

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 to

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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

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

- “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 rod 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 stands 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, confident 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, 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 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, the intrinsic dignity of human nature, and God's honor 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 spiritual 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 reflected in all created things, but also to have a keen awareness of the passing nature of the present world. It perfects 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 or 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 and lead to eternal reward:

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 “ends 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 that 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.

In order to act well, our emotions need to be shaped and controlled by our reason. For this we need God's help, and we are encouraged to bring our emotional struggles to God in prayer, as we see illustrated in 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.

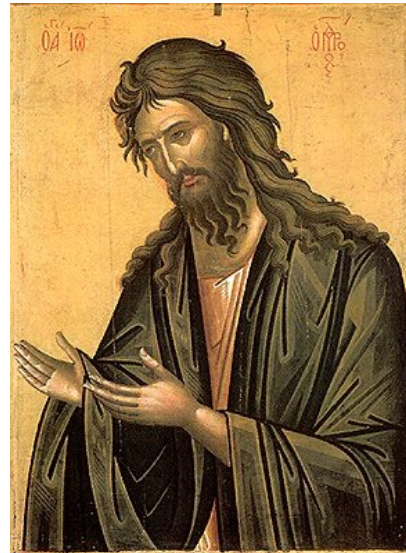
—Gal 5:13

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 are guilty of 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 (Gen 3). After this, sin spreads. Cain kills Abel (Gen 4:1-16). Wickedness spreads on earth, occasioning the flood (Gen 6-9). Even after that, people seek to make themselves godlike with the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). Even when God enters into covenant with His people, sin is a constant reality. The people waver between fidelity and infidelity (Judges 2). Even chosen patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings are discovered to sin in various ways.

Sin is the greatest evil, because whereas with 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. God also counts us worthy to sanctify through grace and the Sacraments.

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.

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:

<u>Corporal Works of Mercy</u>	<u>Spiritual Works of Mercy</u>
1. Feed the Hungry	1. Instruct the Ignorant
2. Give drink to the Thirsty	2. Counsel the Doubtful
3. Clothe the Naked	3. Admonish the Sinner
4. Shelter the Homeless	4. Bear Wrongs Patiently
5. Visit the Imprisoned	5. Forgive Offenses Willingly
6. Visit the Sick	6. Comfort the Sorrowful
7. Bury the Dead	7. Pray for the Living and the Dead

Care for Creation, “Our Common Home” (*added by Pope Francis on September 1, 2016*)

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