On the one hand, this *divine* or *theological* faith is certain—more certain than things we know through reason, since God guarantees the content of faith. On the other hand, our faith is veiled: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. . . We walk by faith, not by sight” (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 5:7).

Sins against faith, then, involve some reservation on our part. If we seek to only follow and accept God on our own terms, then we are not truly entrusting ourselves to God in faith. *Lack of trust*, then, is a sin against personal faith. *Willful Doubt* or *Unbelief* is insincere doubt. It is not questioning for the sake of finding truth. It is rather a skeptical questioning involving a predisposition against the truth, often accompanied by ridicule. This predisposition of unbelief

arises as a psychological reaction to a truth which, if embraced, would demand a change in one's belief and behavior. *Heresy* involves willfully believing something contrary to the teaching of Christ and the Church. *Apostasy*, in turn, is a total repudiation of the faith. *Schism* is a breaking-away from the community of faith, and is also a sin against charity. True faith, on the other hand, involves trusting God totally and accepting everything that He reveals through Christ and His Church, even if it is sometimes difficult to understand.

What is Hope?

Hope is the graced virtue by which God draws us to eternal life with Him. Though we are weak and unable to give ourselves eternal life, theological hope is founded on the infallible promises of God, not on human contingencies. Hope is the virtue by which we rely on God's grace to forgive us, make us holy, overcome sin, help us to love and serve, and lead us to eternal life.

Sins against the virtue of hope involve not relying on God's grace, either by *Presumption* or, oppositely, by *Despair*. One form of the sin of *Presumption* involves relying too much on oneself and one's own strength. Another form involves giving myself permission to sin on the presumption that God will forgive me. *Despair*, on the other hand, is the sin of thinking I am too weak, that God would never forgive me, or that my weakness is beyond what God can help with. Despair is giving up on God. Thus, presumption relies too much on our own strength, while despair fails to trust in the power and interest of God to help us. In contrast, true hope involves relying on God and trusting that He can and wants to forgive and help us. In hope, God wants us to trust in His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness, and to look forward to eternal life.

What is Love?

Love can be thought of in different ways: as an emotional affection for (and attraction to) someone or something, as a feeling of affirmation, as willing the good of another, or as the experience of mutual care between persons (among family and friends). Theological love involves these dimensions. However, as graced, it is deeper, since it is a sharing in God's eternal love, which God manifested in Christ and shared with us through the Gift of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Because God's love has been shared with us, we can then love others with the very love with which God has loved us in Christ. This is why Jesus calls us to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

Theological love, then, is God's love in our hearts. It is God's love moving us to love Him with all our hearts (Mk 12:30-31). It is also a love that overflows to others, loving also those created in God's image. For this reason, the New Testament exhorts us to love believers with a special love (1 Th 4:9-10; 1 Pt 1:22; 3:8; 1 Jn 3:14, 16), but also to love "all men" (1 Th

3:12) and even our “enemies” (Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27). This love is also a witness to, and proof of, Christian discipleship: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

The Christian is called to do everything in love: “abide in my love” (Jn 15:9); “let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor 16:14). It is the central virtue that binds all other virtues together: “And over all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14). Love, in fact, is so central, that anything done without love is useless (1 Cor 13:1-3).

Love expresses itself in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, listed in the previous section (p. 177). Love also produces joy and peace within us. St. Teresa of Kolkata (a.k.a. “Mother Teresa”) encouraged us all to do little things with great love, and to live our ordinary lives with extraordinary love.

Love is difficult, however. It can be difficult to love God fully, to be selfless and to do good to others when it is not appreciated, to forgive others when they wrong us, or to consistently make time for God and others. The sins against love, then, include selfishness, egoism, lack of mercy, failure to forgive others, and sometimes even the failure to challenge and confront others when they are doing wrong.

What are the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are a list of divine commands given to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Ex 20:2-17; Dt 5:6-21). They highlight basic moral obligations. Through them, God highlights to us the supreme importance of our relationship with Him, as well as the highly important goods of life, family, marriage, the created world and its goods, truthful speech, and pure thoughts and desires. Jesus teaches the rich young man that the Ten Commandments are necessary for salvation: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). Jesus also deepens our understanding of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) and His moral teachings.

The first three commandments have to do with our relationship with God. The last seven highlight our right relationship with others. As we will see later, the virtue of *Justice* is the virtue of relationships—the virtue of giving to others what is their due. Thus, the first three commandments spell out what we owe God; the last seven articulate the respect we owe others. These two aspects of justice parallel the two great commandments of love of God and neighbor. We can thus see how the Ten Commandments illustrate the basic requirements for both justice and love.

The Ten Commandments, as adapted by the Church, are:

1. I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Since our focus here is our relationship with God, we will address the first three commandments now. The others we will cover later.

What does the First Commandment teach us?

The first commandment teaches us to put God above all things. It also warns us of loving ourselves or anything created more than Him. Positively, the First Commandment invites us to adore God and live out our relationship with Him in prayer, and in great faith, hope, and love. Negatively, the First Commandment warns us against the following sins:

- *Idolatry*: worshipping someone or something other than God, or placing something else ahead of God in importance in our lives
- *Superstition*: the attempt to manipulate God through pagan, ritual actions
- *Atheism*: denial of God's existence
- *Agnosticism*: refusal to be open to God's existence
- *Indifferentism*: being indifferent to the reality of God
- *Hatred toward God*
- *Ingratitude toward God*, as well as lukewarmness and spiritual laziness (*acedia*)
- *Sins against faith, hope, and love* (as summarized on pages 182-183)

What does the Second Commandment teach us?

The Second Commandment teaches us about honoring God and His Holy Name in our speech. Positively, it invites us to always reverence God—as well as holy persons and things—in our thoughts, words, and actions. Whenever we speak of God and holy persons or things, we should do so with great respect, reverence, and love. Negatively, it warns us against the following sins:

- *Abuse of God's Name / Irreverence:* speaking about God and holy persons or things disrespectfully, casually, or flippantly
- *Blasphemy:* thoughts or words of defiance and disrespect toward God
- *Unnecessary Oaths:* swearing by God lightly and/or deceptively
- *Sacrilege:* desecrating a holy person or thing; for example, doing something horrible to the Holy Eucharist, or vandalizing or destroying a church

What does the Third Commandment teach us?

The Third Commandment teaches us to honor the Lord's Day. Positively, we fulfill this commandment by putting God first on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection and New Sabbath. This involves the serious obligation of going to Mass every Sunday. There can be good excuses to miss Mass on a Sunday: illness, serious weather, and the inability to make it because of distance, necessary work, or when someone who needs care is dependent on you. In this case, one should try to fulfill one's obligation insofar as possible; for example, watching Mass on television, or reading through the Sunday Scriptures, or taking extra time to pray. Sundays are also days to rest, recreate, cultivate relationships, and do works of charity. We should do our best to refrain from all unnecessary working, buying, and selling. It is sometimes necessary that certain people work on Sundays, since their work involves service to the public and common good. Sometimes someone's employment requires work on Sundays, and other sufficient employment might not be available. God understands our human limitations and does not expect us to do what is beyond our reasonable control. However, each of us is called to do our best to go to Mass, pray, rest, recreate, cultivate relationships and do works of charity.

For Catholics, this commandment also includes the Holy Days of Obligation.

The sins against this commandment are:

- *Failure to go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days when there is no weighty reason*
- *Doing unnecessary work*

THE GIFT OF GRACE



Grace is a central concept in the Scriptures, and in the spiritual life. In English, when we say that someone “has grace,” or is “graceful,” we mean that he/she is elegant and beautiful in appearance or action. Theologically, however, grace is a way of describing how we share in God’s life.

In the Old Testament, we discover the roots of the idea of grace in the concepts of *Holiness*, *Election*, and *God’s Favor*. In the first chapter of Genesis, we see that God creates everything “good,” that is, with its own inherent dignity and value, reflective of God’s goodness. Nothing created is in itself *holy*, however. *Holiness* is a way of speaking of what belongs to God. Yet, we do hear of God “hallowing,” or “making holy,” the Sabbath day. This is a way of speaking about how God has called human beings to share in His own reality. In the Sabbath, human beings are called to enter into God’s rest, and into a loving relationship with God, through His gift of holiness, or grace. Thus, holiness is a gift over and above the created order. It is an invitation and offer that springs from God’s unique love toward us, an invitation and offer to share in His life.

The concept of *Election* concerns God’s special and loving choice for Israel to be His own people. This choice is preceded by God’s choice of the patriarchs, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. It is followed by a progressive self-disclosure of God, and the formation and building up of His people, until this *divine election* will extend to all the peoples of the earth through Jesus, His Son (see Gen 12:1-3).

God’s Favor is at times spoken of in the prophets (Jer 31:2; Zech 4:7; 11:7, 11) and wisdom books (Wis 4:15; Sir 37:21). The idea here is that God has shown favor to His people, a favor which is a free and loving gift, a favor which resides within His people.

All of these rich concepts are contained in the New Testament notion of grace. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will be the Mother of the Messiah, she is called “full of grace” (Lk 1:28), since God has prepared her to be the graced ground from which the seed of the Word of God would spring. In Jesus, then, the grace of God has become flesh:

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.
—Jn 1:14**

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all. —Titus 2:11

Jesus, then, is the fountainhead of grace from which we all receive:

And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. —Jn 1:16

In the Acts of the Apostles, we witness the early Christian community flourishing in God’s grace (4:33; 6:8; 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:11; 18:27; 20:24, 32).

St. Paul writes eloquently about God’s grace in Jesus to the Romans and Galatians, and in the following passages:

He (God) destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. —Eph 1:6

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He has loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. —Eph 2:5-9

**But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.
—Eph 4:7**

Grace, then, is God choosing us in love, and giving us a share in His life and holiness, through Christ. It is the totally gratuitous gift of His love and life, a gift we in no way could have earned, and a gift that saves us, heals and forgives us, equips and strengthens us, makes us His sons and daughters, sanctifies us, and leads us to eternal life.

In essence, therefore, *grace is something that comes from God and passes into us as a gift of His love, healing and transforming us on our journey to eternal life.* A helpful image of grace is that of an iron in a fire in a blacksmith's shop. When a piece of iron is put into the fire, something from the fire passes over into the iron. The iron turns red and glows, and thus more and more resembles the fire. It is transformed by the fire. It also "participates" in the heat and light of the fire. God is like that fire. Grace is the fire passing over into us, making us "participate" in God, making us resemble God, and transforming us from within. In this way, grace is God's life in us. And, insofar as grace makes us "participate" in God's life—and makes us *godlike*—we are said to be *divinized*. We don't *become* God literally. However, we *become* God by participation, in the fashion of a creature that is graced:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers in the divine nature.

—1 Pt 1:3-4

In Catholic tradition, we speak about different aspects of grace. Insofar as grace resides in our soul, we call it *Sanctifying* or *Habitual Grace*, given in Baptism. Insofar as we remain in sanctifying grace, we are said to be in a *State of Grace*, or in *God's Friendship*. Insofar as God moves a person to a state of grace—or assists and guides someone in a state of grace from moment to moment to live in charity—we call it *Actual* or *Assisting Grace*.

Once a person enters into a state of grace, he remains in that state unless and until he culpably commits a *Mortal Sin*, that is, a serious sin. God's grace in our souls is completely incompatible with serious sin. When a person in a state of grace commits a *Venial Sin*—that is, a less than grave sin—the state of grace remains but is weakened. When someone grows in charity, sanctifying grace increases within him. When persons are in a state of grace, they love God above all things, at least at a basic level. They are meant to grow in grace and charity all their lives.

How are we saved?

In short, all those who die in a state of grace (in God's friendship) will be saved, whereas all those who die in a state of mortal sin will not be saved. The following things are inherent to the state of grace:

- *Repentance*: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:3, 5). "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Love of God: The Gift of Grace

- *Humility*: “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). “Therefore let any one who thinks that he stand take heed, lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12).
- *Faith*: “Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (God)” (Heb 11:6).
- *Love*: “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).
- *Baptism*: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3, 5).
- *Partaking of the Eucharist*: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53).
- *Cooperation With Grace*: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-3).
- *Good Works & Deeds of Charity*: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?... So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:14, 17, 24). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10). “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food... truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:35 & 40).
- *Doing God’s Will*: “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21).
- *Holiness*: “Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).
- *Suffering with Christ*: “He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10:38). “We are children of God... and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17).
- *Perseverance*: “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt 10:22).

Can someone fall away from a state of grace and lose salvation?

Although some Christian denominations teach either “once saved, always saved,” or salvation through “faith alone,” the Scriptures teach very clearly that we can lose our salvation, and that faith just by itself is insufficient for salvation:

- “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4).
- “Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off” (Rom 11:22).
- “Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God... for we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end” (Heb 3:12 & 14).
- “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pt 2:20-21).
- “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?... So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead... You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:14, 17, 24).
- “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).

If we fall away from a state of grace through mortal sin, God is eagerly calling us back, ever desirous of forgiving us. Part of turning back involves a *Firm Purpose of Amendment*, as was explained in the section on the Sacrament of Penance. If we have fallen into mortal sin, we are called to turn to God in repentance and confidence in His mercy. We Catholics are also obliged to bring and confess all known mortal sins to Confession as soon as possible, and as a prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion again.

It should be noted that we can sin seriously and lose the state of grace without necessarily losing the gift of faith. In this case, our faith becomes a dead faith, until it is reanimated by God’s forgiveness and God’s love re-infused into our hearts. Persons can still believe in God while and after committing adultery or murder, for example, but unless they repent and return to a state of grace, whatever faith they had is insufficient for salvation. One only loses the grace of faith by sinning seriously and directly against it (as in the act of apostasy, for example). But if

one sins only against charity (by adultery or murder, or any other serious sin), one loses charity. And if one loses the grace of charity, or love, then one cannot be saved, no matter how much faith one has.

Justification is a word that describes the act whereby God, through the grace merited by Christ, saves and sanctifies us, cleansing us of sin and making us righteous—or “justified.” *Sanctification* follows upon justification. Sanctification is a word that describes the process of God making us holy and helping us to grow in the life of grace. God’s work of sanctification grows within us as we grow in holiness, but it diminishes through sin. Justification can be lost through mortal sin, but can be recovered through the grace of repentance and through Confession.

In summary, grace is God’s gift of Himself to us, through Christ. It is a gift that justifies, saves, heals, forgives, elevates, sanctifies, and leads us to eternal life. We are meant to grow more and more in grace all our lives. We are also called to be on guard against venial sin, which weakens the bond of grace, and mortal sin, which destroys it. If we fall away, God’s grace summons us to return to Him through repentance and through bringing our sins to Confession. If we die in a state of grace, we will be saved, although we likely will need to be perfected in *Purgatory*. If we die in a state of unrepentant, fully culpable mortal sin, however, we will be damned: we will have made a final decision against God, and God will honor our final decision.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is grace?*
2. *What effects does grace have on us?*
3. *What is relationship between grace and salvation, and what things are necessary for salvation?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Hebrews 8 / ***CCC:*** 1949-1986

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD'S LAW



God guides us by grace and by His words. We can refer to the totality of God's guiding words as the *Law*, the *Torah*, the *Way* (Dt 11:28; Acts 9:2; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22), or *His Ways* (Dt 11:2; 28:9; Acts 18:26).

In our society, the word "law" often has a negative connotation. We tend to think of law as restrictive, arbitrary, and burdensome. And, not infrequently, civil laws can indeed be restrictive, arbitrary, and burdensome. When we think of God's law, however, we have to think in completely different terms and on a higher plane. God's law does not restrict our freedom: it enables it. God's law is not arbitrary, but fully reasonable and enlightening. God's law is not burdensome, but leads to authentic happiness and fulfillment.

Indeed, God's law is enlightening and liberating:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. —Ps 119:105

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. —Pr 4:18

God's law is about ideals and goods. His law highlights the greatest goods and ideals in life for us, and guides us to attain those. It is the map that leads to the goal, with the grace of the Spirit. *God's law is a guide for human action.*

We speak of different types of "laws." The *Eternal Law* is God's ideals for all created things. The *Natural Law* is God's eternal law as applied to human beings. It is the totality of what is good for us according to our nature, and it is written on our hearts:

When the Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while

their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day, when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. —Rom 2:14-16

The basic instinctual precept of the Natural Law is to do good and avoid evil. Applied to the different dimensions of our humanity, the Natural Law moves us to honor God, to respect and cherish life, marriage, the family, our neighbor, the goods of others, and society as a whole, and to communicate honestly and order our thoughts and desires aright. In short, the Natural Law is instinctual and moves us through our conscience to act well in all dimensions of our humanity and of our life. The Natural Law highlights to us that *morality is based on reality*. Morality is not arbitrary. Because all things have objective value, and human beings have a special value above all other material beings, to act in accord with the value of things and the dignity of human nature is to act well. To act against the inherent value of things and intrinsic dignity of human nature is to act badly.

Over and above the Natural Law, we speak of the *Revealed Law*. The Revealed Law is simply the ways and ideals that God has *revealed* to us. The *Old Law* refers to God's ways in the Old Testament. The *New Law* refers to the way of Christ: primarily, it is the very grace of the Holy Spirit in our hearts moving us to live in grace and charity; secondarily, it is the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus, the Scriptures, and the Church. Although there are hundreds of laws we can identify in the Old Testament, the core law in the Old Law is the two great commandments to love God above all things (Dt 6:4-9) and our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18), which two ideals are further specified in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:6-21), which in turn are specified ideals of the Natural Law. The moral ideals of the Old Testament are perduring and deepened in the New Testament (Mt 5:17-20; 22:34-40; Rom 13:8-10), whereas many specific laws—the dietary laws for example (Lev 11)—were provisional and are not binding on Christians (Acts 15).

The New Law, then, encompasses the Natural Law and the Old Law. It also goes beyond them, since the New Law involves living as sons and daughters of God in the charity of Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. If the Natural Law and the Old Law are water, then the New Law is water changed into wine. In further sections, we will specify the different dimensions to God's laws and ways as applied to different dimensions of our humanity and our lives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the proper way to understand God's law, and its relevance for us?*
2. *What are the different types of law?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: 1 Cor 13; Eph 6:10-20 / ***CCC:*** 1803-1845

VIRTUE



Virtue can be defined as the “habitual and firm disposition to do the good.” *Virtue is the spring of good action.* Since there are many areas in life in which we are called to do good, there are many virtues we are meant to have and abound in. These virtues—these inner dispositions—help us to do good in these different areas with ease and mastery.

Virtues are also perfective of the person. Living virtuously causes you to *become* virtuous. Doing good causes you to increasingly *become* good. Growing in virtue causes you to grow in *moral character*. This is God’s ideal for us: to do many good and holy things, yes, but especially to *become a holy person*, a saint, resembling Jesus. A saint is a person of great virtue, reflective of Christ. And, because a saint is a person of great virtue, the saint—like Jesus—becomes a spring of good action. Do you want to become holy? It will happen through virtue.

There are *Natural Virtues* which facilitate doing good in our lives. Four natural virtues are thought to encompass all the others. They are called the *Cardinal* or *Moral Virtues*. They are: *Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance*. We learn these virtues through reason, conscience, and moral formation. We grow in them through practice. This is why they are also called *Acquired Virtues*.

God not only wants us to be naturally virtuous in our lives, however. He calls us to be holy, and He guides us through our actions to eternal life. Because of this, through Baptism, God pours His grace into our souls. In the essence of our souls, we call His grace *Sanctifying Grace*. This sanctifying grace then overflows into our rational powers in the form of *Faith, Hope, and Charity* (or *Love*). These are what we call the *Theological Virtues*. *Faith* orients the intellect—even as it draws the will and the whole person—to God. *Hope* orients the will to trusting in God’s grace to make us holy and lead us to eternal life. *Love* orients the will to love God for His own sake, and others in His love. The Theological Virtues are called “theological,” precisely because they *come from God* (they are not acquired naturally, but are the gift of grace) and are *oriented to God* (they have God as their object; they terminate in God). The theological virtues enable us to have a graced and intimate relationship with God through Christ. They also enable us, in our own way, to share in the mind and heart of God.

God also gives us graced versions of the Cardinal Virtues. We call them *Infused Cardinal* or *Moral Virtues*. They are infused Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance. They are like the natural virtues, except that they build upon and strengthen the natural virtues, and order our actions to a higher end than just human flourishing. They orient natural virtue and good human actions to God, to holiness, and to eternal life . . . to divine flourishing.

God's grace has a trajectory within us, therefore. It first enters the essence of our souls. It overflows further to the powers of our soul. Through virtue, it overflows yet further into our actions, making them divinely fruitful and *meritorious* of eternal life. God's intention—through His grace—is clearly to touch, heal, and elevate every part of our selves, our lives, our actions, and our relationships. Virtue is the channel through which this becomes effective.

Lastly, virtues can also be thought of as Christian ideals, the many ideals of the Christian life we find articulated in the Scriptures. The Theological and Cardinal Virtues are considered the main seven virtues of the Christian life, and they can be defined and explained as follows:

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Faith: *Divinely inspired belief in God and in all He reveals.*

Hope: *Divinely inspired reliance on God's grace, oriented to eternal life.*

Charity: *Divinely inspired love of God and neighbor.*

THE MORAL / CARDINAL VIRTUES

Prudence: *Right reason in action.* Prudence is good moral judgment practiced and lived out. It applies to all actions, ordering them to what is good and in accordance with right reason. It is the “chariot” or “pilot” of the virtues.

Justice: *Giving to others their due.* Justice is the virtue of relationships, acknowledging the value of others and acting in accordance with what is their true good. It seeks to give God the honor due Him, which virtue we call *Religion*. It also seeks to give other persons their due, which virtue we call *Social Justice*, involving right honor, right reward, right punishment, and/or acknowledging and rectifying wrongs. It applies to both *micro-relationships* (the relationships in our daily lives) and *macro-relationships* (societal relationships and systems, such as the state, the economy, the environment, etc.).

Fortitude: *Courageously doing what is right in the face of difficulties.* It is not always easy to do right, and it can sometimes be very tempting to do wrong, because of convenience or social expectations or pressure. Through fortitude, God gives us the graced strength to do what is right even when it is difficult.

Temperance: *Pleasures moderated and ordered to the good.* Seeking pleasure in itself makes us selfish, enslaves us, and has many bad consequences. Temperance helps us order pleasure

aright—especially the pleasures of food, alcohol, and sex—so that we truly find joy in good things, in the right context, in the right amount, and in the right way . . . and avoid taking pleasure in evil things. Under temperance, we find many virtues of balance. For example, *Humility* helps us to have the right estimation of ourselves, neither overestimating our value and importance (*superiority*), nor underestimating it (*inferiority*). It also helps us appreciate that others have the same value and importance as ourselves. Temperance also helps us to order things to the right proportions in our lives (making time for prayer and family; not watching too much TV, etc.). All the dimensions of living a healthy life would fall under temperance (healthy diet, exercise, sleep, time for prayer and healthy recreation, good relationships, dealing with stress and problems well, etc.).

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit—mentioned in Is 11:1-3—are thought to perfect the virtues. They are listed and explained as follows:

Wisdom: The *Gift of Wisdom* yields to us a “taste” of the depth and brilliance of God and His ways, including giving us insight into the wisdom of the Cross in God’s plan. Wisdom perfects the theological virtue of Charity.

Understanding: The *Gift of Understanding* causes the truths of the faith to be more deeply impressed on our souls, causing us to be in greater awe of their realities. It perfects Faith.

Counsel: Through the *Gift of Counsel*, the Holy Spirit helps us to know intuitively and quickly what is best. Through this gift, the Holy Spirit also moves us to do something which in retrospect can be seen as the perfect action for the occasion, although human reason did not know it at the time. We are especially encouraged to pray for the Gift of Counsel when we don’t know what the best decisions in our life are and need God’s guidance, when prudence is insufficient. The Gift of Counsel helps and perfects the virtue of Prudence.

Might: The *Gift of Might* is inspired strength for heroic virtue, providing us with divine strength in an overwhelmingly difficult situation. This gift strengthens the virtue of Fortitude.

Knowledge: The *Gift of Knowledge* enables us to see the world and all created things the way that God sees them. It helps us see how God is reflective in all created things, but also to have keen awareness of the passing nature of the present world. It is perfective of Faith.

Piety: The *Gift of Piety* deepens our inner conviction of being God’s children. It gives us a deeper share in the intimacy that Jesus had and has with the Father. Piety perfects the virtue of Justice.

Fear of the Lord: The *Gift of the Fear of the Lord* enables us to see more profoundly the awesomeness of God and the true ugliness of sin. It strengthens our desire to glorify God in everything, and not to sin and offend Him in any way. It perfects the virtue of Temperance.

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The *Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit*, mentioned by St. Paul in Gal 5:22-23, are the fruits we see in lives of holiness. The more we grow in grace, love, and virtue, the more these fruits will be manifested in our life. They are: *Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-Control, Chastity.*

THE BEATITUDES

The *Beatitudes* are the paradoxical ways of the kingdom of God, found at the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:5-12). They highlight the attitudes and virtues of *Poverty of Spirit* (humble dependence on God), *Mourning for Evils, Meekness, Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness, Purity of Heart, Mercy, Peace*, and the *Blessedness of Being Persecuted for Righteousness and the Kingdom of Heaven*. We find these attitudes and ideals exemplified in the life of Jesus.

In the upcoming sections on Service, we will cover the *Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*.

We are thus given these many ideals in the Scriptures, and graced by God to live the great call of the Christian life. Even as we fall short, God ever offers us His forgiveness and mercy, and ever calls us forward to live His ways of virtue.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence (or ‘virtue’), if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” —Phil 4:8

“Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

—2 Pt 1:5-7

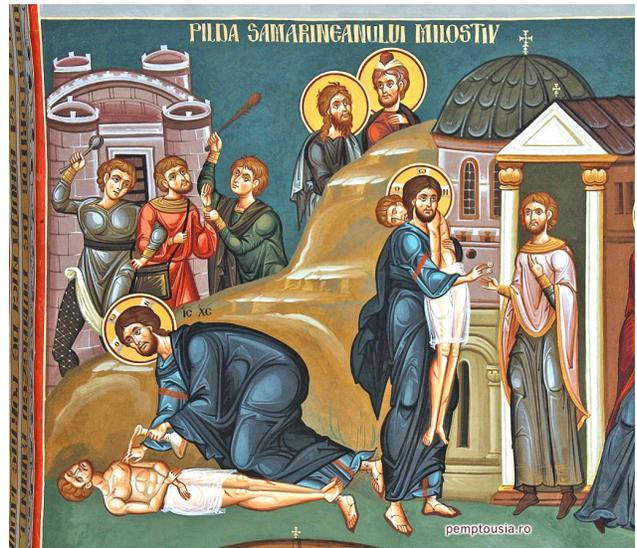
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is virtue?*
2. *What are the theological and moral virtues?*
3. *How can we become more virtuous in our lives?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Psalm 1 / ***CCC:*** 1730-1802; 2030-2051

HUMAN ACTION



We shape and orient ourselves through human action. We grow and develop through human action. We cultivate our relationship with God through human action. We love and serve others through human action. Human actions are, thus, stepping stones by which, through grace, we advance in our pilgrimage toward eternal life.

Because of our special dignity of being made in the image and likeness of God, endowed with intellect and will, our conscious actions are free. Our intellect and will together give rise to the power of *Free Will* within us, which enables us to act freely and personally:

It was He (God) Who created man in the beginning and He left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, good and evil, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power and sees everything. The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, and He knows every deed of man. He has not commanded anyone to be ungodly, and He has not given anyone permission to sin. —Sir 15:14-20

God has given us free will, so that we might come to personally and freely love Him and choose what is good. Our free will was not given us so that we can just do whatever we want. Not all choices and actions are good. Free will, therefore, gives us the possibility of doing good or evil. We are not meant to do evil. Choosing evil corrupts us. But we do have the possibility of choosing what is bad because of free will. Free will, however, is fundamentally *oriented toward God and what is good for ourselves, others, and creation*. To act well is to orient ourselves toward God and act in accordance with the good of our dignity, the dignity of others, and the value of all created things. To sin is to act against these goods.

We are not left to our own power in choice and action. Through His *Law* (or *His ways*), God clarifies both what is good for us and what He desires for us. Through *Conscience*, this law (or way) echoes and resonates within us. Through His *Grace*, God forgives wrong actions we have done, changes us, sanctifies us, helps us to do good and overcome evil, and empowers and inspires us to live a life of holiness, love, and *Virtue*. Apart from grace, we are powerless to overcome all sin and are unable to give ourselves eternal life. Grace, therefore, goes before human action, moving it to what is good. Grace accompanies and blesses human action, inspiring and animating it with God's power in the present moment. Grace also completes human action, making it spiritually fruitful and rewarding it with eternal life. Insofar as grace is spiritually fruitful and God rewards our actions, we speak of action as *meritorious*. *Merit* is about God's grace flowing into our actions. In itself, the word *merit* means reward. Our good actions done in grace are therefore *meritorious* of eternal rewards. They are pregnant with enduring spiritual value that we will reap in eternal life:

Apart from me you can do nothing. —Jn 15:5

I can do all things in Him who strengthens me. —Phil 4:13

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. —Heb 4:16

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. —Jn 15:8

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide. —Jn 15:16

. . . for your reward is great in heaven. . . your Father who sees in secret will reward you. . . truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. . .

—Mt 5:12; 6:18; 10:42

If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. . . —1 Cor 3:14

From now on there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing. —2 Tim 4:8

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. —Gal 6:7-8

So, God really crowns our actions done in Him with eternal life if we persevere to the end and die in His grace. At the same time, as St. Augustine says, when God crowns us, He is only crowning His own merits. He crowns what His grace has done in us.

Human actions include our conscious and deliberate *Thoughts*, *Words*, and *Actions*. The Scriptures call us to be holy in all three:

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. —Mt 5:8

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

—Eph 4:29

Be holy in all your conduct. —1 Pet 1:15

Let all that you do be done in love. —1 Cor 16:14

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. —Col 3:17

What does a Good Action consist of?

A good action is one that is morally good in every essential way.

The three essential elements of any deliberate human action are:

1. ***The Object:*** The *Object* of an act is the act itself. It is the “what” of an action. It is what is thought, done, or said with its basic intention. It can often be thought of as the “means” to an “end.”
2. ***The Intention:*** The *Intention* is the principal reason a person does an action. It is the main “why,” or “end,” of an action.
3. ***The Circumstances:*** The *Circumstances* are the various dimensions of the act other than the object and intention. They include the “where”, “when”, “how”, and consequences of an action.

An action is morally good only when all three of these elements are basically good.

An example of an action that is good in intention but bad in its object is when a person steals a diamond for an engagement ring for his fiancée. The intention of giving a ring to his fiancée is not bad in itself. It is good. That is the “end” or “why” of the action. However, the object, or means, or action itself (stealing a diamond) is evil. Therefore, the overall action is evil. Many people try to justify bad actions in light of a good intention, as if the “end justifies the means.” St. Paul condemns such justification:

Where sin increased, grace abounded. . . What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? —Rom 5:20; 6:1

An example of an action that is good in its object but bad in its intention is when a politician gives to the poor in order to gain popularity with the people. The action of giving to the poor is a good one. However, his intention is bad, since it is selfish. Jesus condemns such pretentious and self-centered actions:

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father Who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you. —Mt 6:1-4

Thus, morally good actions must be good in object and intention. The basic circumstances also must be good. Telling an innocent lighthearted joke to cheer someone up can be good. However, it is generally unfitting if it is done in a church when people are trying to pray and silence is expected. Or, telling someone his/her faults with genuine concern can be a good thing. However, doing this publicly, in front of many people, when it is not necessary or urgent, is not prudent, and therefore not good.

Any action can be evaluated in terms of its object, intention, and circumstances, to see if it is morally good or not. This evaluation can be very helpful in assessing one’s own past or future actions, and assessing the actions of others (when necessary), or their opinions about whether this or that action is good or not.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the role of human action in God’s plan for us?*
- 2. How can we grow in holiness and merit in our thoughts, words, and actions?*
- 3. How is knowing the three essential elements of human action helpful for discerning the morality of an action?*

THE PASSIONS



The *Passions* are our emotions. They are our emotional response to things perceived as good or evil for us. Towards goods, we feel *attraction*. We feel *desire* when we seek after them. When we come into possession with them, we feel *delight*, or *pleasure*. For example, when I first perceive a mango, I feel attracted to it, especially when I am hungry. This might cause me to seek after it. When I'm finally eating the mango, I feel delight at the taste and satisfaction. Towards evils, we feel *dislike*. *Aversion* is what we feel when we seek to avoid the evil. When we come into contact with the evils we dislike, we feel *sadness* or *pain*. If I see a bee, I naturally will flee from it. If it succeeds in stinging me, I feel pain. These are the simpler emotions in life. There are more complex emotions, such as *hope* (when I desire something seems difficult but attainable), or *fear* (when I am afraid that some evil will come upon me), *despair* (when a desired good seems unattainable), *courage* or *daring* (when I feel confident in overcoming some difficulty), and *anger* (when I kick back at an evil that is pressing upon me).

Emotions are necessary for survival, and humans experience emotions just like animals do. However, because of our rationality, we react to goods and evils perceived intellectually. For example, because of our reason, we human beings especially feel anger at the perception of injustice.

The passions are neither completely out of our control nor entirely within our control. After feeling fear, for example, I can bring my reason into play when deciding how best to act in light of the fear. I can also stir up emotions within myself, as when I stir up the emotion of courage or daring before running a race.

Our emotions are at work all the time, and it is important to learn how to deal virtuously with them. Otherwise, we will be governed by our passions, instead of governing our passions. True, we do not have despotic control over our emotions. We can't control them quite like we can parts of our body, like our hands. However, through reason, we can have a kind of "persuasive" control over our emotions. This takes virtue, and virtue often takes time.

We are called to be fully oriented toward God and what is good. This means that it is not only our soul that is called to be oriented toward God. We are called to glorify God in our bodies as well. Likewise, not only our intellect and will, but our emotions too are called to be oriented to the good.

Our emotions can be powerful, and therefore difficult to deal with. It is hard to acquire a perfect integration of our emotions. We tend to get too angry, too sorrowful, too attached to pleasure. Sometimes we don't get angry enough, or sad enough at the evils we see. Sometimes we repress our emotions, since they can seem too difficult to deal with. Thus, *indulgence* and *repression* represent the two extremes of dealing with our emotions. When we are fully integrated in our emotional responses, we get angry at injustices in the right amount, for the right duration, and proportionate to the evil experienced or observed. We are also able to express our anger in a healthy way, being open and perhaps even passionate, but always respectful, charitable, reasonable, accurate, and constructive, in contrast to being either "active aggressive" (being direct but tearing down) or "passive aggressive" (expressing one's anger in a very indirect, ambiguous, and unhealthy way). And likewise with all the emotions.

We are encouraged to bring our emotions to God and under the domain of reason—which struggle we see illustrated throughout the Psalms. We also see emotions in perfect balance in Christ. At times, we see Him joyful (Lk 10:21), sad (Mk 14:34; Jn 11:35), angry (Mk 3:5; Jn 2:13-25), etc. On the one hand, Jesus is passionate in His emotions. On the other hand, He has perfect control of them. This is the ideal balance.

Many common problems involve an imbalance of the emotions. For example, when we become enslaved to pleasure, *addictions* develop. The most common addictions are to the pleasures of alcohol, drugs, food, and sex. But we can become addicted to almost anything. *Phobias*, on the other hand, are the opposite of addictions. They involve an unreasonable and disproportionate fear of—or aversion to—certain evils. *Depression* involves overwhelming sadness. *Anger management problems* are obviously very common.

Recovery, balance, and healing aren't achieved overnight. God's love and mercy, prayer, virtue, the Sacraments, healthier habits, learning better ways of coping, and the help of friends and sometimes support groups and counseling can all help us grow out of addictions, phobias, and unhealthy ways of dealing with or expressing anger. A *holistic approach* is important in dealing with depression, involving these same elements, in addition to whatever medical attention might be needed. With God's grace and these helps, we can slowly come to experience greater freedom and integration of our emotions within us:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house forever; the Son continues forever. So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. —Jn 8:34-36

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.

—Rom 6:22

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved.

—2 Pt 2:19

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

—Eph 4:26

My soul is very sorrowful, even to death... Father, all things are possible to you; remove this chalice from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.

—Mk 14:34, 36

Why are you cast down, my soul, and why do you groan within me? Hope in God, I will praise Him still, my Savior and my God. —Ps 42:5

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. —Gal 5:1

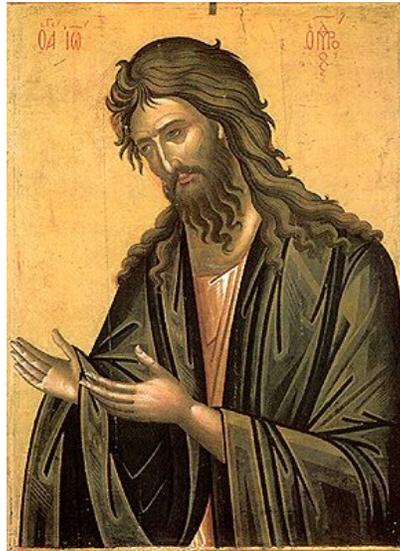
For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. —Gal 5:13

Morally speaking, the passions are neither good nor evil, except insofar as one's reason and will are engaged. This means that one can experience powerful emotions and desires without "giving into" them. One, for example, could very powerfully experience the emotion of anger or a desire to lust. Having a strong emotion, and feeling the pull of it—even intensely—does not constitute sin though. It is especially in times like these that we need the help of God's grace to help us through. Fortunately emotions die down. They are like a storm that can get intense but eventually dies down.

We all have weaker moments in life, times when we are hungry, lonely, tired, sad, angry, etc. It is especially at these moments that we will be tempted to "escape" into some pleasure, such as alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex, etc. In addition to prayer and the other helps mentioned above, it is important to realize when you are weak, and to pause and "go to a safe place," removing yourself from an *Occasion of Sin*.

The good news is: first, that God is merciful, and that He is present to forgive, heal, help, and strengthen us in our struggles; and second, that the more grace heals us, and the more virtue grows within us, the more free, integrated, peaceful, and joyful we will be within.

CONSCIENCE



What is “Conscience?”

Our conscience is our inner moral compass. It is our reason making a judgment on the rightness or wrongness of actions.

Where is Conscience mentioned in the Scriptures?

In the New Testament, the following passages reveal the role of our conscience in our spiritual life:

And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day.” —Acts 23:1

**So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men.
—Acts 24:16**

**They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.
—Rom 2:15**

I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit. —Rom 9:1

Some, though being until now accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. —1 Cor 8:7

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. —2 Cor 4:2

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. —1 Tim 1:5

By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith.

—1 Tim 1:19

...through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared. —1 Tim 4:2

Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. —1 Pt 3:16

What does the Church teach about Conscience?

The Church teaches the following important points about conscience:

- *We are obliged to follow the true and certain judgment of our conscience.* Our conscience is the voice of reason within us, and an echo of God's voice. If our conscience tells us that something is right or wrong, we are obliged to do or not do it. However, there is a big difference between what our conscience is telling us and our preferences. It is common for people to hold certain moral opinions, and to engage in or avoid certain moral actions under the pretext of conscience. It is easy for us to do whatever we want to do and then say that we were only acting according to our conscience. We human beings can be ingenious at deceiving ourselves, and at justifying and making excuses for bad decisions and actions. Listening to our conscience involves silence, listening, genuine humility, sincerity, purity of intention, and the openness and willingness to find what is really good and right, regardless of its convenience or our personal preferences.
- *We are obliged to form our conscience well.* People's inner judgment can be minimally or insufficiently formed due to lack of moral instruction and guidance. It can also be misinformed due to faulty instruction, bad habits, and the confusion of different voices and bad example. It is possible that someone's conscience, like a compass, could be slightly or greatly—although not entirely—broken. It is also possible that someone's conscience could be telling him that something is right when it is in fact wrong, or vice versa. In such a case, a person is obliged to follow the firm judgment of his conscience. However, the person is also obliged to form his own conscience and grow in knowledge and virtue. The Church is a guide to the correct formation of conscience. The Holy Spirit guides us through the Church. Docility is important. Everyone is obliged to do everything in his power to make sure that his conscience is well formed and corrected.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the role of Conscience in our spiritual lives?*
2. *How do we form our Conscience well?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Romans 1 / ***CCC:*** 1846-1876

SIN



What is “Sin”?

Sin is acting against some good: the good of God’s honor, the good of others or things attached to them, our own authentic good, and/or the good and value of creation. Insofar as we actively sin in our thoughts, words, and actions, we commit a *Sin of Commission*. Insofar as we fail to do what we should, we commit a *Sin of Omission*.

Sin, then, is a misuse of our powers, which powers God gave us to be used for good only. But, because of free will, sin becomes a possibility. God gave us a free will so that we could freely say “yes” to Him. But if we can say “yes,” we can also say “no.” And, although nothing created is bad in itself, it is possible for us to misuse and abuse created things to the dishonor of our Creator, and to fail to treat other persons and things according to their dignity and value.

The first sin was committed by the Fallen Angels, which we have discussed. Through a fallen angel who tempted our first parents, sin enters human history, as we read about in the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. After this, sin spreads. Cain kills Abel. Wickedness spreads on earth, occasioning the flood. Even after that, people seek to make themselves godlike with the Tower of Babel. Even when God enters into covenant with His people, sin is a constant reality. The people waver between fidelity and infidelity. Even chosen patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings are discovered to sin in various ways.

Sin is the greatest evil, because whereas in other evils (such as natural disasters, or even suffering and death), evil happens to us, in sin, we ourselves commit evil. Sin is an evil we actively choose, engage in, participate in, and promote, even if only tacitly. It is also the one thing that separates us from God. A remedy was needed: ultimately Jesus Christ, Who is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). Jesus is the One Who forgives our sins when we repent, Who heals us of the wounds of past sins, Who helps us overcome sin and temptation, and Who leads us to the perfect love and sinlessness of eternal life with God.

What are “Vices”?

Vice is the opposite of virtue. Simply, it is a “bad habit.” Just as virtues are inner dispositions that lead us to consistently do good in different areas, vices are bad dispositions—or bad habits—which lead us consistently to do evil in various areas. Bad actions flow from vices, just as good actions flow from virtues. Bad actions also reinforce and increase bad habits, whereas good actions reinforce and increase virtue.

What are the “Seven Deadly Sins” or “Seven Deadly Vices”?

The *Seven Deadly Sins* is a traditional list of seven cardinal vices, under which other vices are often grouped. They are:

- **Pride:** the disordered love of one’s own excellence
- **Envy:** a willful sadness over another’s good (because it is not our good)
- **Wrath:** a hateful and vindictive anger
- **Sloth:** the failure/unwillingness to put forth effort toward some good
- **Greed:** the excessive love of money and earthly possessions
- **Lust:** the disordered love of sexual pleasure
- **Gluttony:** the disordered love of the pleasure of food and drink

Why do we sin?

We sin because sin is attractive. It is an apparent good. It is like a mirage. It is a deception, a kind of “optical illusion.” There is a kind of promised happiness offered us when we are attracted to sin. Goods are inherently attractive. When we are tempted, certain goods or pleasures are highlighted in our mind while the moral evil involved is suppressed. Sometimes we are also tempted to seek after goods through evil means, or in a disproportionate way. The three categories of goods that we are drawn to pursue—even when wrong and disproportionate—are: *pleasure, possessions, and power*, as St. John writes about:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. —1 Jn 1:15-17

The allurement of sin we call *Temptation*, of course. We are never forced to sin, and God always gives us the strength to resist:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. —1 Cor 10:13

At the same time, we can be strongly attracted to sin. Three things are said to influence us toward sin:

1. **The Flesh:** We refer here, not to our flesh as created, but to our “flesh” as fallen, what we call *Concupiscence*. Because of Original Sin, we are more vulnerable to sin: our intellect is often clouded, our will weak, and our emotions not fully subject to reason. Hence, we are easily tempted and experience a powerlessness over sin.
2. **The World:** Here again, we refer not to the “world” as created by God, but rather to that “spirit of the world” that opposes God. In this sense, the “world” stands for those social realities that pressure us to sin, making sin look popular and fashionable.
3. **The Devil:** Demons are not behind every temptation. However, they do often exploit our weaknesses (using the flesh and the world) in order to sway us to sin.

What is the difference between Mortal and Venial Sin?

All sin is wrong. However, certain sins are serious in nature, while others are less serious.

If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a deadly sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not deadly. There is sin which is deadly; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not deadly. —1 Jn 5:16-17

Mortal Sins are serious sins. *Venial Sins* are less than serious sins.

Certain sins are of their nature serious and totally incompatible with the life of grace. The early Church highlighted three of these in particular: *murder*, *adultery*, and *apostasy*. Mortal sins are not limited to these, however. Any time we violate a great good, we sin seriously, provided we sin with full knowledge and consent. In fact, the category of mortal sin is very helpful. It highlights that there are great goods in life. If there were no great goods in life to violate, there would be no mortal sin. The following are serious matters: when someone offends God through blasphemy or sacrilege, or fails to exercise their basic duties toward God; hatred or extreme disrespect or neglect of basic duties toward one’s parents; the killing or seriously injuring of human life; sexual activity outside of marriage or suppressing the twofold purpose of the sexual act; stealing anything significant; lying or bearing false witness about a serious matter; corrupt thoughts involving hatred or lust, which are fully willed; failing to provide for the basic needs of others when they depend on you and you have the ability to help them, etc.

Certain actions are more or less serious in themselves. However, we are not always fully guilty, or *culpable*, for our sins. Certain things can mitigate (lessen) culpability: ignorance (when it is not willed), force of habit, misunderstanding, insufficient time to fully make a deliberate decision, the will not being fully engaged, etc.

For this reason, one can commit what is objectively a serious sin without being fully culpable of serious sin. To be fully culpable for committing a serious sin, three conditions need to be met:

1. ***Serious Matter***: The act must violate some great good in a serious way. The act must be seriously wrong in itself, in other words.
2. ***Full knowledge***: Someone must have full knowledge both of what they are doing and that what they are doing is seriously wrong.
3. ***Full consent***: Someone must fully consent to a serious wrong for one to be fully culpable of a serious sin.

Mortal sins, when they are fully culpable, *cut off* the life of grace within us. That is why all Catholics are urged to sincerely repent and go to Confession as soon as reasonably possible after having committed a serious sin. Venial sins *weaken* the life of grace within us. However, they do not destroy it. At the same time, we should constantly try to overcome our venial sins, since they can build up and lead to a mortal sin.

How can we overcome our sins?

Above all, the virtue of *Hope* is needed in overcoming our sins, since the temptation will be, on the one hand to give up and despair, and on the other hand to willingly justify the continuance of our sin without doing our part to cooperate with God's grace. Hope strikes the balance of having confidence in God's mercy, relying on His grace, and also doing our part in cooperation with His grace to overcome our sins. *Patience* is also needed, since bad habits are hard to break, and relapses are common. God also gives us many other spiritual "tools" to overcome our sins: His tremendous love, His never failing mercy and forgiveness, His grace to strengthen us, the Bible, the Sacraments, the power of prayer, and the help and support of others (sometimes which include support groups and/or counseling). Jesus is our constant companion to help us through all these channels. He wants us to keep on turning back to Him, keep on relying on Him, and never give up. Slowly, His grace can become more victorious in us.

SCRIPTURAL READING

"To those who repent He grants a return, and He encourages those whose endurance is failing, and He has appointed to them the lot of truth. Turn to the Lord and forsake your sins; pray in His presence and lessen your offenses. Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity, and hate abominations intensely. . . How great is the mercy of the Lord, and His forgiveness for those who turn to Him!" —Sir 17:24-26

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. ***What is sin, and what are the different kinds of sin?***
2. ***How do we overcome sin in our lives?***

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Leviticus 19 / ***Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)***: 1877-1948

THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH



“God is love,” St. John exclaims (1 Jn 4). We have discussed how the mystery of God, the Trinity, is an eternal communion of love. The Father loves the Son as the Son loves the Father in the Holy Spirit in eternity. We, therefore, find the phenomenon of total self-giving love in the very heart of the mystery of God.

God’s self-giving love also overflows to us. It is expressed in the act of creation, in the covenants of the Old Testament, in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the gift of the Eucharist, in the act of the Passion and Paschal Mystery, and in the giving of the Holy Spirit. This total self-giving love of God to us will find its culmination in eternal life.

God’s call for us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18), then, is a call to imitate and reflect God in His self-giving. Just as God’s love has overflowed to us, so this love is meant to overflow from us to others, expressed in our words and deeds.

In addition to the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, the Old Testament also gives us a version of the *Golden Rule*: “What you hate, do not do to anyone” (Tobit 4:15). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a positive version of the same rule: “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12). In this way, the Scriptures warn us of treating others unfairly—and as less than ourselves—and at the same time call us to an active love of our neighbor.

At the Last Supper, Jesus raises the standards expressed in the Old Testament. He calls us beyond self-love as the standard for loving others, and beyond the *Golden Rule*: “Love one another as I have loved you,” He commands us (Jn 13:34). For the Christian, the standard of loving our neighbor is now much greater. The new standard Jesus gives us is to *love like He loved*, in other words, to show to others the same kind of self-giving and sacrificial love He showed us: “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn 3:16).

Loving others, then, is at the heart of the Christian life. By loving others, we imitate Christ and glorify God. By loving others, we enrich others. By loving others, we are ourselves enriched and perfected.

So far, we have mainly explored our call to love God. We now will explore the many dimensions of our call to love others. Love has these two aspects to it, then, the *vertical* (love of God), and the *horizontal* (love of neighbor). The virtue of Justice also contains these two dimensions: what we owe God (the virtue of *Religion*) and what we owe others (*Social Justice*). The Ten Commandments are likewise divided into these two dimensions: the first three commandments express various aspects of our duty to love God, the last seven various aspects of our duties to others.

In this and the following sections, then, we will concentrate on the various dimensions of love of neighbor, of social justice, and of the last seven commandments.

Christians are called to express this love in one way within the Church. We have already spoken about how all the members of the Church are given spiritual gifts to use and put at the service of the other members in the Church, for the enrichment and flourishing of the whole Body of Christ.

Christians are called to express this love in another way within society itself. Indeed, they are called to be a *leaven* in society, helping to order society and every aspect of it to the kingdom of God. The lay faithful are called to engage in the world—in its social, political, and economic dimensions—helping to purify them of what is harmful and against the common good, and striving to infuse them with Christian charity and ideals. The leaven in the parable of Jesus is a fitting image, not only of how grace is at work within us, but also of the role of Christians in society:

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened. —Mt 13:33

The Christian is called to live Christian charity, virtue, and social justice within society both at a personal level with those around him/her in everyday life (*micro-relationships*), and also trying to influence social structures and realities (*macro-relationships*), helping to sway them toward the *Common Good*.

Not only is the Church's general moral teaching (*micro-relationships*) rich. Her social teaching (*macro-relationships*) is rich as well. It was lived for centuries, and articulated more recently in various Church documents. The following are considered some of the main source documents of Catholic Social Teaching, which can be read for further study and enrichment:

- *Rerum Novarum* . . . (On the Condition of Labor)—Pope Leo XIII, 1891
- *Quadragesimo Anno* . . . (After Forty Years)—Pope Pius XI, 1931
- *Mater et Magistra* . . . (Christianity and Social Progress)—Pope John XXIII, 1961
- *Pacem in Terris* . . . (Peace on Earth)—Pope John XXIII, 1963
- *Gaudium et Spes* . . . (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)—Second Vatican Council, 1965
- *Dignitatis Humanae* . . . (Declaration on Religious Freedom)—Second Vatican Council, 1965
- *Populorum Progressio* . . . (On the Development of Peoples)—Pope Paul VI, 1967
- *Octogesima Adveniens* . . . (A Call to Action)—Pope Paul VI, 1971
- *Laborem Exercens* . . . (On Human Work)—Pope John Paul II, 1981
- *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* . . . (On Social Concern)—Pope John Paul II, 1987
- *Centesimus Annus* . . . (The Hundredth Year)—Pope John Paul II, 1991
- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* . . . Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004
- *Caritas in Veritate* . . . (Charity in Truth)—Pope Benedict XVI, 2009
- *Laudato Si'* . . . (On Care for Our Common Home)—Pope Francis, 2015

The following are important principles in Catholic Social Teaching articulated in the above-mentioned documents:

- ***The Dignity of the Human Person:*** Every human being has intrinsic worth in light of being made in the image and likeness of God. Every human being has the right to life, respect, freedom, and those things that are necessary for his basic well-being. The dignity of the human person is foundational for all morality and social teaching.
- ***The Common Good:*** The *Common Good* is a simple but rich and very important concept in Catholic Social Teaching. It denotes the entire good of individual persons, groups within the society, and the whole of the society, in both its material and spiritual dimensions. In one simple concept, it denotes the dignity, rights, responsibilities, and material and spiritual good of all. In all societies there are elements that are not ordered to the common good, but rather have the effect of harming the whole or of benefitting a select few at the expense of others.
- ***Preferential Option for the Poor:*** Following the example of Jesus who sought out the needy, the marginalized, and those whose dignity were trampled upon, the Church speaks about the *Preferential Option for the Poor*. This is an inclination and orientation that we are called to have in our decisions and activities. The poor and marginalized should not be neglected, forgotten, or given low priority in our lives, decisions, activities, policies, and ministries. Rather, they should be given top priority.
- ***The Universal Destination of Goods:*** The earth was given to all human beings for their survival and flourishing. Every human being, therefore, has a right to the share in these goods that is necessary for his basic well-being. ***The Right to Private Property***

flows out of the *Universal Destination of Goods*, as a means to achieve its ideals. It is fitting and in accord with human dignity. Yet, the *Universal Destination of Goods* has a certain priority over the *Right to Private Property*, and is used to correct exploitation and abuses committed through greed and hoarding.

- **Subsidiarity:** This principle highlights proper jurisdictions, and the right relationship between different levels of governing bodies. Higher levels of groupings in society should not interfere with lower levels of groupings, unless necessary. Things should be governed at the local level first. This principle protects against the overreach of higher governing bodies. It also calls for responsible governance at lower levels, so that higher levels need not intervene, or intervene minimally.
- **Participation:** All are obliged to participate in their own way in the good of society, both contributing their gifts and working to counter and change unjust structures, behaviors, and policies.
- **Solidarity:** Human beings are called to have solidarity with one another, seeing the fortunes and evils of others as their own. We are our brother's keeper (Gen 4:9).
- **Other Principles (Truth, Freedom, Justice, Love):** These principles also become important in many social matters.

Catholic Social Teaching can also be organized in conjunction with the Ten Commandments:

- The Dignity of Life (5th Commandment)
- The Family and Political Life (4th Commandment),
- The Environment, Material Goods, Economies, Labor (7th & 10th Commandments)
- Social Communication (8th Commandment)

In the following sections, we will explore both the personal and social aspects of love and virtue, social justice, and living according to the Ten Commandments in these different areas. We will end with sections on service and evangelization.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

Review of Leviticus 19 (*Old Testament societal laws of justice and mercy*)

“Only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.”
—Gal 2:10

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *How are Christians called to reflect and live out God's love in the Church and in the world?*
2. *What is the Common Good?*
3. *What are the different areas covered by Catholic Social Teaching?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Psalm 8 / **CCC:** 2258-2330

THE DIGNITY OF LIFE



All things were created good. And therefore, there is an inherent value to all things. When we treat things according to the value they have, we act well. When we don't, we act wrongly.

Human beings have a special value in light of being created in the image and likeness of God with a spiritual soul, having the capacity to know and love rationally and personally. God has also *revealed to us* our great worth: God thought us worth creating. God deemed us worth becoming man for. God considered us worth dying for. Indeed, the blood of the Son of God reveals how precious and valuable we are to God. God also found human life worth calling to eternal life with Him.

The Scriptures illuminate our special dignity in many places. In Genesis 1, after each day of creation, God looks and sees that everything He made is “good” (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After creating human beings, however, it says that what He made is “very good” (v. 31). Here are some other poignant verses that highlight our value:

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than the angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea. —Ps 8:4-8

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? —Mt 6:26

Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! —Mt 12:12

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us. —1 Jn 3:16

We give a name for our special worth: *Human Dignity*. Human dignity is *intrinsic*—or *inherent*—meaning that human beings have value in and of themselves. It is not *relative* to the perception of individuals. It is not defined by societies. We are not a means to an end.

Because our dignity is so special, it is wrong to kill. The Church teaches emphatically that it is *always and everywhere wrong to directly kill innocent human life*. It is not always wrong to kill animal or plant life. We should always respect animals and plants, even when it is necessary to kill them for our needs. However, because we human beings have a special dignity in virtue of being made in the image and likeness of God, it is always wrong to kill innocent human life:

You shall not kill. —Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17

The *inviolability* of human life—which means its special dignity and the inherent wrongness of killing innocent life—is absolutely foundational for all human morality. Without this foundation, morality crumbles: our value would become relative, and the undesirable considered disposable. The Fifth of the Ten Commandments—expressed above—is powerful in its starkness and poignancy. *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)* by St. John Paul II is a Church document that powerfully articulates Church teaching on life issues.

Human life has its natural stages of development and decline. Our value, however, does not develop and decline. As soon as we exist, our special dignity exists. And even when human beings are vulnerable or dying, we retain our dignity: it does not decline. We have a special dignity from the moment of conception onwards. Therefore, it is always wrong to kill innocent human life at any stage, even when it is developing in the womb or dying.

Positively, we are called to respect human life, to cherish and protect it in all its stages, to promote its flourishing in all peoples, and to uphold and serve the dignity of the vulnerable in society, whose dignity is often trampled upon.

Life is given to us as a gift, and we are given stewardship over our own lives. It is a moral obligation to take good care of this gift. Being good stewards over the gift of our own lives means taking care of ourselves both spiritually and physically. It also entails putting our gifts at the service—and spiritual and physical betterment—of others.

Offenses against the dignity of human life include:

1. *Killing the innocent* (including murder, abortion, destruction of human embryos in a lab, euthanasia, suicide, doctor-assisted suicide, unjust war, indiscriminate acts of war, genocide, terrorism, etc.)
2. *Injuring oneself or others* (unnecessary and non-beneficial injury, restraint, or deprivation—including kidnapping, torture, female circumcision, non-therapeutic mutilation or sterilization, etc.)
3. *Slavery* (selling and subjugating human beings)
4. *Unhealthy lifestyle and behavior* (substance abuse, bad diet, not getting sufficient exercise and sleep, etc.)
5. *Dangerous and reckless behavior* (speeding, extreme sports and activities, disproportionate risk, etc.)
6. *Hatred* (toward God, others, or oneself, vindictiveness unforgiveness).
7. *Disrespect* (including *Racism* and every other form of *Unjust Discrimination*)
8. *Disrespect toward the dead* (lack of proper burial or honor: Note that the Catholic Church permits cremation on the condition that faith in the Resurrection of the Body is not doubted. It permits organ donation if this does not kill the donor.)

Why do people sin against life in these ways?

Hatred is often at the heart of sins against life. Actions against life start with thoughts against life. This is why it is crucial to deal with anger well, and to resist—with God’s grace—the temptation to hatred. Hatred is anger turned bitter. It is anger which has become willing-evil for another.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.

—Mt 5:21-22

Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. . . If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

—1 Jn 3:15; 4:20

The disordered love of *Power* is another reason for offenses against life, as when someone resorts to any means possible to secure power for himself. There can be other reasons, such as fear, convenience, and selfishness (which motives are often present when abortion or euthanasia is chosen). God calls us to counter these tendencies through love of enemies, forgiveness, inner security, leaving vengeance to God instead of taking it on ourselves (see Rom 12:19-21), humility, seeking God's will above our own, and the courage to do what is right and to reach out for the help and assistance of others.

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. —Pr 16:32

How does the Church approach the issue of Abortion?

The Church's approach to abortion is multifaceted. The Church seeks to:

- Prevent abortion through education and highlighting the reality and preciousness of human life from the beginning;
- Promote the virtue of chastity and saving sexual intimacy for marriage;
- Help those considering abortion by offering the motivation and assistance they need to have their child, or in seeking to offer their child for adoption;
- Communicate the mercy of Jesus to those who are sorry for what they have done, offering many services of post-abortion healing for both men and women;
- Build a culture of life by changing hearts, so that the value of every human life is cherished at every stage;
- Overturn laws that promote and allow abortion through education, public advocacy, and peaceful protests.

Many argue that women have a "right to choose" abortion, and that no one else should be telling a woman what to do. The truth is, however, that many women do not feel free in their decision. They often make such decisions under great duress, pressure, confusion, and shame. Abortion is also not good for women. It only makes things worse and more confusing for them. Also, while we have the ability to do wrong, we do not have the right to do wrong. Killing innocent human life in the womb is never a good choice, just as killing adults or committing adultery are never good choices. Some claim that the life in the womb is not human but only a "blob of tissue." Nothing could be further from the truth. The life in the womb is by all scientific definitions a complete living organism with a gender, living tissue and organs, and a genetic code completely distinct from father and mother, which genetic code he/she will have for the rest of his/her life. It is good to remember that we all start our lives like this in the womb. Half those killed through abortion are also female. So, in order to be for all women, one must oppose abortion. Being pro-life and pro-woman go together.

How does the Church approach the issues of Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide?

We retain our dignity through death. The dying deserve great compassion and assistance, and palliative care is fittingly used to help comfort the dying and take away great suffering. Palliative care can be legitimately used, even if it winds up slightly shortening the life of the dying person, provided that the drugs used are carefully prescribed and that shortening the person's life is not intended as a means or end, but rather as a necessary but unintended consequence of relieving extreme suffering. Suffering also has meaning, is temporary, and is not the worst of all evils. Doing evil (sin) is the worst of evils. Because of the great value of human life even in death, we should approach the dying with our presence, prayers, and comfort. We should resist and counter all attempts to kill the patient or allow patients to kill themselves.

If a loved one is dying, can it be ok to "pull the plug"?

We are morally obliged to use "ordinary", or "proportionate," means to keeping someone alive, such as nutrition and hydration, and other procedures which are sensible, relatively safe, and available. We are not obliged to go out of our way to keep someone alive, however. We are not obliged to use "extraordinary," "disproportionate," or "aggressive" means to keep someone alive. We should not try to keep someone alive at all costs. Sometimes using a respirator can be considered "ordinary" care, since it is only needed for a short time in order to get someone (otherwise relatively healthy) back on his/her feet. If it is keeping someone alive who is dying from some condition, and there is no reasonable hope to a quality restoration, it can be legitimate and even morally good to "pull the plug." This is not killing the person. It is rather letting the person die apart from life-support. When there is question about what constitutes ordinary versus extraordinary care, you are encouraged to contact a priest with good judgment in these matters (in addition to good doctors).

If it is always wrong to kill innocent human life, can we ever legitimately kill the guilty?

We should avoid all killing. In extreme circumstances, as a last resort, and under strict conditions, it can be justified to kill an unjust aggressor, or someone who is a grave threat:

- *Self-defense* can be legitimate. One should ideally seek every other means than killing to restrain and inhibit an unjust aggressor. If killing an unjust aggressor is the only way to disable immediate and grave harm, however, it can be legitimate.
- *Capital Punishment* has traditionally been considered legitimate in Christian tradition, to protect society and as a proportionate punishment on someone who has inflicted grave harm. However, the Church urges us to opt for imprisonment, and to use capital punishment only when imprisonment cannot be secured and when it is truly necessary to protect society. Pope John Paul II considered these conditions practically non-existent in modern societies.

- *Just War:* War too should be avoided. The Church teaches that war can only be considered just and therefore legitimate when (1) the damage inflicted on an innocent people is grave, lasting, and certain, (2) all other means have proven ineffective or impractical, (3) success is a real possibility, and (4) the use of arms will not produce evils worse than the evil to be eliminated, especially since modern weapons can inflict such devastation. When war is really justified and necessary, all legitimate acts of war should be against combatants only, with rigorous avoidance of killing civilians. All *indiscriminate acts of violence* that wind up killing civilians as a means to killing unjust aggressors are completely morally prohibited.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Why does human life have a special value?*

2. *How can we better cherish, promote, and protect the dignity of every human life?*

3. *What are common violations against human life in today's world?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Psalm 128 / ***CCC:*** 2196-2233

THE FAMILY



The ultimate origin and destiny of the family is the Trinity, of which earthly families are a created image. Families are called to image the inner love of the Trinity.

Within families, each member has its privileges and responsibilities. Husband and wife are called to constantly nourish their marital relationship, loving each other, sacrificing for each other, showing Christ's love to each other, spending time with one another, listening well to each other, apologizing to each other for shortcomings, forgiving each other, serving each other, helping each other to grow spiritually and humanly, etc.

Parents are called to collaboration in their work of raising children. They are called to pray for their children, lead by example, spend time with their children, guide and teach their children in spiritual and human maturity, and protect and discipline their children as needed. They are called to be invested parents, neither being authoritarian nor “hands off.”

Children are obliged to respect and obey their parents, as the 4th Commandment demands. They should seek to be good “team players” in the family, cultivating their gifts and putting them at the service of the family. All our parents are imperfect. We are called to love and respect them nonetheless, and take care of them—as we are able—in their old age or need:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you. —Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16

Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the LORD will refresh his mother . . . O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; and do not despise him all the days of his life.

—Sir 3:6, 12-13

God has willed that new human life would come through marital love. In this way, the reality of the family flows from marriage. The family is also the basic cell of society: each society is a collection of families. The health of a nation is dependent on the health of its families. Pope Saint John Paul II once said, “As the family goes, so goes the nation.” It is therefore necessary to uphold the dignity of marriage between a man and a woman, and to protect the rights of the family in society. When the family is threatened and starts to breakdown, as it has begun to do in our society, society begins to unravel. The Church has the vocation and responsibility of being a refuge of healing for those who come from broken marital and family situations (being a family for those who have none or whose families are dysfunctional), helping to repair and reunify broken relationships, and of teaching God’s ideals for marriage and the family, thus showing people a better way.

God calls each of us to live our role in our own families virtuously, being a light to others no matter what the situation. Through His grace, God gives us the healing we need to reconcile and rebuild relationships and to be better, and the strength needed to live our own role within our families well and in a holy and charitable way, even in hardships. Just as God’s love overflows into our own hearts, and overflows from each spouse to the other, and from the spouses to their children, so God’s love is supposed to overflow yet further: from the family to the Church and society, contributing to the whole and being of service to others, particularly the needy.

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is a paradigm for us in all of this. We celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family each year on the Sunday during the Christmas Octave. It is a great feast of spiritual renewal for our families.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. How does the family reflect the Trinity?*
- 2. What is God’s vision for families, both in their own relationships and within the Church and society?*
- 3. How can we better live out our faith within our families?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Matthew 25 / *CCC:* 2234-2257

SOCIETIES AND NATIONS



St. Hedwig (1174-1243)

Since nations are collections of families, the respect and ideals commanded of us in the 4th Commandment extend to the societies we exist in, particularly the nation, or political reality, in which we live.

Jesus taught the primacy of the kingdom of God over every earthly reality, and at the same time the importance of respecting the civil authorities, and of citizens playing their part for the good of society:

Tell us, then, what you think: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, ‘Why do you put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax.’ And they brought him a coin. And Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’

—Mt 22:17-21

We have also mentioned how the image of the leaven in Jesus’ parable of the leaven is a fitting image for the vocation of Christians in society: to engage in temporal affairs and order them to the kingdom of God, thus uplifting society. We, thus, have a responsibility to contribute to the good of society through being good citizens, obeying laws, paying taxes, voting, and helping improve society through volunteering and raising our voice to promote good causes and counter bad laws or leadership.

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

—1 Pt 2:17

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. . . Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. —Rom 13:1, 6-7

Civil laws are only legitimate, however, when they don't contradict the Natural or Revealed Law. When a government allows slavery, abortion, or euthanasia, or when it restricts legitimate religious freedom, we are not only not obliged to follow such laws: we are obliged to counter such laws.

The Church allows for a spectrum of different types of possible government, provided that the common good is served, human dignity and legitimate human freedom is upheld, and the needy are provided for.

Subsidiarity is an important concept for governance in Catholic teaching. Pope Pius XI described subsidiarity in this way: “A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activities with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good” (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 80). Subsidiarity is a more human, local, coordinated, and effective manner of governance than an overly “top-down” approach where the problems of “bureaucracy” manifest themselves. It is not opposed to higher governance. It is rather for the best possible functioning of higher governing bodies, which work with and empower local governing bodies. The Church also encourages effective mediating bodies, such as unions, that can help protect workers and lower-level groupings.

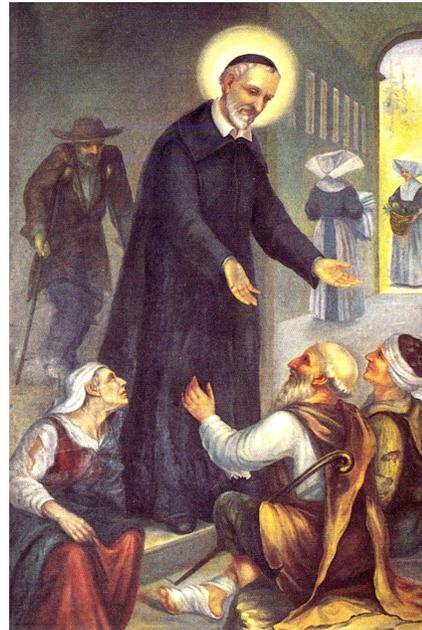
Political authorities are called to great moral rectitude, since they are responsible for the well-being and rights of those under them. They are called to be servant-leaders in the image of Jesus. They are morally obliged to govern according to the Natural Law, and according to the principles of prudence, justice, and mercy. There are numerous saints throughout Christian history who were kings and queens, and who are role models for good governance: St. Hedwig of Poland, St. Louis IX, St. Elizabeth of Portugal, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Margaret of Scotland, St. Stephen I, St. Wenceslaus, and many others.

The Church's role in society is not to replace the civil governing sphere, but rather to inspire and challenge it to live according to the common good and the transcendent character of human beings.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

***Bible:* Matthew 6 / *CCC:* 2401-2463**

CREATION AND MATERIAL GOODS



God created not only angels and human beings, but also a whole visible and material universe as the backdrop for the unfolding of the drama of our relationship with God and each other. The created world also reflects God, lifting up our minds to contemplate the Source of all. God gave us material things in order that, through them, He might lead us to eternity with Him. On a basic level, the visible created world becomes a means for our survival and creative development. Thus, the whole earth was therefore given to human beings for our collective good. This is what we call the *Universal Destination of Goods*.

The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth He has given to the sons of men. —Ps 115:16

God gave the whole earth to the whole human race through the history of its generations. He did not divvy it up among ourselves, but left us to responsibly divvy it up among ourselves.

Private Property arises from the Universal Destination of Goods. It is appropriate that we each have the goods we need for our survival and development. So, we rightly call the goods we have our own, within reason, though not absolutely. Because of Original Sin, we human beings have the tendency to idolize material possessions and money, to hoard, to steal, to damage the goods of others, and to deprive others of their basic necessities. This is the abuse of Private Property, and thus constitutes a use of Private Property that is against the original intention of the Universal Destination of Goods, which is more fundamental. In the situation when persons are deprived of what they need to survive, they can legitimately take from others what they need to survive. This is not stealing, since they are taking what is their fair share, of which they have been unjustly deprived. Needless to say, the societal situation in which this happens should be rectified as soon as possible, so as to prevent situations like these.

Positively, we are called to see all material things as gifts that we are called to be good stewards of. They are not ends in themselves. They are not God, but reflect God. They should be used in service to God and for the authentic good of ourselves and others. We should respect material things and treat them with great responsibility. We should not hoard but seek to be generous. If we have been given more, we are called to be generous and to use our abundance for the good of others, particularly those in need. We should also make restitution for our offenses against the goods of others: returning stolen goods or lost items when possible, paying for damage, returning those things lent to us in a timely manner, paying for what we have taken, etc.

The 7th Commandment forbids stealing:

You shall not steal. —Ex 20:15; Dt 5:19

The 10th Commandments forbids even coveting:

**You shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.
—Dt 5:21; Ex 20:17**

Sins against the 7th and 10th Commandments and our call to good stewardship of created things include the following:

1. *Theft / Stealing* (The definition from the *Catechism*: “usurping another’s property against the reasonable will of the owner.” The *Catechism* also clarifies, “There is no theft if consent can be presumed or if refusal is contrary to reason and the universal destination of goods.” This includes deliberate retention of goods lent or of lost objects possible to return, and violation of legitimate and reasonable copyright laws and the unreasonable taking or using of intellectual property.)
2. *Property damage*
3. *Fraud* (includes tax evasion or cheating on taxes, fraud in selling)
4. *Unjust wages* (when employers do not sufficiently and proportionally pay low income employees while top income employees make an excessive and disproportionate amount; delay or failure to pay just wages)
5. *Price gouging* (forcing up prices by taking advantage of ignorance or hardship)
6. *Promises and contracts that are not upheld or kept*
7. *Unnecessary and excessive waste of money and material resources* (includes excessive and irresponsible gambling, and excessive spending on unnecessary material things)
8. *Failure of reparation* (failure to make up for the damage one has inflicted)

9. *Irresponsible work* (not showing up on time, wasting time, not putting in quality work, being unnecessarily difficult or uncooperative, etc.)
10. *Irresponsible stewardship of the environment and animals* (unnecessary pollution, waste and unsustainable use of resources, overconsumption, abuse of animals, damage to ecosystems, etc.)
11. *Greed / Covetousness*: At the heart of stealing and most other violations of the 7th Commandment is greed, or the excessive love of money and/or material things, which the 10th Commandment addresses.

Jesus calls us to seek heavenly treasure over earthly treasure:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. —Mt 6:19-21

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. —Mt 13:44-46

He also calls us to be generous:

Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back. —Lk 6:38

It is more blessed to give than to receive. —Acts 20:35

What does the Church teach about Work?

Church teaching on work is rich and can be summarized as follows:

- *Rights of Workers*: Workers have a right to a just and living wage, to just working conditions, and to organize effective mediating bodies to advocate on their behalf (unions). Work should be humanizing, not dehumanizing.
- *Responsibility of Workers*: Workers not only support themselves and their families. They also contribute to the good of society. They are called to show up on time, to work hard and responsibly, and to treat others well and fairly in their work.
- *Spirituality of Work*: Work is an opportunity to cooperate in the work of the Creator, to share in the work of the Redeemer, to become holy through one's work, and to inspire others through one's own good example.

What does the Church teach about the Economy?

Modern economies are systems of exchange of money, goods, and services in our societies. Economies should be ordered to the *Common Good*. The Church opposes both communism and unbridled capitalism. The Church does not endorse any particular system but rather gives principles that all systems should serve, principles such as:

- The Common Good
- The Transcendent Character of Human Beings
- The Priority of Persons Over Things
- The Universal Destination of Goods
- Private Property
- Rights and Responsibilities of Workers (summarized above)
- Preferential Option for the Poor
- Subsidiarity

What does the Church teach about environmental issues?

The Church calls us to be faithful stewards of the environment. If we are not good stewards of the environment, we are not acting in accord with the value of created things. Since creation is a gift to us from God, we also dishonor God in mistreating this gift. Often enough, bad stewardship of the environment also leads to human deprivation, suffering, and death. If we are not careful, it could lead to suffering and death on a large scale. In our modern world, we are often not aware of the devastating effects of many of our lifestyle choices on the environment, as well as on the poor and future generations. Using resources *sustainably* is an essential part of being good stewards of creation. It is more important than ever to become knowledgeable of environmental issues, and to make choices that are best for the planet and for other human beings. Personal lifestyle choices and public advocacy are both important. Examples of violations against the environment and the people and other living creatures both present and future who are affected include: unnecessary pollution of air, soil, and water sources; deforestation; excessive green house gas emissions; long-term ramifications of monoculture and the harmful use of pesticides and herbicides; excessive animal agriculture; ecosystem disruption leading to species extinction; unsustainable fishing, hunting, and farming; overconsumption of resources; exploitation of the resources and residents of poorer countries by wealthier countries; governments protecting industries over human life and health; etc. The Church calls all to “ecological conversion” and to counter the “throwaway culture” by cultivating life-style choices that are more sustainable and embody responsible stewardship.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the role of material goods in God’s plan for us?*
2. *What does the Church teach about work?*
3. *What does the Church teach about economic matters?*
4. *How can we be better stewards of material goods and the environment?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: John 8 / CCC: 2464-2513

TRUTH AND COMMUNICATION



Jesus teaches us that, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6), that the Spirit will guide the Church into all truth (Jn 16:13), and that the truth will set us free (Jn 8:32). He calls us to contemplate truth, to communicate it, to live it, and to draw others to live according to the truth. We are called to be ready to give our lives for the truth as well, as Jesus and the martyrs did.

Human beings were made for relationships. And communication is at the heart of relationships. Truth, in turn, is at the heart of good relationships. The 8th Commandment calls us to communicate truthfully and to condemn falsehood, specifically the falsehood involved in bearing false witness against one’s neighbor:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. -Ex 20:16; Dt 5:20

The Scriptures also warn us against every form of lying:

Refuse to utter any lie, for the habit of lying serves no good. —Sir 7:13

The New Testament reinforces this call to thorough honesty and truthfulness:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his practices and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of His Creator. —Col 3:9-10

So, the Scriptures call us to speak with utter truthfulness, and to give others the benefit of the doubt, unless evidence suggests untruthfulness. Sins against the truth include the following:

1. *False witness and perjury* (false witness under oath)
2. *Lying* (deliberate and unjust deception)
3. *Slander* (spreading false reports about others)
4. *Detraction*: Detraction is revealing the moral faults of others without sufficient reason. It unnecessarily stains the reputation of another. When it is necessary or fitting to reveal the moral faults of others (when reporting child abuse, for example), this action is not the sin of detraction but a morally good action. We should do this with caution, however, limiting ourselves to reporting something to those to whom it is necessary and proper to reveal it. People generally have a *Right to a Good Reputation*. We should only highlight someone's bad reputation when necessary. We should avoid *gossip*.
5. *Exaggeration* (exaggerating facts and claims)
6. *Flattery, adulation, complaisance* (unjustly praising someone to gain favor; going along with sin or tacitly approving it)
7. *Boasting* (unnecessary, egocentric, and exaggerated self-praise)
8. *Rash Judgment* (mentally and sometimes vocally drawing unwarranted conclusions about someone's motives or character)

Why do we human beings lie and bend the truth?

Rash judgment along with various *biases* and *prejudices* are common sources of dishonesty, untruthfulness, and lack of openness to truth. We are often selective about what we believe, according to our biases. In addition, exaggerated claims about others start with exaggerated thoughts about them. Inaccuracies in speech begin with inaccuracies in our mind and heart. We also lie in order to hide. When we are ashamed of something, we will be tempted to lie in order to cover it up, or to make sure no one knows about it. The more morally upright we live, however, the less we have to be ashamed of (see Jn 3:19-21). Disordered desire for certain goods (for example, getting a good job) can also tempt us to lie to obtain these goods, at the expense of others. Jesus calls us to have true vision and truthful speech, and to be honest, just, and fair when relating to others.

We have to be especially careful about matters of truth today, because of the prevalence of social media. Those in the professional media are especially obliged to be accurate, to give more weight to what is truly more important, to do all things ethically, and to uphold and promote ethical values. The glorification of sin (sexual sin, violence, materialism, disrespectful language, etc.) in the media is particularly destructive to society. God calls us all to seek, live, protect, and communicate the truth.

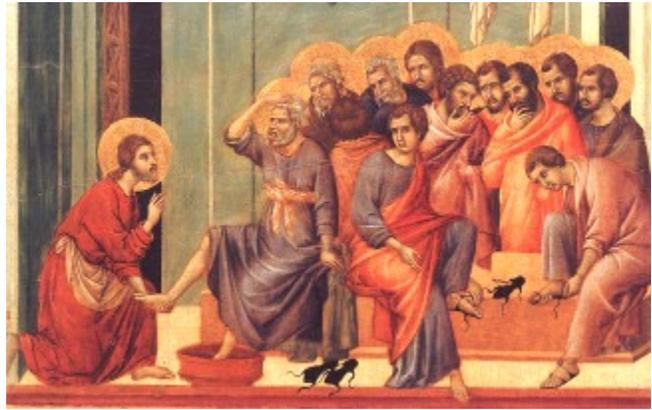
REFLECTION QUESTION

How can we be better servants of the truth?

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Luke 10:25-37; Jn 13

SERVICE AND THE WORKS OF MERCY



Just as we are called to *love* God with all our hearts, and others as Christ loves them—and to live *justly* in giving God and others what is their due—so the Scriptures speak of our call to *serve* God and others:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good? —Dt 10:12-13

If anyone serves me, he must follow me; for where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. —Jn 12:26

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. —Rom 12:11

If anyone would be first, he must be the last of all and servant of all. —Mk 9:35

For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. —Mk 10:45

For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. —Lk 22:27

Our service toward one another ought therefore to flow from our service to God.

This call to serve others is embodied most especially in the action of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

—Jn 13:12-15

Through the Parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) and the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) also, Jesus calls us to be Good Samaritans in our own lives, and to imitate the merciful actions of the just who are admitted into the kingdom of heaven through feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned.

Indeed, a spirit of service should mark the Christian life. We should not be known as being focused only on ourselves, but as being “other-oriented”:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. —Phil 2:4

And He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him Who for their sake died and was raised.

—2 Cor 5:15

St. Paul exhorts us: “always seek to do good to one another and to all” (1 Th 5:15). Indeed, this is in imitation of Jesus who, as Peter says in the Acts of the Apostles, “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

There are countless ways that we can and should do good to others. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are traditional lists of concrete ways that we can do good to those in need:

<p><u>Corporal Works of Mercy</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Feed the Hungry2. Give drink to the Thirsty3. Clothe the Naked4. Shelter the Homeless5. Visit the Imprisoned6. Visit the Sick7. Bury the Dead	<p><u>Spiritual Works of Mercy</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Instruct the Ignorant2. Counsel the Doubtful3. Admonish the Sinner4. Bear Wrongs Patiently5. Forgive Offenses Willingly6. Comfort the Sorrowful7. Pray for the Living and the Dead
<p>Care for Creation, “Our Common Home” (<i>added by Pope Francis on September 1, 2016</i>)</p>	

These are the activities that the saints abounded in throughout the ages and throughout the world, which activities we are called to abound in as well, living the call of Jesus and following in the footsteps of the saints. These lists are not exhaustive but give us many different examples of how we can be of service to others.

In the end, there are three ways that we can help others . . . by prayer, action, and words:

Prayer: God is real. He wants us to pray for others. And He wills to bestow blessings on others through our prayers for them. In the section on prayer, we will speak more about the importance and efficacy of our prayers for others, called *Intercession*. We should daily pray for the shepherds of the Church, for the Church at large, for civil leaders, for the conversion of sinners, for the faithful, for our families and friends, for the sick and suffering, for the poor, for those who have asked for our prayers and those to whom we have the duty to pray, and even for our enemies and for those who have hurt us. When others are not open to our words or actions, fortunately prayer for them is still an avenue open to us.

Actions: We can also influence and help people through our actions. The *Corporal Works of Mercy* give us many examples of actions by which we can help others. There is also the power of *presence* and *example*: we can help people by just being present to them, sometimes without saying much or anything. We can also seek to be an example of goodness to them, thereby attracting them to what is better in life. Indeed, we are called to lead by example. When people are not open to words, often the path of example is still open to us.

Words: The *Spiritual Works of Mercy* give us many examples of how we can do good to others through our words. Listening to others is also a potent way of serving them.

In the end, the best way to help others is by becoming a saint, because the holier we truly are, the more powerful our prayers will be, the more powerful our example will be, and the more powerful our words will be. The more our service is rooted in God and in the strength of Christ, the more fruitful our works of goodness and mercy will be and the less we will tend to get burnt out as well.

Lastly, our charity should be both local and universal. On the one hand, “charity begins at home.” We are called to communicate God’s love first to those in our families, communities, workplaces, and parish church. To regularly communicate love and virtue to those we are most familiar with is itself a challenge. On the other hand, we are also called to be concerned with and to assist those in need around the world, both Christians and non-Christians. We should regularly be praying for those in need around the world, and seeking to help them through trusted charitable organizations.

In particular, we are called to live out our Christian vocation in and through our local church. It is important to register in a local parish, to be faithful in attending Mass, to actively participate in the life and activities of the parish, and to put your “time, talent, and treasure” at

the service of the local Church. Think and pray about what gifts you have and how you can use them for the good of your parish. With regard to tithing, it is important that everyone play his/her part, so that the Church may continue to survive and thrive. Tithing in the Bible means dedicating 10% of one's income to the service of God (Num 17-18; Dt 12-14). In the Catholic Church it is sometimes recommended that one should strive to give 5% to one's parish and 5% to other works of charity, many of which can be covered in "second collections." Parishes traditionally also have a "poor box," which funds are very useful in helping those who come to the parish looking for help (food, gift cards, rent assistance, etc.). People are not expected to give beyond their means, but they are encouraged to do what they can. Money is a means. It should never be the focus of the parish's activities. At the same time, it is important that everyone play his/her part in contributing to the upkeep and flourishing of the parish. Finally, whenever we serve or give to anyone, whether it be in the form of "time, talent, or treasure," or in the form of "prayer, actions, or words," we should not serve or give reluctantly or begrudgingly, but humbly (not seeking to be admired) and joyfully: "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

In doing good to others, we give glory to God, benefit others, and are ourselves enriched. In serving others, we imitate Christ, Who served us. In serving others, God's love overflows from us to others, bearing fruit and leading us to the kingdom of heaven:

Come, O Blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. . . Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

—Mt 25:34-36, 40

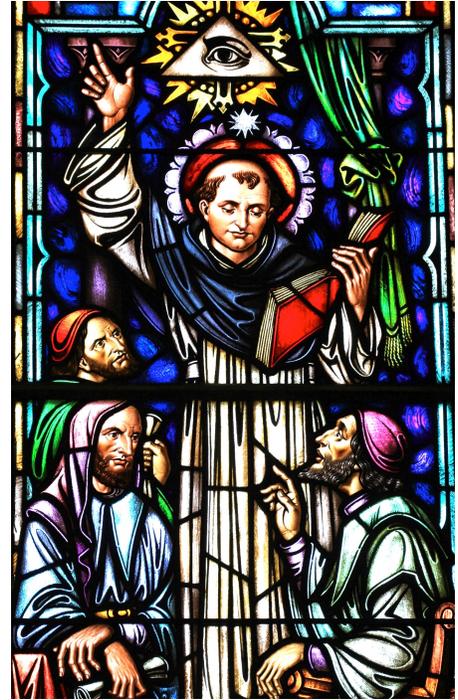
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *Why are service and the works of mercy so central in the Christian life?*
2. *What are different ways we can serve others, both locally and universally?*
3. *What are some ways you might actively participate in your parish?*

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: Mt 28; Mk 16 / *CCC:* 849-856

EVANGELIZATION



God desires the salvation of all (1 Tim 2:4). As we learned in the beginning, God created the universe for the purpose of sharing divine life with persons made in His image and likeness. As we learn from the Old Testament, and above all in the example and teaching of Jesus, even when we sin and wander from God, God lavishly offers us His forgiveness and calls us back to Him. Jesus came as the Good Shepherd seeking out the lost sheep. Through Christ, therefore, God calls all people to salvation.

In His public ministry, Jesus called, formed, and sent out disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God. After He rises and before He ascends to heaven, Jesus gives the *Great Commission*, namely the explicit command to His disciples to preach, bring His salvation to, and make disciples of, all nations. Each of the Gospels has its own version of this commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. —Mt 28:19-20

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. —Mk 16:15-16

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be

preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high. —Lk 24:46-49

As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. —Jn 20:21

Along with the apostles, the Pharisee Saul, who initially persecuted the Christians, encountered the risen Christ one day on the road to Damascus. His life was changed, he repented, and he spent the rest of his life preaching the Gospel and forming Christian communities around the Mediterranean world. He would become St. Paul. The Lord Jesus spoke to a disciple, Ananias, about the mission He had in mind for him:

Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. —Acts 9:15-16

St. Paul would become the early Church's greatest missionary, and a good amount of the New Testament would be comprised of his story and missionary efforts in the Acts of the Apostles and a number of his letters to various churches and individuals (Romans, 1 & Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon).

The end of the world will come once the Gospel is preached to all nations:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.

—Mt 24:14

This mission of the Church comes directly from Christ, therefore. It is God's will that all come to believe in Christ, enter the Church, and live according to the kingdom of God. Preaching the Gospel and inviting all to faith and conversion of life is not therefore "imposing our beliefs on others." Evangelization is not about forcing anyone to believe anything. It is rather an invitation, an invitation someone can freely embrace or reject. To reject the Church and her missionary call, however, is to reject Christ, and to reject Christ is to reject the One Who sent Him:

He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me. —Lk 10:16

And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them. —Mk 6:11

Love of Neighbor: Evangelization

Simeon, who received the child Jesus in the Temple, predicted that Jesus would be accepted and rejected by many (Lk 2:34). And Jesus Himself gives us the parable of the seeds, which illustrates different ways that the Gospel is received, from immediate rejection, to immediate acceptance but with a later falling-away, to a full acceptance that perseveres and bears abundant fruit (Mt 13:1-9; 18-23).

The shepherds of the Church have the chief responsibility to spread the Gospel and call people to conversion, forgiveness, and discipleship. However, all the faithful are called to share in this mission of *evangelization*, which is the sharing of the Gospel. Jesus instructed the freed man who was possessed by demons, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you” (Mk 5:19). This is a great example of lay evangelization.

Evangelization springs from love. When we love someone, we want the best for that person, which means we desire his or her full flourishing, both physically and spiritually. We want what God wants for him or her. And, as we said in the beginning, all people desire God in the depth of their being, whether they realize it or not, and whether they are open to God or not. This means that what we proclaim corresponds to what all desire. Many people just don’t realize that yet.

How do we evangelize others? By praying for them, by providing them with a good example, by entering into a relationship with them, and—when the time is right—by seeing if they might be open to God. It is important to listen to and learn where a person is at, and how grace has already been at work in their lives. Insofar as they are open, we can help others become closer to God and slowly discover all that God has in mind for them in our Catholic Faith. We shouldn’t be overly forceful. We should not be overly timid either. We should pray that the Holy Spirit may guide our efforts to bring others closer to Him. We should always be trying to “plant seeds,” knowing that some seeds will take, while others will not. Others will take time to open up and begin to blossom and grow and bear fruit. In the end, evangelization is God’s work. We are mere instruments through which God wills to work. Be open to how God can use you!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the basis of the Church’s mission to evangelize and make disciples?*

2. *How can we best share our faith with others?*

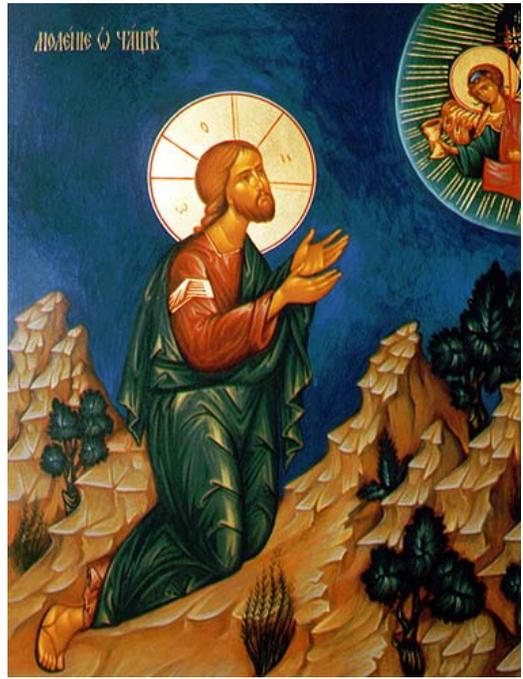
READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK

Bible: John 17 / *CCC:* 2558-2622

THE *OUR FATHER*

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER



Among all created things, angels and humans are uniquely “persons,” made in the image and likeness of God. Because of this, they have the capacity for personal relationships, both with each other and with God. *Living out* a personal relationship with God is the essence of prayer.

Apart from grace, we could become aware of God’s existence and turn to Him with our thoughts and words. However, because of grace, we are now able to relate to God in a new way: not only as creatures seeking to do Him homage, but now as beloved sons and daughters of God, belonging to God and praying to God our Father from the heart of His beloved Son, in and with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

We have spoken about the intimate relationship of total love that the Son of God has with the Father in eternity, and of how, in becoming man, the Son now expresses this intimate relationship with His Father *in and through His humanity*. One of the reasons the Son of God became man was to invite us into the loving relationship He has with the Father in and through His humanity, so that *we* might love the Father as Christ loves the Father, in and through Christ, as St. Paul explains:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” —Gal 4:4-6

This is why Jesus is always speaking to or about the Father, and why He taught us to pray to the Father in the words of the *Our Father*:

And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this: *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* —Mt 6:7-13

The Holy Spirit is essential in all this as well. It is the Holy Spirit Who unites us to the mystery of Christ, enabling us to pray to the Father through Christ, as St. Paul explains:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And He Who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. —Rom 8:26-27

This intimate relationship with the Trinity through grace is begun in us in Baptism. We are called to grow in this loving relationship all our life, until it is perfected in the eternal love of heaven. The life of prayer, then, is a life in which we seek to grow in our relationship with God in love. In prayer, we come to know and love Him Who knows and loves us unceasingly. In every moment, God draws close to us and moves us into relationship with Him. In prayer, we complete the relationship by returning His love through our mind, heart, and life.

When we sin, we compromise and diminish our relationship with God. This is why when Adam and Eve sin, they are depicted as hiding, as covering themselves, as turning away from God (Gen 3:8-12). Indeed, sin is the opposite of prayer. We cannot sin and pray (truly) at the same time. Love, humility, and turning away from sin are intrinsic qualities to authentic prayer. This is why, at times, God is depicted as turning His face from us and refusing to hear us until we are repentant (Is 1:15-18; Jer 11:11; Ezk 8:18; Ps 66:18). In reality, it is we who are not really turning to God, since we are more oriented toward ourselves than toward God, even as we might think we are praying to God.

In the Old Testament, we see how human beings were created in a harmonious relationship with God, how they fell away from that relationship through sin, but also how God was ever calling them back into relationship with Him. Through Noah, God taught His people the importance of obedience and righteousness (Gen 7:1). Through Abraham, God called His people to “walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). Through Isaac, God drew His people to meditate on His ways (Gen 24:63). Through Jacob, God taught His people about His presence in their midst (Gen 28:10-17), and to bring their struggles to Him (Gen 32:22-32). Through Joseph, God taught His people patience and how to forgive and to trust in God’s providence (Gen 50:15-21). God taught Moses to “stand in the breach” (Ps 106:23) and intercede for the people (Ex 32:11-14), and to love Him with all their hearts (Dt 6:4-9).

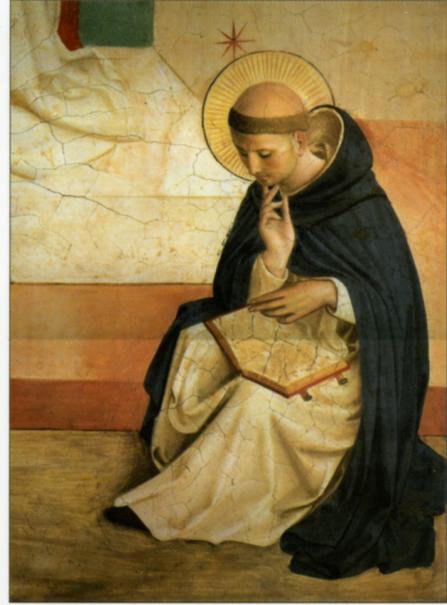
Through David, God taught His people to seek forgiveness and make amends (2 Sam 11-12; 24; Ps 51). The *Psalms*, which is a book of 150 prayers, depicts the various facets of our relationship with God, including many of our inner struggles. Through the prophets, God taught His people to repent, to attend to righteousness and the needs of the poor, and to trust in His deliverance (Is 1; Jer 25; 27).

In the New Testament, with Jesus, we are given a picture of the kind of relationship with God we are meant to have. Jesus prays in the Temple as a twelve-year-old child (Lk 2:49). In His public ministry, Jesus spends long hours in prayer before the break of day, often in a “lonely place,” on a “mountain,” or in the “wilderness” (Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16; 6:12). He frequently makes exclamations to the Father (Mt 11:25; 26:39, 42; Mk 14:36; Lk 10:21-22; 22:42; 23:34, 46). Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:21). He prays before His Baptism (Lk 3:21), the choosing of the apostles (Lk 6:12), and His Transfiguration (Lk 9:28). He also prays with His disciples at the Last Supper in what is known as His High Priestly Prayer (Jn 17), in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:41-44; Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42), and on the Cross (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34; Lk 23:34, 46; Jn 19:30). His example teaches us how to pray.

Jesus also verbally teaches us many things about prayer. Specifically, He teaches us:

- To relate to God as our Father, and to pray the *Our Father* (Mt 6:9-15; Lk 11:1-4);
- To pray and ask things from God in the name of Jesus (Jn 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26);
- To ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13);
- Not to pray in order to be seen (Mt 6:5);
- To go into our room and pray to our Father in secret (Mt 6:6);
- Not to heap up many empty phrases, thinking we can manipulate God through formulaic repetition (Mt 6:7);
- That God knows what we need before we ask Him (Mt 6:8);
- To glorify God, seek His kingdom and will, ask for what we need, seek His forgiveness, forgive others, and ask for help in temptation and deliverance from evil (Mt 6:9-13)—all elements summarized in the *Our Father*;
- To seek God’s forgiveness whenever we pray, and to forgive others as a precondition for God forgiving us (Mt 6:12; 14-15);
- To confidently seek the things we need from God, to “ask”, “seek”, and “knock” (Mt 7:7-12; Lk 11:9-11);
- To pray always and not lose heart (Lk 18:1);
- To be persistent in what we ask for in prayer (Lk 18:1-8; Lk 11:5-13);
- To be repentant and humble in prayer (Lk 18:9-14);
- To pray and celebrate the Eucharist together (Mt 18:20; 1 Cor 11:24-25; Lk 22:19);
- To keep vigilant in prayer, ever ready for the second coming of Christ (Mt 25:13; Mk 13:37).

WHEN TO PRAY



Time is a gift of God leading to eternity. We are called to make the most of the gift of time (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5), doing all that we do in love (1 Cor 16:14) and in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17), glorifying God with our deeds (1 Pt 2:12; 4:16), growing in holiness (1 Th 4:1, 3; 5:23), and serving our neighbor in charity (Jn 13:34). Our time on earth is naturally divided into days, months, and years. God has also willed that the week be a marked unit of several days for us, beginning with Sunday, the first day of the week, the day on which the world was created, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead, the day on which the Holy Spirit came upon the Church on the feast of Pentecost, and a day of worship and rest for us.

Sunday is the preeminent day of the week for worship, therefore. And the Mass is the greatest prayer, since it is a celebration of the offering of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. The Mass and the Eucharist, then, stand at the center of the life and week for the Christian.

There are other important times to pray, of course, especially each day. The Scriptures speak of the morning (Ps 5:3; 57:7-10; 59:16; 63:6; 90:14; 119:147; 143:8; Is 33:2; Mk 1:35), the evening (Ps 141:2; Mt 14:23), and night (Lk 6:12; Gen 32:24; 1 Sam 15:11; Ps 4:4, 8; 30:5; 42:8; 63:6; 119:55, 62, 148; 134:1; Lam 2:19; 2 Sam 12:16; Joel 1:13; Acts 16:25; Ps 22:2) as privileged times to pray. We also see the early disciples in Acts praying at different times in the middle of the day, such as when Peter prays on a housetop at 12pm (Acts 10:9), or when Peter and John go up to the Temple to pray at 3pm, the hour when Jesus died (Acts 3:1; 10:30).

When to Pray

The Morning: It is important to pray at the beginning of the day, so that one is rooted in God—and in His strength and peace—as one goes into the day. It is good to dedicate each day to God, and ask for the grace to do His will throughout the day. Many Catholics traditionally do this through a *Morning Offering*. There are different versions. One can always do this in his or her own way as well. It is also helpful to begin and end each day with the Sign of the Cross, so that the day itself can be seen as a prayer in which one seeks to offer up everything for the glory of God. Time for quiet prayer is recommended in the morning, although some prefer the evening for this. It is good to start with shorter times, such as 5-10 minutes, and to work up to more time, such as 30 minutes, or even an hour.

The Evening: The evening is a good time to wind down and reflect, to give thanks for the blessings of the day, to ask forgiveness for one's faults, and to pray for others.

During the Day: During breaks, it is a good practice to pray to God, even if only briefly.

Before Meals: Before one eats a meal, it is fitting to give thanks to God for the gift of nourishment, to ask His blessing upon the food and the meal (perhaps with others), and to pray for those who go without. Don't do it for show, but also don't be afraid to make the Sign of the Cross and pray when eating in public. Some Catholics also pray briefly at the end of each meal, thanking God for the meal and praying for the faithful departed.

Other Times: If it is natural to mark each week with the prayer of Sunday Mass, and each day with prayer at the beginning and end of the day, it is also fitting to mark each month in some way, especially by going to confession. Some people have a day each month in which they take extra time to pray and be spiritually renewed. Some also make an annual retreat of a few days or even a week. More regularly, some make the practice of going to daily Mass, and/or a weekly prayer group. Lastly, like Jesus, it is important to pray before important events in our lives.

SCRIPTURAL READINGS

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” —Heb 13:8

“But I call upon God; and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and He will hear my voice.” —Ps 55:16-17

“He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.” —Ps 91:4-6

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” —Col 3:17

PRAY ALWAYS

The Christian is called not only to pray regularly at marked times, but also to “pray always”:

And He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. —Lk 18:1

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Th 5:17-18

I keep the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. —Ps 16:8

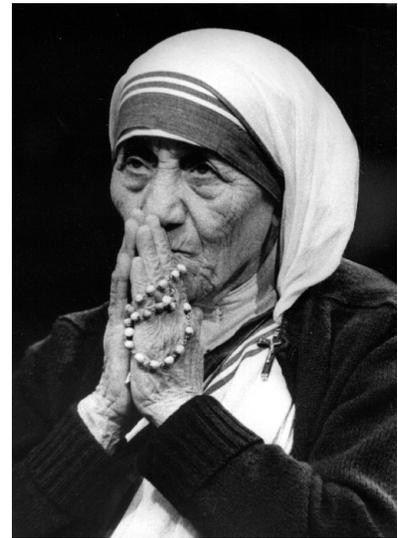
My eyes are ever toward the LORD. —Ps 25:15

In Him we live and move and have our being. —Acts 17:28

God is always loving us. We are called to become increasingly aware of His presence at all times, to love Him in return, and to direct everything we do to Him and His glory. It is true that we cannot always give our full attention to God, as when we take time to pray more directly. However, we can cultivate the practice of becoming aware of His presence throughout the day. We traditionally call this practice *Recollection*. One’s day and life becomes much deeper and more meaningful when recollection is practiced. Helpful ways to remember God’s presence and to “pray always” are:

- Sending up little prayers of love (“effusions” or “aspirations,” as it were) throughout the day. This can be thought of as regularly feeding the fire of prayer with kindling.
- Pausing within yourself to become aware of God’s presence. People in the East often do this through relaxing, mindfulness, and breath-awareness.
- Using holy images to remind you of the reality of God and His angels and saints.
- Glancing at natural things, such as trees, or the sky, or a plant in one’s office, to remind you of the Creator.
- Looking for the image of God within people.
- Seeing everything good, true, and beautiful as a reflection of God.
- Reflecting on how God is speaking to you through other people and events.

WHERE TO PRAY



Insofar as we are called to “pray always,” every place becomes a place of prayer. When we take time to pray in a more focused way, however, there are certain places that are more ideal:

One’s Room: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:6). The idea here is to find a personal place of solitude where you can be alone with God and come to know and love Him personally and intimately. It can be any room, but one’s own dwelling is meant to be a place sanctified by prayer and a place to find God.

A Church: In the Old Testament, God instructed His people to build a “Tabernacle” or “Tent of Meeting,” which was a kind of portable Temple. This was but provisional and prepared in time for a permanent Temple in Jerusalem. God made Himself present and accessible to His people in a privileged way in His Temple. The Temple is called a “house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56:7; Jer 7:11; 1 Macc 7:37; Mk 11:17; Mt 21:13; Lk 19:46). The Temple in turn is a sign of a greater reality, Jesus Himself, Who is God-among-us (Mt 1:23) and God’s true Temple on earth (Jn 1:14; 2:21). Christian Churches are a symbol of Jesus, the Temple of God. They also house the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, within our Tabernacles. So, because Catholic churches are blessed, and graced with the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, they become an ideal place of prayer for the community, both during and outside of Mass. They are also a sign of the Temple in the eternal Jerusalem, heaven itself (Rev 21:22).

Outdoors: Like Isaac who meditated while walking in a field (Gen 24:63), or Moses and Elijah who prayed on mountains and in caves (Ex 24:15-18; 34:28; Kgs 19:8), Jesus often prayed on a “mountain” (Mk 6:46), in the “wilderness” (Lk 5:16), in “a lonely place” (Mk 1:35), or “in a garden” (Jn 18:1; Mk 14:32-42). To pray outdoors, and especially in nature, can be refreshing and uplifting to our minds and hearts, since we are surrounded by things that reflect the beauty of the Creator.

HOW TO PRAY



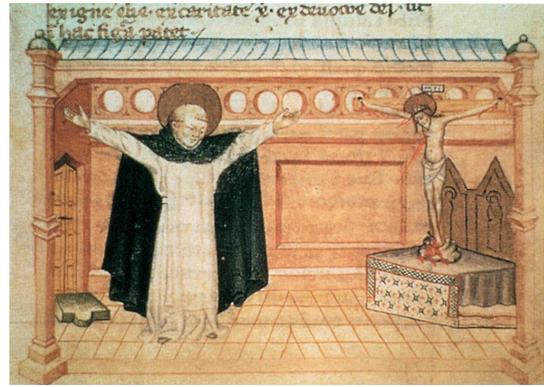
How are we to pray? Most importantly, *with the heart!* God doesn't want us to mouth words to Him when we are thinking about something else, or when we are not really sincere, or when we are not really repentant. Prayer, above all, is a directing of the mind and heart to God. It is the grace of the Holy Spirit moving us interiorly to know and love God our Father in Christ. To pray with the heart, certain dispositions are necessary and fundamental:

- **Faith:** Faith moves us to believe in and surrender to the God Who reveals Himself to us in love.
- **Humility:** Humility acknowledges that God is infinitely greater than we are, and that we stand before Him weak and sinful.
- **Repentance:** Repentance is genuinely turning away from our sins, versus denying, justifying, settling for, or making excuses for our sins. It is a grace-inspired act of reform and intention of betterment.
- **Hope:** Hope trusts in God and His grace, confident in His love for us.
- **Love:** God's love beckons us to love Him in return.
- **Obedience:** In prayer, we are always called to say, "Thy will be done," not "My will be done." We seek to submit to God.
- **Reverence:** It is only fitting that we acknowledge God's greatness and come before Him with the greatest reverence for His infinite mystery, with "the fear of the Lord."
- **Thanksgiving:** Since God has given us everything, we are called to be ever thankful for His love and mercy, and for all that He has given to—and done for—us.
- **Perseverance:** While it is important to have all these dispositions when we pray, it is equally important to persevere in the practice of regular prayer. Prayer is to the soul what water is to a plant. When a plant stops being watered, it withers and dies. When a person stops praying, he spiritually withers and dies. Prayer also brings depth to life. Without prayer, we remain on the surface, and everything becomes superficial. It is crucial, then, to continue in—and not to fall away from—the practice of prayer. God calls us to persevere in the practice of prayer even when it is difficult.

Since we as human beings are both individual and social in our nature, it is also fitting that we worship God both personally (individually) and socially (with others).

In the following sections, we will also explore various dimensions or prayer.

POSTURES OF PRAYER



When we pray, it is the whole of ourselves that prays. While the core of prayer is the heart, it is fitting that we also express prayer through our bodies. The following postures are traditional prayer postures:

Prostrating: Prostrating—or praying while laying face down—is a gesture of radical humility, need, and surrender to God (Gen 17:3; Ex 20:6; Jos 7:6; Lk 5:12).

Kneeling: Kneeling is a posture of reverence and humility (Lk 22:41; Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5).

Sitting: Sitting is a symbol of relaxation, peace, listening, and attentiveness.

Standing: Standing is a symbol of readiness (Neh 8:5), of strength (Mk 11:25; Jn 19:25), of confidence (1 Sam 1:26), of sharing in the victory of the Resurrection, and of awaiting the second coming of Christ (Lk 21:36).

Orans (praying with hands uplifted / facing East): Often standing is accompanied with the lifting up of one's hands, which is a gesture of praise (Neh 8:7; Ps 141:2), blessing (Luke 24:50), peace (1 Tim 2:8), confidence (Ps 63:4), transcendence, intercession (Ex 17:8-13), of reaching out to God (Ps 134:2), and of the Cross and/or Resurrection. Early Christian iconography depicts figures praying with uplifted hands. Early Christians also prayed toward the direction of the East, since the sun was seen as a symbol of Christ, the light of the world (Jn 8:12), and in expectation of the second coming of Christ (Rev 22:20).

Walking: Walking while praying is a gesture of pilgrimage (Ps 122), meditation (Gen 24:63), and divine accompaniment (Lk 24:15). Processions are often a part of liturgy (entrance procession, offertory procession, Communion procession at Mass, or Eucharistic processions as on Holy Thursday and Corpus Christi).

The idea here is that there are different ways to pray, and the different prayer postures can bring a refreshing variety in prayer, which can be helpful for keeping one's attention directed toward God. Postures, again, involve the body, and therefore the whole person, in prayer.

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER

In our relationships, we speak to others in various ways. Sometimes we praise and affirm them. Sometimes we thank them. Sometimes we apologize to them. Sometimes we ask them questions and seek something from them, either for ourselves or for others. We relate to God in all of these ways as well. In English, a popular way of summarizing these different ways is by using the acronym “ACTS,” standing for “Adoration”, “Contrition”, “Thanksgiving”, and “Supplication”:

Adoration: It is only fitting to praise God for His love and goodness. We use different words to express our total praise of God above all created things, recognizing that He is the Author of all that exists, as He is also our Redeemer, Savior, Sanctifier, and the One Who will glorify us in heaven. Specifically, we use the words “praise”, “adore”, “bless”, “worship”, “give homage”, “bow down to”, etc. The Scriptures are full of expressions of praise. At its heart, the act of adoring or praising God should be an act of total love toward the One Who has loved us totally: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:4-5). Jesus invites us to pray, “Hallowed be Thy Name” (Mt 6:9).

Contrition: When we sin in any way, we offend God, the Source of all goodness. We should be ever asking for His pardon for our sins: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (Ps 51:1-2). “Forgive us our trespasses as we have forgiven those who trespass against us” (Mt 6:12).

Thanksgiving: Since God has given us so much, it is only right that we give thanks to Him: “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Th 5:18) . . . “always and for everything” (Eph 5:20).

Supplication: In supplication, we petition God for our needs: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt 6:11). We can ask for anything, as long as it is according to God’s will (Jas 4:3; 1 Jn 5:14): “Thy will be done” (Mt 6:10). Although God knows what we need before we ask Him (Mt 6:8), it is His will to give us gifts through our asking (Mt 7:7-12). Praying for others is called *Intercession*: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men. . . this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1-4). We are called to constantly pray for the physical and spiritual needs of others.

We find all of these elements expressed in the *Our Father*. These elements and different expressions can also guide our spontaneous prayer in which we seek to praise and thank God, ask for His forgiveness, and ask for what we—and others—need.

THREE WAYS TO PRAY

There are three ways we can communicate with God: we can speak to Him in love, we can ponder His mystery and His works and words, or we can just be with Him in contemplative union. We call these three ways *Vocal Prayer*, *Meditation*, and *Contemplation*:

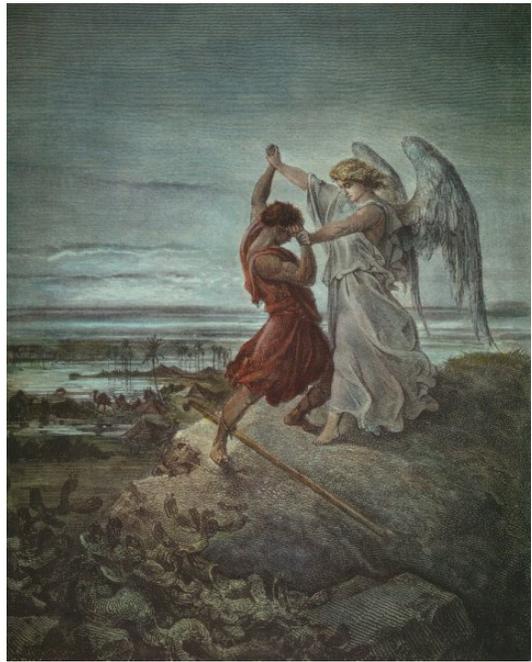
Vocal Prayer: In vocal prayer, we speak to God from our hearts. We can do this through already-composed, or formulaic, prayers, like the *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, or the countless beautiful prayers in Christian tradition. Or we can pray spontaneously, from our hearts. Composed prayers help give us the right sentiments to express toward God, especially when it is hard to find the right words to say. They also facilitate praying the same prayers together in a group. Spontaneous prayers in turn are more natural to what we want to personally express to God in the moment. They also work well when someone leads prayer in a group. As Catholics, we should be comfortable praying both ways.

Meditation: Meditation goes beyond words: It is a pondering over the mystery of God, or over the words or working of God. Reading the Scriptures, pondering the mysteries of the Rosary, contemplating God's beauty as reflected in nature, and meditating on both the various facets of our Faith and the working of God in the events of our lives are all good sources for meditation. Just as Vocal Prayer draws our words to God, meditation draws our imagination and wonder toward the mystery of God.

Contemplation: Contemplation goes yet beyond meditation, and beyond words and images. It is a "resting in God." It is just being in His presence. It is sometimes compared to when a married couple just spends time being with each other, without having to say anything. It is being united to God in deep love: "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17). It is a little taste of heaven, although we don't always necessarily "feel" so close to God. We are all called to find times to be still before God in silence: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). "For God alone my soul waits in silence" (Ps 62:1). God draws us all to contemplate His reality and His love, and, through purifying our hearts, He wants to give us the grace of *Infused Contemplation*, which is grace of almost always being aware of God's presence. It is the prayer of resting-in-God placed within us by God. Contemplation draws the whole of our person and our innermost depths to God.

When we grow spiritually, we grow in all of these dimensions of prayer: our conversation with God becomes more intimate, our meditation deeper, and our contemplation more perfect. These different ways of praying are helpful to us at different times. Sometimes when we are very distracted or grieving, vocal prayer might be the most helpful. If we have been very busy, we might need time just to be quiet with God. Sometimes we feel inspired to ponder over various thoughts in meditation.

THE BATTLE OF PRAYER



Prayer is not easy. We avoid prayer for various reasons: busyness, distraction (our mind is busy thinking about a thousand other things), sin, temptation, attachments, thinking that prayer is boring and unproductive, being more anxious to accomplish various tasks, feeling unworthy, having a hard time sitting still, the fear of facing ourselves, the feeling of vulnerability, our preference for other things, feeling “dry,” etc. The truth is that prayer fulfills us, because God fulfills us, in prayer. It also brings depth, meaning, peace, joy, strength, and enjoyment in life. It is the spiritual “fuel” that helps us to be our best for God and others. But, it takes discipline. How can we be more faithful to prayer, given the difficulties mentioned above? The following things will be helpful:

- ***God’s grace:*** Prayer is primarily God’s work. We can’t force ourselves to pray. It is our task to let God move us to cooperate with His grace, and help us to pray. In prayer, we come as beggars, needy but fully confident that God is there and will help us in whatever state we find ourselves in the moment.
- ***Fidelity:*** If you want to be faithful to prayer, know from the outset that you will be tempted to fall away: “My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, remain in justice and fear, and prepare yourself for temptation” (Sir 2:1). Showing up is half the battle. It is crucial to make the time even when you don’t feel like it and are distracted the whole time. Don’t think about how to pray. Don’t make a million resolutions. Just do it. Just pray!

- ***Spiritual Nourishment:*** It can be hard to go from a busy day to entering into silent prayer to God for any length of time. Since we are people who look for stimulation, visuals—such as icons and other holy images—can help us focus and provide content for meditation to our minds. Reading the Bible or a spiritual book can also help inspire and nourish our prayer. Visiting a church, changing prayer postures, praying in a different place, etc., can also help. Praying in the presence of the Eucharist is especially fruitful. We should also be careful what we are putting into our minds, hearts, and bodies outside of times for prayer.
- ***Perseverance:*** You will not always feel like praying. And, like anything, the initial excitement and motivation will fade with time. Everyone experiences “dryness” (not feeling anything) in prayer. Everyone gets distracted in prayer. Everyone will be tempted to think that they are wasting their time, or not getting anything out of prayer. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Distraction is revealing: it reveals our attachments, what our heart is preoccupied by. It is often an indication of an area where we need growth, an area in which we are clinging to something too much. Dryness, likewise, is something God uses to purify our hearts, so that we learn to love Him for His own sake and not because of any consolations we might feel when we pray. As the saying goes, “What do we love more, the consolations of God or the God of consolations?” If someone lies out in the sun, she doesn’t always feel the light soaking into her skin, but the light is being absorbed. If someone goes into heart surgery and is put under anesthesia, he won’t feel anything. But the doctor is working on his heart. Something is really happening, even though the patient feels nothing. So too, God is always working on and in us when we pray. And He is present even when we don’t feel His presence, just as the sun does not cease to exist when we don’t see it when it is temporarily hidden behind clouds. God is helping us grow in pure love of Him. God is ever calling us to deeper conversion, and more perfect love. Prayer, like life, is not easy, but the practice of prayer is worth it. The way to the Resurrection is through the Cross: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25). Indeed, great blessings come to us through persevering in prayer.

Congratulations on finishing this overview of the Catholic Faith! You are encouraged to review this overview on your own and to deepen in your relationship with God and your faith for the rest of your life. It is Jesus Who leads you. Through Him, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, God calls you to know and love Him and the depths of His love, truth, and plans for you. May the Holy Spirit help you to fully embrace the life of holiness He is calling you to in the midst of the Catholic Church, and to come one day to your final destination with your brothers and sisters in faith, with Mary and the angels and saints in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.