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30 DAYS TO FREEDOM

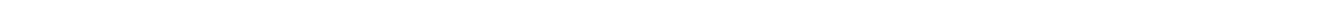


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INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.

...Our path towards holiness is a constant battle. Those who do not realize this will be prey to failure or mediocrity. For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the Word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, and missionary outreach. If we become careless, false promises of evil will easily seduce us.

...Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life, and growth in love are the best ways to overcome the temptations of evil. Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out.

...The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. At the same time, it demands that we keep “our lamps lit” (Lk 12:35) and be attentive. “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:22).

Pope Francis
Apostolic Exhortation
Gaudete et Exsultate

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Deliverance is a process that requires a firm commitment to follow Christ. Freedom does not typically come all at once but comes in stages. Depending on the reasons for a person's affliction, healing and freedom largely depends on developing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, healing from past wounds, as well as overcoming tendencies toward sinful behaviors and unhealthy thinking patterns that are often influenced by the demonic. This prayer manual will help guide you.

Try not to fall into discouragement but keep pressing forward to receive the freedom that Jesus purchased for you by dying on the Cross. The enemy will attempt to overwhelm people through doubt, fear, and intimidation. Try to remove these obstacles by asking God for the grace to let go of control and the ability to trust in His plan. Demons will also discourage people from attending prayer sessions. It is important to avoid cancelling. Please ask any questions you wish and do not hesitate to voice any concerns as well.

God is more powerful than any evil spirit. So focus your thoughts, heart and your attention all towards the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The more you begin to understand and grow to believe your Christian faith the more results you will see.

We recognize this process is deeply personal and sharing certain details may be painful, embarrassing, or difficult. It is important to bring everything that is associated with your spiritual suffering “into the light.” We work with many people facing remarkably similar circumstances; everything is kept highly confidential.

BASIC EXPLANATION OF ANGELS & DEMONS

From a natural point of view, demons operate like angels: they think and act as spirits. They can communicate by impressing thoughts and images upon the mind and can place matter into motion merely by their will. Angels stay united to God and therefore are superior; demons, due to their sin, rebelled against God and remain separated from His graces and the Kingdom of Heaven. This choice is permanent and eternal.

Demons have profound knowledge of our capacities, our inclinations, our sympathies and antipathies, our weak points—just the right way to bring us down or tempt us to sin at any given moment. Demons can also fuel our imagination, stir up emotions and passions, and cause suffering to the extent that God will allow. Yet, no demon can fully conquer our free will and totally prevent us from choosing God and holiness of life.

Essential Guide to Angels

Libreria Editrice Vaticana

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

WHY DESIRE A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS?

“To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement.” —St. Augustine

The desire for a relationship with Jesus is an excellent thing; it is the realization that all our desires—great and small—can only be fulfilled in Him. The longing you may be experiencing can be the first step of a journey for seeking truth. He only asks that you seek Him and cooperate with His efforts to sanctify you. But that can seem like a daunting mission. How do we answer the call of our Creator to deeper union with Him? Have courage... it's a beautiful journey, one that we are all called to.

RENOUNCING THE WORKS OF SATAN

Becoming free from demonic oppression includes taking responsibility for ways we have accommodated or possibly consented to these evil influences and choosing to reject them in the name of Jesus. This is a formal declaration, directed towards the enemy, that one is no longer enslaved by sin or willing to repeat the mistakes of the past. Renunciation is most effective when it is specific. What spirits do you recognize at work in your life?

FOUR WAYS DEMONS GAIN ENTRY

Legal Grounds: These are ways that provide a demon with the right to enter or impact a person's life. Unconfessed sins, ungodly soul ties (due to fornication), unforgiveness, cursed objects, experimentation with the occult (energy healing, tarot cards, psychics, etc.) and more, must be resolved through repentance, renunciations, extending forgiveness, etc. Do not be embarrassed to share personal or dark experiences. Everything is held in total confidence.

There are many cults that mix Catholic saints or devotions with pagan systems or explicitly demonic entities. They often use some Catholic symbols, or altered Catholic symbols, to insult God and to gain some amount of acceptability and legitimacy. One of the best known is Santa Meurte, a very large religion that sprung up in Mexico. Followers worship a skeletal female figure that is a mockery of the Virgin Mary. Though there are many false religions and cults, the games of the demons are the same. The deceptions of the devil are usually based on pride.

Many New Age and pagan practices that are advertised as healing or healthy are spiritually dangerous. For example, Kundalini Yoga teaches that a serpent spirit is at the base of the spine and after activation from the touch of a yogi master rises to the head. This then causes uncontrolled movements and vocalizations. Similarly, Reiki healing has led to a number of possession cases, often after years of well-meaning work. Other occult powers beyond healing are involved in the higher levels of Reiki that are usually not taught to Westerners.

Divination (fortune telling) and necromancy (supposed communication with the dead) are the two most common traps that people fall into that violate the First Commandment. This is because they both address people's primary fears of death: fear about their own future or sadness at the loss of a loved one. Going to psychics or having mediums speak to dead loved-ones can open doors to demonic problems. Trying to communicate with the dead opens the door to a relationship with demonic spirits since any poor soul in Purgatory would not draw a person into violating the First Commandment. Paranormal investigating is

essentially necromancy because it is an attempt to make the dead manifest and communicate. This opens doors to relationships with demons on a large scale.

People that use divination based on using their own body as an instrument of their practice usually develop problems faster. Examples include talking boards [Ouija], pendulums, trance mediumship, lean testing, grip testing and other similar activities. These are particularly dangerous because they give spirits permission to move part of the body and those rights of control remain until properly renounced.

Keeping the First Commandment: Adam Blai

Strongholds: People often develop patterns of incorrect thinking that need to change by reading the Word of God. For example, if one thinks, “God is angry and ashamed of me” that is untrue and leads to feelings of despair and worthlessness. Scripture instead tells us that if we are baptized and follow God’s commandments, we are His adopted children. Beginning to realize and believe God’s truths and promises is vitally important.

Inner Healing: Traumatic experiences are the most common entryway for the demonic. As people release their pain and forgive others (including themselves), the Holy Spirit is able to heal and close those wounds.

Confronting the Demons: If a qualified member of the clergy has discerned and determined that an actual spirit is present, efforts to expel the demon using the authority of Jesus’ name and appropriate prayers of the Church will be used. During this process manifestations such as shaking, burping, vomiting, etc. may occur. Do not resist—let these behaviors occur naturally. Please share with the presiding minister any emotions, sensations, or information you may hear.

REPENT, RENOUNCE, REBUKE

All sin is an offense against God and a rejection of His perfect love and justice. One who is repentant, though, expresses regretful pain or sorrow. They whole-heartedly understand the nature and truth regarding their sin. Mortal sins, though, destroy the grace of God in the heart of the sinner and severs our relationship with Him, allowing the demonic entry. As long as a person has not repented, the door remains open and permits demons to return.

Repent

“Repent” literally means being “re-penitent” or “again humble.” One who is penitent expresses humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses. To repent means to come back to that place of humility and sorrow over sin.

We are coming back to the One who grants forgiveness. We are not trying something new or different—we are reaffirming our need for the Savior, Deliverer and Redeemer, Jesus. If there is no repentance, then we continue to walk in darkness, deceived by the enemy. And if we continue to be deceived, we remain in bondage.

Renounce

To “renounce” means to “give up, refuse, or resign by formal declaration.” Whereas repenting is directed toward God, renouncing is directed toward the enemy.

We are countermanding any words that contradict God’s Word. We are making a formal declaration that we will no longer align ourselves with things that oppose God. We are canceling any and all agreements with the enemy.

Many believers repent of their sins before God, only to find themselves in a losing tug-of-war with the enemy, repeating their failures. An individual must be willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve liberation and maintain their newfound freedom.

We must shut the door on the devil, refusing by formal declaration to walk in the ways of the past. Renouncing is the means by which we cut off any legal right for Satan to bind or torment us. This is the way we resist him.

If our words have been contrary to God's, then we have aligned ourselves with the works of darkness. To be free from them, we must counter those words with God's Word, thus renouncing the hidden works of shame. "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Rebuke

After we repent, we have the right to cancel or rebuke any legal hold the enemy has over us. The yoke of bondage can be broken off our lives. God loves to see us come to the place where yokes are broken—and it thoroughly frustrates the enemy!

THE GRAVITY OF SIN: MORTAL & VENIAL SIN

Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture, became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience. Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of human beings by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God. Mortal sin necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and conversion of heart that is normally accomplished within the setting of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent." It results in the loss of charity and the state of grace.

If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's Kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices forever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.

- Mortal sin is a grave matter
- Mortal sin is committed with full knowledge
- Mortal sin is committed with deliberate consent

Mortal sins cannot be done "accidentally." A person who commits a mortal sin is one who knows that his/her sin is wrong, but deliberately commits the sin anyway. Mortal sin necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and conversion of heart that comes through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

To be freed from demonic influence, one must be willing to give up anything and everything that is ungodly in one's life and must whole-heartedly understand why a specific behavior or action is offensive to God and detrimental to the soul. Use an Examination of Conscience and then study Scripture along with the Catechism of the Catholic Church to improve your understanding.

Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin... it does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness."

CCC 1854–1864

COOPERATING WITH GOD'S GRACE

Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ.

The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of His own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.

CCC 1996–1999

SACRED SCRIPTURE

Our own consciences and beliefs have to be shaped by the Word of God as it comes to us: at Mass (via the Lectionary) or private, contemplative study (Lectio Divina). We are responsible to submit our minds and wills to it, to be transformed by it and to be willing to share it. Again, the words of St. Paul: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12.2).

A SACRAMENTAL LIFE

The whole of the Christian life is meant to be permeated and marked by the activity of God in our own lives and the summit of this realization is the Liturgy and the Sacraments. The reception of these Sacraments commits us to live a liturgical life, and this does not mean just going to Mass on Sunday and going to Confession once a year... Each and every day there is a wealth of grace available because of the Sacraments, and we must respond to them every moment of each day. The question is how this is to be done.

The first thing to realize is that, “the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life” (CCC 1324). It is the source from which we get the power to live a daily sacramental life, and it is the summit toward which we move as Christians, namely to a more intimate union with Christ. The graces of the Sacraments are always available. We are all called to be saints—to be holy men and women—who responded daily to the graces they received, to God's life in them.

To live a sacramental life also means to be immersed in the life and prayer of the Church. The Church's liturgy is where this is most profoundly done. Full and active participation in the Mass as often as possible is key. This means being there both in body and in spirit. We must understand where we are, before Whom we stand, and what we are doing.

olol.org/the-sacramental-life

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES WITH CATHOLICISM

Richard John

Life is an unpredictable journey filled with both joys and challenges. When faced with difficult times, many people turn to their faith for solace, guidance, and strength. For Catholics, the Church offers a rich tapestry of beliefs, practices, and communities that can provide invaluable support during life's storms. Catholicism can help you navigate through difficult times, offering hope, healing, and a path towards resilience.

The Power of Prayer

At the heart of Catholic spirituality lies prayer. It is a powerful tool for connecting with God and finding comfort in the midst of suffering. Whether it's through personal prayer, attending Mass, or participating in the Sacraments, prayer offers a channel for expressing your emotions, seeking guidance, and experiencing God's presence.

Personal Prayer: Spending quiet time in prayer allows you to reflect on your challenges, pour out your heart to God, and find solace in His love.

The Role of Devotion

Devotions, such as the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and Eucharistic Adoration provide opportunities for deepening one's relationship with God and seeking solace in times of trouble.

Eucharistic Adoration: Spending time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament can be a profound experience of God's love and peace. It offers an opportunity for quiet reflection, prayer, and healing.

The Rosary: This prayerful meditation on the life of Jesus and Mary can be a source of comfort and peace. It invites reflection on the mysteries of faith and offers opportunities for personal prayer.

Divine Mercy Chaplet: Centered on the message of God's infinite mercy revealed through Jesus Christ, this devotion invites trust in God's love and forgiveness.

The Sacraments: The Sacraments, such as the Eucharist and Reconciliation, offer tangible signs of God's grace and forgiveness. They provide a source of spiritual nourishment and healing.

The Support of the Catholic Community

The Catholic Church is more than just a building or a set of beliefs; it is a community of faith. Surrounding yourself with fellow believers can provide a strong support system during difficult times.

The Importance of Forgiveness

One of the greatest challenges we face in life is learning to forgive. Catholicism emphasizes the importance of forgiveness as a path to healing and reconciliation.

Forgiving Others: Holding onto resentment can be a heavy burden. By forgiving those who have hurt us, we liberate ourselves from the pain and bitterness of the past.

Seeking Forgiveness: Acknowledging our own mistakes and seeking forgiveness from others is an essential step towards personal growth and reconciliation.

God's Forgiveness: The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers an opportunity to confess our sins and receive God's unconditional forgiveness, providing a sense of peace and renewal.

Finding Hope and Meaning

In the midst of suffering, it can be difficult to find hope and meaning. Catholicism offers a rich theological framework that can help us to make sense of our experiences and find purpose in our lives.

The Paschal Mystery: The Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ are central to the Catholic faith. Reflecting on these events can provide a profound sense of hope and redemption.

The Virtues: Cultivating virtues such as faith, hope, love, and courage can help us to navigate through difficult times with strength and resilience.

The Afterlife: The Catholic belief in eternal life offers a source of comfort and hope, reminding us that our earthly struggles are temporary.

The Role of Suffering

While suffering is never easy, Catholicism teaches that it can be a path to spiritual growth and deepening our relationship with God.

Sharing in Christ's Suffering: By uniting our suffering with that of Christ, we can find meaning and purpose in our trials.

Spiritual Growth: Overcoming challenges can lead to personal growth and a stronger faith.

Building Empathy: Experiencing suffering can help us to develop compassion and empathy for others who are going through difficult times.

Practical Tips For Coping With Difficult Times

In addition to spiritual practices, there are practical steps you can take to cope with difficult times:

Seek professional help: If you are struggling with depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues, don't hesitate to seek professional help.

Take care of yourself: Prioritize physical health by eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly.

Find healthy coping mechanisms: Engage in activities that help you relax and manage stress, such as exercise, reading, or spending time in nature.

Set realistic goals: Break down overwhelming tasks into smaller, manageable steps.

Remember, you are not alone in your struggles. The Catholic Church offers a wealth of resources and support to help you through difficult times. By turning to your faith, seeking the support of your community, and practicing self-care, you can find strength, resilience, and hope in the midst of life's challenges.

The Power of Sacraments

Sacraments: Visible Signs of God's Grace

The Catholic Church offers seven Sacraments as channels through which God's grace is bestowed upon believers. These sacred rituals provide spiritual nourishment, healing, and strength during challenging times.

Eucharist: Often referred to as the "source and summit" of the Christian life, the Eucharist is a powerful encounter with Jesus Christ truly present in the consecrated bread and wine. Receiving Communion can offer profound consolation and spiritual renewal.

Reconciliation: This Sacrament, also known as Confession, offers a path to healing and reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins. It provides a sense of peace and renewed spiritual freedom.

Anointing of the Sick: This Sacrament is administered to those who are ill or elderly, offering spiritual comfort and physical healing. It is a reminder of God's loving presence during times of suffering.

Matrimony: While primarily a Sacrament for married couples, it strengthens the bond between spouses and provides support during life's challenges. The Sacrament of Matrimony reflects the love between Christ and the Church, offering a model for enduring love and commitment.

The Importance of Community and Service

Beyond personal prayer and Sacraments, the Catholic community plays a vital role in supporting individuals through difficult times. Involvement in parish activities, service to others, and building relationships with fellow parishioners can provide a strong sense of belonging and purpose.

Service to Others: Engaging in acts of charity and service can shift one's focus from personal challenges to the needs of others. It can also provide a sense of meaning and purpose.

livingwords.in/blogs/catholicism/faith-in-hard-times-overcoming-challenges-with-catholicism?srsltid=AfmBOopigeiyMUdGYq6jaOg6TkXIINhyueljvrEw-LerLRqcWPwZrJpZ

EXPECTATIONS OF THE MINISTRY

To continue receiving assistance from God, individuals must agree to the following:

1. Totally reject and never again participate in occult or satanic practices
2. Remove all cursed objects from one's home or residence
3. Participate in Saturday evening/Sunday Worship (Mass for Catholics)
4. Avoid temptations and grave sins (Confession at least once a month for Catholics)
5. Moderately fast on Wednesdays and Fridays; Abstain from viewing inappropriate or controversial movies, TV shows, websites or social media
6. Focus on God and completely ignore the advice, demands, or threats of any demon; this includes suspected curses or spells performed by others
7. Avoid spiritual counsel and/or prayer from multiple clergy, teams, or resources.
8. Consistently attend all scheduled prayer sessions
9. Complete the 30–60–90 Meditations & Written Assignments

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINISTRY

- Refrain from discussing your spiritual problems and sufferings with family members, friends, coworkers, and even clergy. Many people (even within the Catholic Church) have never experienced or witnessed these matters. Such conversations can be detrimental, leading to skepticism and further isolation.
- We highly encourage wearing at least one sacramental, such as a crucifix, cross, St. Benedict medal or Miraculous Medal that is properly blessed by a priest or deacon of the Catholic Church. These are outward expressions of your faith in Christ and carry God's holy blessings.

HOW TO USE THE 30–60–90 MEDITATION MANUAL

Freedom from evil spirits is typically achieved through a process of conversion, whereby people willingly change their lives to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. This guide helps people understand why a relationship with God is necessary, as one deepens his or her life of prayer.

Each of the next 30 days will be divided into Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

Morning Prayer will usually contain various Opening Prayers, Scripture meditations, and reflections. Evening Prayer, in contrast, is focused on learning important concepts and catechesis. Materials may include readings from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, instructional videos, religious articles and commentaries, writing assignments, etc.

Based on your current life of prayer and faith, individuals will be assigned a specific Prayer Track as well as a spiritual mentor. Information about the different Prayer Tracks is located towards the rear pages of the manual. Each Prayer Track will specify additional steps and prayers to follow for each of the five weeks. Spiritual mentors will arrange times for a brief phone call each week to discuss the material and written assignments, provide encouragement, and gather information regarding your circumstances.

WEEK 1: DAILY MEDITATIONS— GOD’S LOVING PLAN FOR HUMANITY

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Scripture Meditation

Jesus said to His disciples: “Whoever loves Me will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.”

—John 14:23

Do you want our Lord to come to you and dwell within the depths of your soul? Presumably the answer is an easy “Yes.” The way to make this happen is to love God and keep His word. When you do that, the Blessed Trinity will come and dwell within you.

It’s interesting that the love of God appears to be contingent upon our love of Him. In other words, does God only love us when we love Him first? Strictly speaking, God loves us with a perfect love regardless of whether we love Him or not. But with that said, love takes on a whole new form when it is received and reciprocated. Therefore, when we choose to love God we suddenly realize that our love of Him opens the door for Him to come and dwell within us, transforming us and making our heart His holy sanctuary. What a glorious gift!

It’s also interesting to note that love of God means, in part, that we are obedient to Him. But that’s the nature of God. He is Love itself and, therefore, loving Him necessarily involves a complete submission of your will to His. Perfect obedience to Him in all things is a powerful way of loving Him. It’s a way of allowing Him to dwell within you and, in that act, to take over your will. Only then can you love Him even more fully with your whole being.

Reflect, today, especially upon your desire to have the Most Holy Trinity come and dwell within your soul. This should be the primary goal of our lives. If God lives within us then all else in life will fall into place. All things will work for the good and God will be glorified in and through us. Make the choice to love Him through your obedience this day, and your relationship of love will grow by leaps and bounds.

Lord, I do love You and desire to love You in a more perfect way this day. Help me to submit to Your perfect will in all things. Help me to embrace perfect obedience to You always. In that act of love and submission, come and make Your dwelling within me. Jesus, I trust in You.

—Philip Neri

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Catechism: (CCC #214-227)

THE PROFESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

God, “He Who Is”, Is Truth and Love

God, “HE WHO IS”, revealed himself to Israel as the One “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”. These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name. In all His works God displays, not only His kindness, goodness, grace and steadfast love, but also His trustworthiness, constancy, faithfulness and truth. “I give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness.” He is the Truth, for “God is light and in Him there is no darkness”; “God is love”, as the apostle John teaches.

God Is Truth

“The sum of Your word is truth; and every one of Your righteous ordinances endures forever.” “And now, O LORD God, You are God, and Your words are true”; this is why God’s promises always come true. God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of His Word in all things. The beginning of sin and of man’s fall was due to a lie of the tempter who induced doubt of God’s Word, kindness and faithfulness.

God's truth is His wisdom, which commands the whole created order and governs the world. God, who alone made heaven and earth, can alone impart true knowledge of every created thing in relation to Himself.

God is also truthful when he reveals Himself—the teaching that comes from God is “true instruction.” When He sends His Son into the world it will be “to bear witness to the truth”: “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know Him who is true.”³⁷

God is Love

In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal Himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as His special possession: His sheer gratuitous love. And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins.

God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son. His love for His people is stronger than a mother's for her children. God loves His people more than a bridegroom his beloved; His love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities and will extend to His most precious gift: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.”

God's love is “everlasting”: “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you.” Through Jeremiah, God declares to His people, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”

But St. John goes even further when he affirms that “God is love.” God's very being is love. By sending His only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed His innermost secret: God Himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and He has destined us to share in that exchange.

The Implications of Faith in One God

Believing in God, the only One, and loving Him with all our being has enormous consequences for our whole life.

It means coming to know God's greatness and majesty: “Behold, God is great, and we know Him not.” Therefore, we must “serve God first.”

It means living in thanksgiving: if God is the only One, everything we are and have comes from Him: “What have you that you did not receive?” “What shall I render to the LORD for all His bounty to me?”

It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all men: everyone is made in the image and likeness of God.

It means making good use of created things: faith in God, the only One, leads us to use everything that is not God only insofar as it brings us closer to Him, and to detach ourselves from it insofar as it turns us away from Him:

My Lord and my God, take from me everything that distances me from You.

My Lord and my God, give me everything that brings me closer to You.

My Lord and my God, detach me from myself to give my all to You.

It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity. A prayer of St. Teresa of Jesus wonderfully expresses this trust:

Let nothing trouble you. Let nothing frighten you.

Everything passes. God never changes.

Patience obtains all.

Whoever has God wants for nothing.

God alone is enough.

Summary of Key Concepts

God's Nature: God is love and truth and He wills our good. He is trustworthy and faithful and continually showers His mercy upon His children despite our unfaithfulness.

The Holy Trinity: The one true God is triune with three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we obey God's laws, Christ dwells in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit as granted through the Father's glory (Eph 3: 14–19).

God's Love for All Creation: God's love is perfect and everlasting. It is far greater than the love that any human can offer. It is sacrificial and is made manifest in the offering of His only son, Jesus, to die on the cross to atone for our sins and to bring us to salvation.

Misconceptions About God: People often believe that we must earn God's love. In fact, God's love is steadfast and always available to us, but we must be willing to repent of our sins and make our hearts a suitable home for Him so He can guide us in all things.

Questions to Consider

1. Am I obeying all of God's commandments or do I sometimes choose to follow my will rather than His?
2. Do I love God above all things and all people? If not, what or who have I placed before God in my heart? (e.g. money, power, beauty, spouse, children)
3. Do I trust God in all circumstances of my life? If not, why not?
4. What can I do to make my heart and soul a more fit dwelling place for God?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Scripture Meditation

Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Anointed. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night.

They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.

Therefore, rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them. But woe to you, earth and sea, for the Devil has come down to you in great fury, for he knows he has but a short time.”

When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half-year.

The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current. But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the flood that the dragon spewed out of its mouth.

Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus.

—Revelations 12:7–17

THE DEVIL AND THE WEAKNESSES OF HUMAN NATURE

We must realize that demons are pure intellectual beings, not rational beings like us.

They possess a superior knowledge of our weaknesses and dispositions, which they use to tempt us. St. Teresa is aware that, “The devil knows very well to take advantage of our nature and little understanding” (Letter to Isabel de S. Jeronimo and Maria de Jesus in *Obras Completas*, 980).

In his *Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross also suggests that demons use the world and flesh to enhance the power of their work: “The temptation of the devils . . . is stronger than those of the world and the flesh, because the devils reinforce themselves with these other two enemies, the world and the flesh, in order to wage a rugged war” (431).

The devil knows how to exploit our instincts and passions, the weakness of our flesh and our pride. Victor White, in *God and the Unconscious*, remarks that misfortune, sickness, or mental anxiety are not sins, but they may induce us to rebellion and despair. And Satan may take advantage of all of them to tempt us to sin.

catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=8280

St. Teresa of Avila

But the devil comes with his artful wiles, and, under the color of doing good, sets about undermining it in trivial ways, and working it in practices which, so he gives it to understand, are not wrong; little by little he darkens its understanding and weakens its will, and causes its self-love to increase in one way or another he begins to withdraw it from the love of God and persuade to indulge its own wishes. (*Interior Castle*, 120)

St. John of the Cross

The angels produce spiritual communications; the demons, spiritual horrors. But in the end, victory belongs to the good angels. These horrors, which purify the soul, are followed by a spiritual favor, in accord with the dark and horrible purgation it suffered. The soul “will enjoy a wondrous and delightful spiritual

communication, at times ineffably sublime. The preceding horror of the evil spirit refined the soul so that it could receive this good” (Dark Knight, 385).

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Catechism (CCC #391-395)

THE FALL OF THE ANGELS

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called “Satan” or “the devil.” The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: “The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing.”

Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels. This “fall” consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and His reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter’s words to our first parents: “You will be like God.” The devil “has sinned from the beginning”; he is “a liar and the father of lies.” It is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels’ sin unforgivable. “There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death.”

Scripture witnesses to the disastrous influence of the one Jesus calls “a murderer from the beginning,” who would even try to divert Jesus from the mission received from His Father. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” In its consequences the gravest of these works was the mendacious seduction that led man to disobey God.

The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God’s reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and His Kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries—of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature—to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but “we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him.”

QUESTION TIME with Fr. John Flader

catholicleader.com.au/opinion/guest-writers/the-fall-of-the-angels/

Why did some of the angels fall and become devils when they were created in heaven and were so close to God? Also, why didn’t they have the opportunity to repent and be saved as we do?

To situate the questions in context we recall that our first parents were tempted by the devil in the form of a serpent (cf. *Genesis* 3:1–7).

We know that the devil is a fallen angel, created originally with all the powers and happiness of the other angels, but who for some reason rejected God and remained separated from Him forever in hell. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says of the serpent: “Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called Satan or the devil. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: ‘The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing’” (Lateran Council IV (1215), DS 800; CCC 391).

You mention that the devils—or angels at the beginning—were created in heaven and very close to God. Many people think this but it is clear that the angels, while very blessed and close to God, were not in heaven. When a soul is in heaven it is drawn irresistibly to the goodness and love of God and cannot reject Him. It is impossible for any soul in heaven to sin.

The angels at the beginning were given many endowments from God. In the natural sphere they were pure spirits with a very keen mind and a strong free will. By their nature, angels are superior to all other creatures, including humans. In the supernatural sphere they, like Adam and Eve, were given the state of grace, which is

a sharing in the divine life and the divine nature. They were indeed very close to God, even though they were not in heaven. They knew God and were able to love him with a knowledge and love more perfect than ours.

And of course they were called to eternal life with God in heaven.

Then why did some of the angels reject God?

The answer can only be pride. Some of the Fathers of the Church apply to the devil God's words to a wayward Israel: "For long ago you broke your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve'" (*Jeremiah 2:20*).

Even though created with such a superior nature, some of the angels did not want to serve anyone, not even the God who had made them and blessed them so much. John Milton, in his *Paradise Lost*, has the devil say: "Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven" (I, 263). The Catechism teaches: "This 'fall' consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and His reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: 'You will be like God'" (Genesis 3:5; CCC 392).

Summary of Key Concepts

Creation of Angels, Lucifer: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing" (Lateran Council). Lucifer is another name for Satan and means "angel of light."

The Fall of the Angels: Scripture tells us that "The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it." (Rev 12:9). The devil refused to serve God because of his pride and desire to be equal to God.

Nature of Angels & Demons: In the natural sphere they were pure spirits with a very keen mind and a strong free will. By their nature, angels are superior to all other creatures, including humans. In the supernatural sphere they, like Adam and Eve, were given the state of grace, which is a sharing in the divine life and the divine nature.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you believe that the devil and his angels wage war on the children of God on earth through his hatred for God and His Kingdom?
2. Do you understand that although the devil has greater power than people, that he can only act by the permissive will of God?
3. Do you trust that God uses diabolical activity to work for good in people's lives?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 3

Daily Scripture Meditation

EXPULSION FROM EDEN

“Now the snake was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’” The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”

The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

When they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. The LORD God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you? He answered, “I heard You in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid.” Then God asked: Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat? The man replied, “The woman whom You put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.” The LORD God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, “The snake tricked me, so I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the snake: Because you have done this, cursed are you among all the animals, tame or wild; On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel. To the woman he said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you shall not eat from it, cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground from which you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

The man gave his wife the name “Eve,” because she was the mother of all the living. The LORD God made for the man and his wife garments of skin, with which He clothed them. Then the LORD God said: See! The man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil! Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life, and eats of it and lives forever?

The LORD God therefore banished him from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken. He expelled the man, stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the Garden of Eden, to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

—Genesis 3:1–24

Essential Concepts & Terms

Original Sin is the sin inherited by all humankind from Adam in his disobedience of God’s command not to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The Original Sin event is referred to as “The Fall of Man.”

The Fall

Adam’s choice to disobey God’s command is considered a “fall” because his choice to sin represents a fall from grace. God created Adam in His image and likeness and saw that he was good, (Gen 1:26–31); Adam was created with an original grace and holiness. God shared His entire creation with Adam even giving him dominion over all other creatures and God gave one simple command for Adam to obey:

“The LORD God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.” —Genesis 2:16–17

Adam and Eve were given the free choice to love and serve God. God gave us the ability to love God freely (free will) because true love is one that is not forced. With this ability to choose, mankind has chosen not to love God, hence our inheritance of a fallen nature.

Adam's choice to disobey God and eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, after Eve was tempted by the serpent, demonstrated what is at the essence of all sin: that sin is rooted in man's preference for himself over God. Instead of choosing God, Adam chose himself by eating of the fruit of the tree so that he could be like God, (Genesis 3:5). Humanity was forever changed through this event, losing its innocence of good and evil, bringing sin into the world.

Adam and Eve became aware of sin and its allure and, therefore, more susceptible to sin after having fallen to temptation. Making a choice to sin leads to weakness of the soul and a propensity to continue to sin.

The Nature of Original Sin

Original Sin is not a committed sin, but rather a contracted sin. Unlike all other sins, which are acts of one's own personal sin, it is a state of the soul, representing the fallen nature that was handed on to us by Adam who fell into death upon committing the original sin. It represents the fallen state of humanity in which we find ourselves devoid of the original grace and holiness with which humanity was created, (Genesis 1:31).

Sin not only has personal consequences on one's own soul, but collective consequences that damage all souls. The Original Sin forever changed humanity by allowing sin to enter the world. Sin is rooted in our preference for ourselves over God. Through the Original Sin humanity took on a fallen nature, one that is incomplete without Jesus' saving work on the cross.

Christ's Redemption and Original Sin

The sin of Adam is linked directly to Christ's redemption; through one man, Adam, sin entered the world, and through one man, Jesus, humanity is restored, (Romans 5:12–21). Jesus is the perfect sacrifice that atones for all of our sins. Jesus, in His complete humanity and complete divinity, is the only sacrifice that could make up for a fallen human nature.

God's first covenant with humanity, through Adam, was broken through the Original Sin. God has created a new covenant in Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice. Jesus has given us a way to enter into this new covenant, through baptism. Baptism removes Original Sin and any personal sin, and cleanses the soul making it new and fresh. It makes one a new creature in Christ. God invites us into this covenant with Him freely and it is up to us to choose to enter into it and uphold our end of the bargain.

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 3

Catechism (CCC #1704–1705)

The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection “in seeking and loving what is true and good.”

By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an “outstanding manifestation of the divine image”.

What makes us in the image and likeness of God?

Answer: We are made in the image and likeness of God because we can love, create, and truly choose good. We are capable of truly and freely choosing to do good and to love. Human persons are not mere reactionary creatures but a creation that, like God, can choose to do good and to love one another. Human persons are also able to know and understand goodness and love. Human persons can mirror God in the manner we know, understand, love and do good.

Listen to Podcast: Fr. Chad Ripperger

Psychology of the Demon — 35 Minutes

Summary of Key Concepts

Original Sin: Original Sin is not one's own personal sin, it is a state of the soul, representing the fallen nature that was handed on to us by Adam who fell into death upon committing the Original Sin.

Made in God's Image & Likeness: We are made in the image and likeness of God because we can love, create, and truly understand, know, and choose to do good.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you understand how choices to disobey God's commandments cause people to fall from His grace and can open the door to demonic activity?
2. Through God's extraordinary love for us He sent His only Son to save us and invites us into a new covenant relationship. Do you understand how you need to choose each day to remain in this relationship by following Him?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 4

Daily Scripture Meditation

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit upon His glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before Him. And He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by 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, a stranger and you welcomed Me, naked and you clothed Me, ill and you cared for Me, in prison and you visited Me.’

Then the righteous will answer Him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You ill or in prison, and visit You?’

And the King will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’

Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, a stranger and you gave Me no welcome, naked and you gave Me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for Me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to Your needs?’

He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for Me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

—Matthew 25:31–46

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 4

HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY, Pope John Paul II

Heaven is fullness of Communion with God

Heaven “is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit,” the Pope said.

When the form of this world has passed away, those who have welcomed God into their lives and have sincerely opened themselves to His love, at least at the moment of death, will enjoy that fullness of communion with God which is the goal of human life.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “this perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity, this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed is called ‘heaven’. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (n.1024).

Today we will try to understand the biblical meaning of “heaven,” in order to have a better understanding of the reality to which this expression refers.

In biblical language “heaven,” when it is joined to the “earth,” indicates part of the universe. Scripture says about Creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1).

Heaven is the transcendent dwelling-place of the living God

Metaphorically speaking, heaven is understood as the dwelling-place of God, Who is thus distinguished from human beings (cf. Ps 104:2f.; 115:16; Is 66:1). He sees and judges from the heights of heaven (cf. Ps 113:4–9) and comes down when He is called upon (cf. Ps 18:9, 10; 144:5). However the biblical metaphor makes it clear that God does not identify Himself with heaven, nor can He be contained in it (cf. 1 Kgs 8:27); and this is true,

even though in some passages of the First Book of the Maccabees “Heaven” is simply one of God’s names (1 Mc 3:18, 19, 50, 60; 4:24, 55).

The depiction of heaven as the transcendent dwelling-place of the living God is joined with that of the place to which believers, through grace, can also ascend, as we see in the Old Testament accounts of Enoch (cf. Gn 5:24) and Elijah (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11). Thus heaven becomes an image of life in God. In this sense Jesus speaks of a “reward in heaven” (Mt 5:12) and urges people to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (ibid., 6:20; cf. 19:21).

The New Testament amplifies the idea of heaven in relation to the mystery of Christ. To show that the Redeemer’s sacrifice acquires perfect and definitive value, the Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus “passed through the heavens” (Heb 4:14), and “entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself” (ibid., 9:24). Since believers are loved in a special way by the Father, they are raised with Christ and made citizens of heaven. It is worthwhile listening to what the Apostle Paul tells us about this in a very powerful text: “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He 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” (Eph 2:4–7). The fatherhood of God, who is rich in mercy, is experienced by creatures through the love of God’s crucified and risen Son, who sits in heaven on the right hand of the Father as Lord.

After the course of our earthly life, participation in complete intimacy with the Father thus comes through our insertion into Christ’s paschal mystery. St Paul emphasizes our meeting with Christ in heaven at the end of time with a vivid spatial image: “Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thes 4:17–18).

Sacramental life is anticipation of heaven

In the context of Revelation, we know that the “heaven” or “happiness” in which we will find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father that takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit.

It is always necessary to maintain a certain restraint in describing these “ultimate realities” since their depiction is always unsatisfactory. Today, personalist language is better suited to describing the state of happiness and peace we will enjoy in our definitive communion with God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up the Church’s teaching on this truth: “By His death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has ‘opened’ heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in His heavenly glorification those who have believed in Him and remained faithful to His will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ” (n. 1026).

This final state, however, can be anticipated in some way today in sacramental life, whose center is the Eucharist, and in the gift of self through fraternal charity. If we are able to enjoy properly the good things that the Lord showers upon us every day, we will already have begun to experience that joy and peace which one day will be completely ours. We know that on this earth everything is subject to limits, but the thought of the “ultimate” realities helps us to live better the “penultimate” realities. We know that as we pass through this world we are called to seek “the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1), in order to be with Him in the eschatological fulfillment, when the Spirit will fully reconcile with the Father “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:20).

Hell is the state of those who reject God

The Pope said that care should be taken to interpret correctly the images of hell in Sacred Scripture, and explained that “hell is the ultimate consequence of sin itself... Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy”.

God is the infinitely good and merciful Father. But man, called to respond to Him freely, can unfortunately choose to reject His love and forgiveness once and for all, thus separating himself for ever from joyful communion with Him. It is precisely this tragic situation that Christian doctrine explains when it speaks of eternal damnation or hell. It is not a punishment imposed externally by God but a development of premises already set by people in this life. The very dimension of unhappiness which this obscure condition brings can in a certain way be sensed in the light of some of the terrible experiences we have suffered which, as is commonly said, make life “hell.”

In a theological sense however, hell is something else: it is the ultimate consequence of sin itself, which turns against the person who committed it. It is the state of those who definitively reject the Father’s mercy, even at the last moment of their life.

Hell is a state of eternal damnation

To describe this reality Sacred Scripture uses a symbolic language that will gradually be explained. In the Old Testament the condition of the dead had not yet been fully disclosed by Revelation. Moreover it was thought that the dead were amassed in Sheol, a land of darkness (cf. Ez. 28:8; 31:14; Jb. 10:21f.; 38:17; Ps 30:10; 88:7, 13), a pit from which one cannot reascend (cf. Jb. 7:9), a place in which it is impossible to praise God (cf. Is 38:18; Ps 6:6).

The New Testament sheds new light on the condition of the dead, proclaiming above all that Christ by His Resurrection conquered death and extended His liberating power to the kingdom of the dead.

Redemption nevertheless remains an offer of salvation, which it is up to people to accept freely. This is why they will all be judged “by what they [have done]” (Rv 20:13). By using images, the New Testament presents the place destined for evildoers as a fiery furnace, where people will “weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13:42; cf. 25:30, 41), or like Gehenna with its “unquenchable fire” (Mk 9:43). All this is narrated in the Parable of the Rich Man, which explains that hell is a place of eternal suffering, with no possibility of return, nor of the alleviation of pain (cf. Lk. 16:19–31).

The Book of Revelation also figuratively portrays in a “pool of fire” those who exclude themselves from the Book of Life, thus meeting with a “second death” (Rv. 20:13f.). Whoever continues to be closed to the Gospel is therefore preparing for “eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might” (2 Thes 1:9).

The images of hell that Sacred Scripture presents to us must be correctly interpreted. They show the complete frustration and emptiness of life without God. Rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy. This is how the Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the truths of faith on this subject: “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from Him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell’” (n. 1033).

“Eternal damnation,” therefore, is not attributed to God’s initiative because in His merciful love He can only desire the salvation of the beings He created. In reality, it is the creature who closes himself to His love. Damnation consists precisely in definitive separation from God, freely chosen by the human person and confirmed with death that seals his choice forever. God’s judgment ratifies this state.

We are saved from going to hell by Jesus who conquered Satan

Christian faith teaches that in taking the risk of saying “yes” or “no,” which marks the human creature’s freedom, some have already said “no.” They are the spiritual creatures that rebelled against God’s love and are called demons (cf. Fourth Lateran Council, DS 800–801). What happened to them is a warning to us: it is a continuous call to avoid the tragedy which leads to sin and to conform our life to that of Jesus who lived His life with a “yes” to God.

Eternal damnation remains a real possibility, but we are not granted, without special divine revelation, the knowledge of whether or which human beings are effectively involved in it. The thought of hell—and even less the improper use of biblical images—must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God who makes us cry “Abba, Father!” (Rm. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

This prospect, rich in hope, prevails in Christian proclamation. It is effectively reflected in the liturgical tradition of the Church, as the words of the Roman Canon attest: “Father, accept this offering from Your whole family ... save us from final damnation, and count us among those You have chosen.”

Purgatory is necessary purification

Before we enter into full communion with God, every trace of sin within us must be eliminated and every imperfection in our soul must be corrected

The Holy Father reflected on Purgatory and he explained that physical integrity is necessary to enter into perfect communion with God therefore “the term Purgatory does not indicate a place, but a condition of existence”, where Christ “removes ... the remnants of imperfection.”

As we have seen in the previous two catecheses, on the basis of the definitive option for or against God, the human being finds he faces one of these alternatives: either to live with the Lord in eternal beatitude, or to remain far from His presence.

For those who find themselves in a condition of being open to God, but still imperfectly, the journey towards full beatitude requires a purification, which the faith of the Church illustrates in the doctrine of “Purgatory” (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1030–1032).

To share in divine life we must be totally purified

In Sacred Scripture, we can grasp certain elements that help us to understand the meaning of this doctrine, even if it is not formally described. They express the belief that we cannot approach God without undergoing some kind of purification.

According to Old Testament religious law, what is destined for God must be perfect. As a result, physical integrity is also specifically required for the realities that come into contact with God at the sacrificial level such as, for example, sacrificial animals (cf. Lv 22: 22) or at the institutional level, as in the case of priests or ministers of worship (cf. Lv 21: 17–23). Total dedication to the God of the Covenant, along the lines of the great teachings found in Deuteronomy (cf. 6:5), and which must correspond to this physical integrity, is required of individuals and society as a whole (cf. 1 Kgs 8: 61). It is a matter of loving God with all one's being, with purity of heart and the witness of deeds (cf. *ibid.*, 10: 12f.)

The need for integrity obviously becomes necessary after death, for entering into perfect and complete communion with God. Those who do not possess this integrity must undergo purification. This is suggested by a text of St Paul. The Apostle speaks of the value of each person's work that will be revealed on the Day of Judgement and says: “If the work which any man has built on the foundation [which is Christ] survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3: 14–15).

At times, to reach a state of perfect integrity a person's intercession or mediation is needed. For example, Moses obtains pardon for the people with a prayer in which he recalls the saving work done by God in the past, and prays for God's fidelity to the oath made to his ancestors (cf. Ex 32: 30, 11–13). The figure of the Servant of the Lord, outlined in the Book of Isaiah, is also portrayed by His role of intercession and expiation for many; at the end of His suffering He “will see the light” and “will justify many,” bearing their iniquities (cf. Is 52: 13–53, 12, especially vv. 53: 11).

Psalms 51 can be considered, according to the perspective of the Old Testament, as a synthesis of the process of reintegration: the sinner confesses and recognizes his guilt (v. 3), asking insistently to be purified or “cleansed” (vv. 2, 9, 10, 17) so as to proclaim the divine praise (v. 15).

Purgatory is not a place but a condition of existence

In the New Testament Christ is presented as the intercessor who assumes the functions of high priest on the day of expiation (cf. Heb 5: 7; 7: 25). But in Him the priesthood is presented in a new and definitive form. He enters the heavenly shrine once and for all, to intercede with God on our behalf (cf. Heb 9: 23–26, especially, v. 24). He is both priest and “victim of expiation” for the sins of the whole world (cf. 1 Jn 2: 2).

Jesus, as the great intercessor who atones for us, will fully reveal Himself at the end of our life when He will express Himself with the offer of mercy, but also with the inevitable judgment for those who refuse the Father's love and forgiveness.

This offer of mercy does not exclude the duty to present ourselves to God, pure and whole, rich in that love which Paul calls a “[bond] of perfect harmony” (Col 3: 14).

In following the Gospel exhortation to be perfect like the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5: 48) during our earthly life, we are called to grow in love, to be sound and flawless before God the Father “at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (1 Thes 3: 12f.). Moreover, we are invited to “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit” (2 Cor 7: 1; cf. 1 Jn 3: 3), because the encounter with God requires absolute purity.

Every trace of attachment to evil must be eliminated, every imperfection of the soul corrected. Purification must be complete, and indeed this is precisely what is meant by the Church’s teaching on Purgatory. The term does not indicate a place, but a condition of existence. Those who, after death, exist in a state of purification are already in the love of Christ who removes from them the remnants of imperfection (cf. Ecumenical Council of Florence, *Decretum pro Graecis*: DS 1304; Ecumenical Council of Trent, *Decretum de iustificatione*: DS 1580; *Decretum de purgatorio*: DS 1820).

It is necessary to explain that the state of purification is not a prolongation of the earthly condition, almost as if after death one were given another possibility to change one’s destiny. The Church’s teaching in this regard is unequivocal and was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council which teaches: “Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed (cf. Heb 9: 27), we may merit to enter with Him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where ‘men will weep and gnash their teeth’ (Mt 22: 13 and 25: 30)” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 48).

One last important aspect that the Church’s tradition has always pointed out should be reposed today: the dimension of “communio.” Those, in fact, who find themselves in the state of purification are united both with the blessed who already enjoy the fullness of eternal life, and with us on this earth on our way towards the Father’s house (cf. CCC, n. 1032).

Just as in their earthly life believers are united in the one Mystical Body, so after death those who live in a state of purification experience the same ecclesial solidarity that works through prayer, prayers for suffrage and love for their other brothers and sisters in the faith. Purification is lived in the essential bond created between those who live in this world and those who enjoy eternal beatitude.

Summary of Key Concepts

Particular Judgment

General Judgment

Heaven, Hell, Purgatory

Questions to Consider

1. When you imagine Heaven, what things or people are included? Why are these important to you?
2. Many today do not believe in the existence of Purgatory. How can you help them understand that it is a great blessing for those who just need more purification before they would feel comfortable in the presence of God?
3. Every trace of sin must be absent before one may enter Heaven. What are you willing to do now so as to make eternal life in Heaven possible?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 5

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.”

The one who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Then He said, “Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true.”

He said to me, “They are accomplished. I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God, and he will be My son.

But as for cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol-worshippers, and deceivers of every sort, their lot is in the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

—Revelations 21:1–8

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 5

Catechism (CCC #1023–1027)

HEAVEN

Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God forever, for they “see Him as He is,” face to face:

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving Christ’s holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death) already before they take up their bodies again and before the General Judgment—and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven—have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.

This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity—this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed—is called “heaven.” Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

To live in heaven is “to be with Christ.” The elect live “in Christ,” but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name.

For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the Kingdom.

By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has “opened” heaven to us. The life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in His heavenly glorification those who have believed in Him and remained faithful to His will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the Kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

FROM THE DIARY OF ST. FAUSTINA (1936)

St. Faustina on Heaven

Today I was in heaven, in spirit, and I saw its unconceivable beauties and the happiness that awaits us after death. I saw how all creatures give ceaseless praise and glory to God. I saw how great is happiness in God, which spreads to all creatures, making them happy; and then all the glory and praise which springs from this happiness returns to its source; and they enter into the depths of God, contemplating the inner life of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, whom they will never comprehend or fathom. This source of happiness is unchanging in its essence, but it is always new, gushing forth happiness for all creatures. Now I understand St. Paul, who said, 'Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.'

God has given me to understand that there is but one thing that is of infinite value in His eyes, and that is love of God; love, love and once again, love; and nothing can compare with a single act of pure love of God. Oh, with what inconceivable favors God gifts a soul that loves Him sincerely!

The sight of this great majesty of God, which I came to understand more profoundly and which is worshipped by the heavenly spirits according to their degree of grace and the hierarchies into which they are divided, did not cause my soul to be stricken with terror or fear; no, no, not at all! My soul was filled with peace and love, and the more I come to know the greatness of God, the more joyful I become that He is as He is. And I rejoice immensely in His greatness and am delighted that I am so little because, since I am little, He carries me in His arms and holds me close to His Heart.

She concludes: "O my God, how I pity those people who do not believe in eternal life."

St. Faustina on Hell

Today, I was led by an angel to the chasms of hell. It is a place of great torture; how awesomely large and extensive it is! The kinds of tortures I saw: the first torture that constitutes hell is the loss of God; the second is perpetual remorse of conscience; the third is that one's condition will never change; the fourth is the fire that will penetrate the soul without destroying it, a terrible suffering, since it is a purely spiritual fire, lit by God's anger; the fifth torture is conditional darkness and a terrible suffocating smell, and despite the darkness, the devils and the souls of the damned see each other and all the evil, both of others and their own; the sixth torture is the constant company of Satan, the seventh torture is horrible despair, hatred of God, vile words, curses and blasphemies. These are the tortures suffered by all the damned together, but that is not the end of the sufferings. There are special tortures destined for particular souls. These are the torments of the senses. Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which it has sinned. There are caverns and pits of torture where one form of agony differs from another. I would have died at the very sight of these tortures if the omnipotence of God had not supported me. Let the sinner know that he will be tortured throughout all eternity, in those senses which he made use of to sin.

[I am] writing this at the command of God, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like. I, Sister Faustina, by the order of God, have visited the abysses of hell so that I might tell souls about it and testify to its existence. I have received a command from God to leave it in writing. The devils were full of hatred for me, but they had to obey me at the command of God. What I have written is but a pale shadow of the things I saw. But I noticed one thing: that most of the souls there are those who disbelieved that there is a hell.

When I came to, I could hardly recover from the fright. How terribly souls suffer there! Consequently, I pray even more fervently for the conversion of sinners. I incessantly plead God's mercy upon them. O my Jesus, I would rather be in agony until the end of the world, amidst the greatest sufferings, then offend You by the least sin.

ncregister.com/blog/saints-who-saw-heaven-and-hell

Summary of Key Concepts

Beatific Vision

What is Heaven Like?

Questions to Consider

1. What virtues do you need to build up in your life so as to be ready to enter Heaven?
2. Have you ever prayed for the soul of a family member or friend after they passed away? What type of prayer do you find the most consoling when you do so? (Mass? Divine Mercy Chaplet? Rosary?)
3. Knowing that hell is a reality, what can you do to ensure that you are safe from the devil's grasp?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Scripture Meditation

“No one who lights a lamp hides it away or places it [under a bushel basket], but on a lampstand so that those who enter might see the light. The lamp of the body is your eye. When your eye is sound, then your whole body is filled with light, but when it is bad, then your body is in darkness.

Take care, then, that the light in you not become darkness. If your whole body is full of light, and no part of it is in darkness, then it will be as full of light as a lamp illuminating you with its brightness.”

—**Luke 11:33–36**

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 6

Assignment: Written Reflection

WEEK 2: DAILY MEDITATIONS— TURNING AWAY FROM SIN

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Scripture Meditation

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ [the Son of God].

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”

John [the] Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of His sandals. I have baptized you with water; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him. And a voice came from the heavens, “You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”

At once the Spirit drove Him out into the desert, and He remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

—Mark 1:1–15

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 1

Catechism (CCC #1846–1851)

MERCY AND SIN

The Gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners. The angel announced to Joseph: “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” The same is true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of redemption: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

“God created us without us: but He did not will to save us without us.” To receive His mercy, we must admit our faults. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

As St. Paul affirms, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” But to do its work grace must uncover sin so as to convert our hearts and bestow on us “righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God, by His Word and by His Spirit, casts a living light on sin: Conversion requires convincing of sin; it includes the interior judgment of conscience, and this, being a proof of the action of the Spirit of truth in man's inmost being, becomes at the same time the start of a new grant of grace and love: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Thus in this “convincing concerning sin” we discover a double gift: the gift of the truth of conscience and the gift of the certainty of redemption.

THE DEFINITION OF SIN

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”

Sin is an offense against God: “Against You, You alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Your sight.” Sin sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become “like gods,” knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus “love of oneself even to contempt of God.” In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.

It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate’s cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas’ betrayal—so bitter to Jesus, Peter’s denial and the disciples’ flight. However, at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world, the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.

The Four Wounds of the Fall

Fr. Sean, January 21, 2016

THE FOUR WOUNDS

The wounds we have inherited from the Fall have brought about a destructive disharmony in our soul. This disharmony of the soul is not merely a matter of feelings; the wounds of the Fall are not superficial. Our state of being is a state of sin and death (an unresponsive state to God’s truth, goodness, and beauty) that will only become more and more destructive and alienated from God. If we are left to our own devices and ourselves, we are hopelessly doomed to failure. St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* this personal observation that describes such a state of being: “The enemy held fast my will, and had made of it a chain, and had bound me tight with it. For out of the perverse will comes lust, and the service of lust ended in habit, and habit, not resisted, became necessity. By these links, as it were forged together—a hard bondage held me in slavery.”

Thomas Aquinas explained the wounds this way: “In so far as reason has lost the way to truth, there is the wound of ignorance. In so far as the will has lost its inclination to good, there is the wound of malice. In so far as the irascible power has lost its aggressiveness towards the difficult, there is the wound of weakness. Finally, in so far as desire is no longer directed to the delectable under the restraint of reason, there is the wound of desire.” The four faculties or powers of the soul are reason, the will, the irascible power, and desire. Next we will look at the specific wounds.

The first wound is blindness or ignorance, which is our loss of the intellectual capacity to know and form judgments concerning spiritual things. This wound is described by Thomas as “reason having lost its way to the truth.” St. Paul explains: “But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” (1 Corinthians 14:15) As a result of the wound of blindness, man’s conscience is an unreliable and often dormant faculty. We are especially poor in forming correct judgments about ourselves. We quickly judge others, but when it comes to honestly judging our own behavior, intention, and desire, we do a pitiable job.

The second wound, malice, is in the faculty of our will. Thomas describes malice as having lost the inclination to the good. Malice comes from the Latin ‘malum’, which means evil. God has made the will of man desiring the good. In itself, our will harkens after the true, the good, and the beautiful, but original sin hinders our ability to realize God’s good intentions for our life. In this vivid passage from Roman 7:14–24, St. Paul dramatizes the doomed struggle of man, unaided by the Holy Spirit, against malice: “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I

am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The Fall has impaired our will so that when a strong, personal defense against sin is called for, or when we need to make an offense against sin, we falter, and we do not have the strength of will to persevere apart from the grace of God.

The third wound is concupiscence, which is the disordered desire for immediate sensual needs. Notice that the third wound is the "disordered desire," rather than our "immediate sensual needs." Most people need sleep, food, drink, and warmth in the winter, clothing, sexual love, and physical exercise all in differing degrees for different people. Some need sleep, sexual love and physical exercise while others live perfectly happy and full lives without them. But it is important to realize that sensual desires are not sinful. Thomas referred to concupiscence as "wounded desire," It is "desire for the delectable without the restraint of reason." God has made human beings with the capacity to desire the delectable and the fact of the matter is that Adam and Eve had sensual desires before and after the Fall. The difference they experienced after the Fall was that concupiscence, once a mere need, became their soul's unrestrained and driving force.

And finally, the fourth wound is weakness, the failure of our will to muster a personal offense against evil. Thomas says that the upshot for the wound of weakness is that our irascible power has lost its aggressiveness toward the difficult. The first two wounds touch upon what used to be called the spiritual faculties: the intelligence and the will. The last two, concupiscence and weakness, touch upon our passions. Life is hard and the good is hard to attain. It requires a lot of energy to lay hold to it. We need strength, but the wound of weakness deprives us of the very powers we need. We are lazy and not inclined to make too many efforts. We want to get everything the easy way and this is a hallmark of original sin: "I want what I want when I want it."

The four wounds are lethal and we are powerless to redeem ourselves from Original Sin. Try as he may over and over again to reform himself, he will fail, because reformation is not what he needs. Sin breeds more sin and more disorder and we end up, as the BCP puts it, "tied and bound with the chain of our sins" (BCP p.63). But even in this condition human nature itself is not essentially corrupt, but profoundly wounded by suffering the loss of the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit, who animated and unified Adam's powers and faculties in a free and godly harmony. Instead of the love of God, which is true reason, ruling from the center of our being and uniting our faculties around that one great love, we now have "self," and thus, concupiscence at the center. But in Holy Baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and we are infused with the heavenly virtues of faith, hope, and charity and thus we are equipped to begin a reversal of the Fall as the wounds are cleansed and healed through the grace given to Holy Mother Church.

allsaintscville.org/the-four-wounds-of-the-fall/

Summary of Key Concepts

What is Sin?

Thomas Aquinas—Four Wounds of Sin

Body, Intellect, Will

Questions to Consider

1. In what aspect of your life do you experience the greatest temptation to sin?
2. On those occasions when you are tempted to sin but chose to do good instead, what has made the difference?
3. Are you ever tempted to give up because choosing to love others over self-love can be so challenging? What keeps you persevering in your efforts to show your love for God by loving your neighbor?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Scripture Meditation

PERSEVERANCE IN TRIAL

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God Who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and he will be given it.

But he should ask in faith, not doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed about by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, since he is a man of two minds, unstable in all his ways.

The brother in lowly circumstances should take pride in his high standing, and the rich one in his lowliness, for he will pass away "like the flower of the field." For the sun comes up with its scorching heat and dries up the grass, its flower droops, and the beauty of its appearance vanishes. So will the rich person fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

TEMPTATION

Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that He promised to those who love Him.

No one experiencing temptation should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and He Himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers: all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.

Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does.

—James 1:2–25

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 2

Catechism (CCC #1852–1853, 1865–1869)

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SINS

There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The Letter to the Galatians contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Sins can be distinguished according to their objects, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbor, or oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal

sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man.” But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds.

Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations, which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.

Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the capital sins, which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called “capital” because they engender other sins, other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.

The catechetical tradition also recalls that there are “sins that cry to heaven”: the blood of Abel, the sin of the Sodomites, the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, and injustice to the wage earner.

Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them: by participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; and by protecting evil-doers.

Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. “Structures of sin” are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a “social sin.”

Summary off Key Concepts

Temptation—World, Flesh, Devil

Mortal vs. Venial Sin

Conditions for Mortal Sin

Questions to Consider

1. There are many different degrees of sinfulness. Are you ever tempted to be “good enough” without seeking to be perfect?
2. Why do you think it is often easier to recognize someone else’s sinfulness over identifying your own?
3. What helps you to “take the beam out of your own eye before you remove the splinter in other people’s”?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 3

Daily Scripture Meditation

“Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away. But whoever does the will of God remains forever.” —1 John 2:15–17

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall not have other gods beside Me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or serve them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their ancestors' wickedness on the children of those who hate Me, down to the third and fourth generation; but showing love down to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not invoke the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished anyone who invokes His name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day—keep it holy.

Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your work animal, or the resident alien within your gates.

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Now as all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blast of the shofar and the mountain smoking, they became afraid and trembled. So they took up a position farther away and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die.”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and put the fear of Him upon you so you do not sin.”

So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

—Exodus 20:1–21

The Ten Commandments: The Origins of Mortal Sin

1ST COMMANDMENT: I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD: YOU SHALL NOT HAVE STRANGE GODS BEFORE ME

Polytheism and idolatry

Superstition that also expresses itself in various forms of divination, magic, sorcery and spiritism.

Irreligion which is evidenced: in tempting God by word or deed; in sacrilege, which profanes sacred persons or sacred things, above all the Eucharist; and in simony, which involves the buying or selling of spiritual things.

Atheism, which rejects the existence of God, founded often on a false conception of human autonomy.

Agnosticism, which affirms that nothing can be known about God, and involves indifferentism and practical atheism.

See Compendium 445; CCC 2110–2128; 2138–2140

2ND COMMANDMENT:

YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN

Blasphemy, curses, unfaithfulness to promises made to God, false oath, perjury. Compendium 447–449; CCC 2142–2149; 2160–2162

3RD COMMANDMENT: REMEMBER TO KEEP HOLY THE LORD'S DAY

Not going to Holy Mass during Sundays and Holy days of Obligation without a just motive (e.g. sickness)

See Catechism 1389

4TH COMMANDMENT: HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER

Negligence, unfulfillment and indifference of the obligations/responsibilities towards one's children, parents and siblings; education in virtue and in faith of one's children

Hatred; ingratitude; disrespect; disobedience in matters concerning the material and spiritual well-being.

See Catechism 2114–2118; 2221–2229

5TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT KILL

Direct and intentional murder and cooperation in it;

Direct abortion, willed as an end or as means, as well as cooperation in it. Attached to this sin is the penalty of excommunication because, from the moment of his or her conception, the human being must be absolutely respected and protected in his integrity;

Direct euthanasia, which consists in putting an end to the life of the handicapped, the sick, or those near death by an act or by the omission of a required action;

Suicide and voluntary cooperation in it, insofar as it is a grave offense against the just love of God, of self, and of neighbor. One's responsibility may be aggravated by the scandal given; one who is psychologically disturbed or is experiencing grave fear may have diminished responsibility.

See Compendium 470; Catechism 2268–2283; 2321–2326

6TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

Grave sins against chastity differ according to their object: adultery, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, rape, and homosexual actions. These sins are expressions of the vice of lust. These kinds of acts committed against the physical and moral integrity of minors become even more grave.

Direct sterilization, contraception, artificial fecundation

Adultery, divorce, polygamy, incest, free unions (cohabitation, concubinage), and fornication or sexual acts before or outside of marriage

See Compendium 492, 498, 502; Catechism 2351–2359; 2396; 2370–2372; 2380–2391, 2400

7TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

Theft, deliberate retention of goods lent or of objects lost; business fraud; paying unjust wages; forcing up prices by taking advantage of the ignorance or hardship of another;

Speculation in which one contrives to manipulate the price of goods artificially in order to gain an advantage to the detriment of others;

Corruption in which one influences the judgment of those who must make decisions according to law;

Appropriation and use for private purposes of the common goods of an enterprise; work poorly done; tax evasion; forgery of checks and invoices; excessive expenses and waste. Willfully damaging private or public property is contrary to the moral law and requires reparation (CCC 2409)

Slavery (2414)

Disordered desire for money (CCC 2424)

Withholding wages (CCC 2434)

Immoderate love for riches and their selfish use (CCC 2445)

8TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR

Lying (in some cases CCC 2484), false witness and perjury (CCC 2476), rash judgment, detraction, calumny (CCC 2477), adulation (CCC 2480), violation of the sacramental seal (2490) and divulgence of professional secrets (2491)

See Compendium 523–524; Catechism 2475–2487; 2507–2509

9TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE

The Ninth Commandment forbids cultivating thoughts and desires connected to actions forbidden by the Sixth Commandment.

See Compendium 528; Catechism 2517–2519; 2531–2532

10TH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS

This Commandment, which completes the preceding Commandment, requires an interior attitude of respect for the property of others and forbids greed, unbridled covetousness for the goods of others, and envy which is the sadness one experiences at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself. See Compendium 531; Catechism 2534–2540; 2551–2554

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 3

Catholic Commentary on the 7 Deadly Sins

Most Catholics are familiar with the Seven Deadly Sins, also known as the Seven Capital Sins. These are those sins that engender all other sins, hence why they are called the Capital Sins—because they are at the head of all other sins.

Much spiritual direction, writing, and discussion have surrounded how to combat these sins, and what virtues we ought to strive after that most oppose these sins. For example, those who struggle with pride ought to pray for the grace of humility and take steps to better live out this virtue.

At some point in one's spiritual journey, as we seek to draw ever closer to the Lord, there will come a point where we recognize that, even if we have truly done battle with our sins, there is still deep, spiritual healing that must take place to thoroughly purify of us of the Seven Deadly Sins.

The Doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, explains that there is a deeply spiritual component to these sins, that they can often hide in spiritual guises, and to move further along in the spiritual life, healing is required in these areas.

All quotes from St. John of the Cross come from his work *The Dark Night of the Soul* as quoted in Ralph Martin's excellent work, *The Fulfillment of All Desire*.

PRIDE

Pride is not simply having a bloated sense of self or putting oneself in the place of God. Even our desire for holiness and perfection can become a source of pride. Jesus tells us to be perfect (Mt. 5:48) and in striving after perfection, we might be tempted to discouragement when we fail to be perfect as our Father is perfect.

St. John writes,

Sometimes they minimize their faults, and at other times they become discouraged by them, since they felt they were already saints and they become impatient and angry with themselves, which is yet another fault.

While we must strive after moral perfection, our reason must be purely to please God. It is possible, however, that our desire for perfection and sanctity is more self-indulgent than it is a desire for the Lord.

St. John continues,

They are often extremely anxious that God remove their faults and imperfections, but their motive is personal peace rather than God. They fail to realize that were God to remove their faults they might very well become more proud and presumptuous.

We ought to consider the question, "Why do we want to be perfect?" If for the sake of God and not for our own sake, then we ought to be humble in the face of our imperfections, patiently awaiting the Lord's healing.

ENVY

The sin of envy, for many, connotes an extreme form of greed—it is a desire for something that someone else has. While envy does include this, a more exact understanding of envy is sorrow at someone else's good. Envy isn't wanting your neighbor's car; envy is being upset or frustrated that your neighbor has a car that you don't have.

St John of the Cross shows that envy can exist in the spiritual life as well. He writes:

In regard to envy, many of them feel sad about the spiritual good of others and experience sensible grief in noting that their neighbor is ahead of them on the road to perfection, and they do not want to hear others praised. Learning of the virtues of others makes them sad. They cannot bear to hear others being praised without contradicting and undoing these compliments as much as possible.

These scathing words surely ring true. It really can hurt to see when someone else is closer to God, more spiritually mature, and receiving more praise for their goodness and success in the spiritual life. This hurt, despair, and frustration at another's spiritual good is envy.

To combat this, we must be grateful for the spiritual blessings the Lord has bestowed upon us. We must also pray for the grace to see that another person's spiritual good does not hurt us or take away from us, rather, it helps build up the Body of Christ and in so doing benefits us.

AVARICE

Whereas envy tends to focus on the person who has something we wish we had, avarice or greed focuses on the coveting of that good itself. It might come as a surprise, but it is indeed possible to be greedy of spiritual goods as well.

Whether is always seeking more spiritual advice, or the newest edition of a theological tome, or perhaps simply another icon to place in a room — spiritual avarice is an inordinate desire for spiritual goods and the seeking of spiritual consolation in these things rather than in God.

St. John of the Cross writes of those enraptured by spiritual avarice, “They weigh themselves down with over-decorated images and rosaries... they prefer one cross to another because of its elaborateness.”

I, for one, can see this sinful inclination in my own life and recognize how tempting it is because these prayerful and holy objects are in fact good and helpful. Having good books and holy items is of course good (and sometimes necessary) for growth in the spiritual life. The temperate possession and desire for these items are not being discouraged, rather, St. John is pointing out that we can make idols out of anything, even holy things.

St. John explains that “true devotion comes from the heart and looks only to the truth and substance represented by spiritual objects” and we must remind ourselves of this frequently. The goal is not more images and rosaries, the goal is God. We do not need more spiritual things, we need more of Him.

WRATH

Just as it is easy to lose our tempers and become angry in sensible ways, such as being cut off in traffic, or when someone makes a mistake that causes us trouble, it is possible to become angry in our spiritual lives.

St. John of the Cross points out two main ways this can happen. We can become angry with others when we see them sinning and falling short of spiritual perfection. St. John says these people are “setting themselves up as lords of virtue” and much opposed the virtue of meekness.

Another way that the deadly sin of anger can take root in the spiritual life is in anger with ourselves. St. John writes,

Others in becoming aware of their own imperfections grow angry with themselves in an unhumble impatience... They want to become saints in a day... They make numerous plans and great resolutions, but since they are not humble and have no distrust of themselves, the more resolves they make the more they break, and the greater becomes their anger. They do not have the patience to wait until God gives them what they need, when He so desires.

Like in the antidote to pride, we must ask the Lord to give us patience as we strive for perfection in His holy time. Our moral perfection is for Him and not for our own peace or satisfaction. Anger in the face of our imperfections only further distances us from the Lord.

LUST

Even those who have mastered the virtue of chastity can still suffer from temptations to lust and sins of the flesh. In fact, St. John of the Cross points out that, though surprising, lustful temptations can commonly appear during prayer and spiritual exercises.

The reason for this can perhaps be seen in the strong connection between the spiritual and the sensory. We often experience joy and consolation in our spiritual practices in a sensible and emotional way. For those who don't have strong enough control over the sensible reactions in the spiritual life, there is a greater possibility of experiencing these lustful desires and temptations.

St. John also points out that this is a tactic of the devil, to lead people away from prayer: “To make them cowardly and afraid, he brings vividly to their minds foul and impure thoughts...the devil excites these feelings while souls are at prayer, instead of when they are engaged in other works so that they might abandon prayer.”

Of course, it is necessary to resist the devil and be persistent in our prayers, precisely in the face of these temptations. The Lord will continue to purify these desires and raise them up to the pure charity that is of Him.

GLUTTONY

Gluttony involves the excessive desire and consumption of food and drink. In the spiritual life, there can also be an overemphasis on the feelings that come from our prayer to the extent that the feelings, and not God, become our focus. Spiritual gluttony is the excessive desire for spiritual feelings rather than God Himself.

It is possible that our spiritual readings, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and ministry activity become more about making us feel good than being about the Lord and His will.

Of spiritual gluttons, St. John says, "Their only yearning and satisfaction is to do what they feel inclined to do... They think that gratifying and satisfying themselves is serving and satisfying God."

It is very dangerous to assume that the pious and holy things we want for ourselves are the same things the Lord wants for us. Are we setting aside an hour of spiritual reading in the morning because the Lord is calling us to do it, or because it feels good to us and is easier than starting the work of the day? Are we fasting three times a week because we've discerned the Lord is asking these sacrifices of us or because we like the physical benefits of fasting?

The best and most effective prayers and devotions will always be the specific ones the Lord is inviting us to do. The danger of spiritual gluttony is a good reminder to constantly and consistently ask God to confirm our spiritual practices are in alignment with His will.

SLOTH

Sloth is often equated with laziness but can be even better defined as sorrow in the face of good. Just as laziness can be extremely tempting and prevalent in our sensible lives so too in our spiritual lives. Spiritual sloth, or a deep sorrow in the face of spiritual goods, can become quite tempting as the Lord withholds some of the feelings and consolations in prayer that He might have previously given.

St. John explains,

Regarding spiritual sloth, those beginners usually become weary in exercises that are more spiritual and flee from them since these exercises are contrary to sensory satisfaction. Since they are so used to finding delight in spiritual practices, they become bored when they do not find it... They either give up prayer or go to it begrudgingly.

Like spiritual gluttony, spiritual sloth can stem from the desire for the feelings and consolation associated with prayer rather than for the Lord. This is precisely why God will at times remove these feelings and consolations, not as a punishment, but to purify our hearts and remind us why we are praying in the first place.

Again, we must ask the Lord to purify our hearts, for a deep purification is the only way to heal these spiritual deadly sins. When we recognize more aridity in our prayer, we must remind ourselves that this is when we are closer to God, we must embrace the dry wood of the cross that we are carrying, knowing the Lord is permitting this for our good.

A DEEPER HEALING

To sum up, as we progress through the spiritual life, we will see that our souls have been distorted by sin far more than we can have imagined.

Even after we have, to the best of our knowledge, combated the Seven Deadly Sins and been freed from these vices, as we draw closer to our holy God, we will see the deeper stains of these sins, the deadly sins on a spiritual level.

Whether it be pride, envy, avarice, wrath, lust, gluttony, or sloth—these deadly sins can exist on the spiritual level, just as they exist on the sensible level.

We can become spiritually prideful, putting our moral perfection in the place of God. We can become spiritually envious, saddening as others progress in their relationships with God.

We can experience spiritual avarice, desiring holy objects and goods more than the God they point us to. We can become spiritually wrathful, and upset with the world and ourselves when we detect any moral imperfections.

We can experience spiritual lust, being tempted by the devil in times of prayer as he seeks to pull us away from God. We can become spiritual gluttons, fattening ourselves on the feelings that come from our

devotions and focusing on these and not the Lord. Finally, when those feelings are removed, we can become spiritually slothful and bored by prayer because we really want good feelings and not God.

We may experience some, none, or all of these temptations and sins. Each person's path to God is different, but what we all have in common is that we need the Lord to purify these faults. If we want to draw deeper in the spiritual life, we must recognize that it is only by God's grace that we can be healed and progress. Pray to the Lord, be patient and trust in Him.

catholicstand.com/diving-deeper-into-the-seven-deadly-sins/

SUMMARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Christ's Golden Rule is to treat others as you would want to be treated yourself. How would following the Ten Commandments make that possible?
2. Which of the Ten Commandments is the most challenging for you to obey? Why? What can you do to change that?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 4

Daily Scripture Meditation

BATTLE AGAINST EVIL

Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from His mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.

Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.

So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.

—Ephesians 6:10–18

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 4

8 Ways People Give the Devil a Foothold

Fr. Vincent Lampert, Exorcist Priest

[youtube.com/watch?v=Q7qExWLDAAUo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7qExWLDAAUo) —21 Minute Video

Summary of Key Concepts

Some common ways for the devil to gain a foothold in one's life are: 1. Ties to the Occult; 2. Through the Entertainment Industry; 3. A Curse; 4. Being Dedicated to a Demon; 5. Abuse; 6. Habitual Sin; 7. Inviting a Demon into your Life; 8. Broken Relationships.

Questions to Consider

1. Are you aware of the way(s) the devil has been able to gain a foothold in your life? Are you willing to both rebuke the devil and refrain from anything that opened up a foothold for his entry into your life?
2. Jesus exorcised many demons during His public ministry. What were some of the positive things that resulted in the faith of the person who had been possessed but had been healed?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 5

Daily Scripture Meditation

Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in Him, "If you remain in My word, you will truly be My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered Him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can You say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free.

I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill Me, because My Word has no room among you.

I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father."

They answered and said to Him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this.

You are doing the works of your father!" [So] they said to Him, "We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you cannot bear to hear My Word. You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Can any of you charge Me with sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe Me? Whoever belongs to God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not listen, because you do not belong to God."

—John 8:31–47

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 5

Catholics and New Age, The Occult, & Witchcraft

Wendy McMahan | 27 March AD 2017

The Scriptures give us a picture of the invisible air that surrounds us, and those spiritual beings who occupy it. From the moment we were born, there has been a battle raging for each one of our souls. God has given us a guardian angel to protect and guide us through this life and to lead us on the path towards God and away from the world. But the devil's main objective is to steal our souls. Demons were once angels who fell. Paragraph 414 of the Catechism of The Catholic Church states:

Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who freely refused to serve God and His plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate man in their revolt against God.

Because they were once angels, demons still retain the supernatural powers God gave them before they fell, and they use them to tempt us towards sin. God limits those powers but even so they are far more intelligent than we are. They observe us and are therefore privy to our weaknesses, and they use those flaws to pull us into sin, and tear us away from God. They whisper lies into our minds and do everything in their power to influence us into their way of thinking. They never grow weary, and they will never stop trying to destroy us until we die.

THE WORLD AND THE OCCULT

It cannot be denied that in the world today what is good is seen as bad, and what is bad is seen as good. This sad reality has been accepted by many people, but it is an epidemic among our youth and young adults. There are a lot of things I could focus on here but I am going to choose one, which is actually multi-faceted: the

occult or the New Age movement. It is presented as a good and has been interwoven into our culture today. Many people are drawn into the occult because the world makes it so attractive and accessible.

It has infiltrated even the Catholic Church. I googled Catholic retreats and what I found shocked me. There is a long list of pagan and Eastern religious practices taking place at these centers. They include energy therapies, yoga, labyrinth, mindfulness training, centering prayer, meditation halls, training workshops, eco-spirituality, and more. These forms of meditation actually come from non-Christian religions. For example, the Labyrinth comes from Greek mythology, centering prayer comes from Buddhism, and yoga comes from Hinduism. None of these have anything to do with Catholicism, yet they are being taught in Catholic retreat centers. It gives the laity searching for God a false sense of security, and opens them up to false gods and religions that are totally contrary to the Catholic faith. Lay people put their trust in the Church; if these New Age beliefs are presented to them as acceptable, then they will most likely believe and use them. These practices are a mockery of the true faith. They are mixing different gods and religions with Catholicism. It is a deception not only of the faithful, but also those perpetuating these heresies.

A person does not have to take a workshop or learn Centering Prayer to achieve peace. Coming to truly know and love God in the depths of our hearts isn't learned; it is His free gift to all of us. All you have to do is pray. Sit quietly in adoration and pray, and you will be brought to contemplation. That is not something you have to learn; it is simply the fruit of consistent prayer before our Lord in the Eucharist. Jesus is the one true God, you are not going to find Him in yoga and meditations based on Eastern religions. These practices are "I" centered not God centered. If meditation is placed on anything other than Christ, it may open a door to the demonic.

There are also some common New Age practices we see every day including dream-catchers, crystals, horoscopes, astrology, numerology, psychics, tarot cards and I could go on. People do not know the dangers they put themselves in by participating in these occult practices. The devil uses deception to pull people away from God. One example is people who wear shiny stones around their necks thinking it is going to transmit cosmic energy into them, thereby spiritually enhancing their lives. That is just impossible, yet people believe it is true so they do it anyway. The devil's deception is working. These things are idols that take the place of Jesus Christ. God commands us: "You shall have no other gods before Me." —Exodus 20

POWER OF WITCHCRAFT

I read an article recently about witches who have started gathering across the country to begin a ritualistic attack against President Donald Trump. I think it is essential to point out that witchcraft is a very real and powerful form of black magic. I know this personally because I was spiritually attacked by witchcraft. I had no idea what was happening to me or why my life was so out of control. During those years, God taught me so much about the evils that exist and how to defeat them. At first, I didn't believe in witches. So, I understand that there are going to be people who will also find it hard to believe, but witches are real.

They are people who have chosen to serve Satan in exchange for worldly favors and supernatural powers that give them the ability to secretly harm or control others. Father Gabriele Amorth said, "Just as Christ gave His apostles and their followers specific powers for the good of the body and the soul, so Satan gives specific powers to his followers for the destruction of the body and the soul" (*An Exorcist Tells His Story*, 30). We can see then that witchcraft is a much darker form of the occult. It is real and can cause great harm and even death to the innocent who are attacked by it.

Anyone using magic is practicing witchcraft. There are different forms of witchcraft and some are more powerful than others. Satanism is the worship of Satan and it is one of the most powerful forms of witchcraft. They perform rituals and black masses in mockery of the Catholic Church. There is also Voodoo and Santeria, which are both a mix of Catholicism and African Magic. Again we see a mockery of the Catholic faith and its practices. Wiccans do not believe in the devil, they focus on the earth and goddess worship. This doesn't mean Wicca is any less dangerous, they are still calling on evil spirits to do their bidding whether they acknowledge that or not. Wiccans use pentagrams and magic, which you also find in Satanism.

Father Gabriele Amorth states that "It is not necessary to become a Satanist in order to serve the devil and become one of his followers. There are many, alas, who do not officially consecrate themselves to Satan but

choose to follow his basic principle, and as a result they place their souls at great risk.” (*An Exorcist Explains The Demonic*, 34). This statement shows us that all forms of the occult, whether one believes in the devil or not, reject God and have the potential to lead to eternal suffering in hell.

catholicstand.com/catholics-new-age-occult-witchcraft/

Summary of Key Concepts

Pacts & Agreements

Rebuke Soul Ties

Unforgiveness

Questions to Consider

1. Popular culture makes light of New Age and occult practices, not knowing that people who are naively seeking a sense of security or peace can then fall under the devil's power. Where do you find meaning, fulfillment and happiness now? Which of the practices mentioned above will be the most difficult for you to break away from?
2. God has given each person a guardian angel whose power to protect and guide you is strong. How often do you invoke the power of your angel to protect you from evil spirits?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Scripture Meditation

“Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus.”

—Ephesians 3:20

For the grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people as His own, eager to do what is good.

Say these things. Exhort and correct with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

—2 Titus 2:11–15

Assignment: Written Reflection

What are ways that you have been unfaithful to God and need to be reconciled with Jesus?

What are ways that you still struggle to comply with God's expectations for your life?

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 6

The Five Effects of Grace

Nancy Ward

St. Thomas Aquinas gives us five effects of grace:

1. **Grace heals our soul.** “Grace is a glow of soul, a real quality, like beauty of body. Grace is nature's perfection,” he writes.
2. **Grace gives us the desire to do good.** “Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom” (CCC 2022), which makes us aware of our own purpose and compels us toward total self-fulfillment. Jesus pours out His grace, giving us the power to choose to do good, to choose to be free, to choose to fulfill our destiny as children of God.
3. **Grace works effectively through us to carry out good.** “Grace is a participation in the life of God” (CCC 1997). When we live a life of grace we live for God as we fulfill our unique purpose in the Kingdom. We eagerly receive what we can never deserve but what He graciously allows us to take part in: the life of God. That power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.
4. **Grace gives us staying power to keep going.** With grace comes courage, resilience, and resoluteness despite our fragility, weakness, and sin. “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (1 Cor 12:9).
5. **Grace enables us to break through to glory.** St. Thomas writes, “Grace is in the soul's substance, granting a new kind of spiritual being, rendering it like God and a partaker of the divine nature.” The truest sign of grace in us is our willing dependence on God. Our surrender to His will is the best way to glorify Him.

newevangelizers.com/blog/2016/03/01/five-effects-grace/

The Five Obstacles to Grace

Jeff Cavins

Obstacle 1: Lack of Knowledge

Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed because of a lack of knowledge.”

Obstacle 2: Traditions and Ruts

Matthew 15:6 “. . . you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your traditions.”

In other words, you do what you do just because that's the way it has always been done. You don't question your life. A man once said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Obstacle 3: Disobedience

Hebrews 4:6–7 “Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he sets a certain day, ‘today’ saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’”

2 Peter 2:19–22 “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them, the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit” and “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

Obstacle 4: Time/Distractions

Ephesians 5:15 “Be very careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

Obstacle 5: Pride

Proverbs 29:23 “A man’s pride brings him low.”

Galatians 3:1–3 “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

media.ascensionpress.com/podcast/5-obstacles-to-grace/

Summary of Key Concepts

Questions to Consider

1. How can you gain knowledge of bringing Christ’s grace into your life? Who or what would be able to help you do that?
2. What distractions are most noticeably keeping you from living a life of grace? What are you willing to do to keep them to a minimum in your daily life?
3. No one is able to live a perfect grace-filled life by his/her own efforts. Have you surrendered your helplessness to God with humility and trust?

WEEK 3: DAILY MEDITATIONS— JESUS CHRIST THE MESSIAH

JESUS: FULLY HUMAN & FULLY DIVINE

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and yet You are coming to me?”

Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.

After Jesus was baptized, He came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for Him], and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon Him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.”

—Matthew 3:13–17

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun and His clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Him.

Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If You wish, I will make three tents here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”

When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and do not be afraid.” And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

—Matthew 17:1–9

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Catechism: (CCC #464–469)

TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that He is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it.

The first heresies denied not so much Christ's divinity as His true humanity (Gnostic Docetism). From apostolic times the Christian faith has insisted on the true incarnation of God's Son “come in the flesh.” But already in the third century, the Church in a Council at Antioch had to affirm against Paul of Samosata that Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature and not by adoption. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 confessed in its Creed that the Son of God is “begotten, not made, of the same substance (homoousios) as the Father,” and condemned Arius, who had affirmed that the Son of God “came to be from things that were not” and that he was “from another substance” than that of the Father.

The Nestorian heresy regarded Christ as a human person joined to the divine person of God's Son. Opposing this heresy, St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 confessed "that the Word, uniting to Himself in His person the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man." Christ's humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it His own, from His conception.

For this reason the Council of Ephesus proclaimed in 431 that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her womb: "Mother of God, not that the nature of the Word or His divinity received the beginning of its existence from the holy Virgin, but that, since the holy body, animated by a rational soul, which the Word of God united to Himself according to the hypostasis, was born from her, the Word is said to be born according to the flesh."

The Monophysites affirmed that the human nature had ceased to exist as such in Christ when the divine person of God's Son assumed it. Faced with this heresy, the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 confessed:

Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to His divinity and consubstantial with us as to His humanity; "like us in all things but sin." He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to His divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to His humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (prosopon) and one hypostasis.

Fully Human and Fully Divine: Understanding the Incarnation

Father Ian Ker

Catholic Christianity believes that the identity of Jesus Christ is similar to the nature of God in the sense that both are mysteries that are beyond full human understanding. Just as God is one and yet three persons, so Jesus is both divine and human at the same time. And not partly divine and partly human, but fully and truly God and fully and truly human.

The mystery, however, will appear less impenetrable if we recall that humanity is made in the image or likeness of God, so that the more really human a person is, the closer he or she will resemble God. In other words, the most human of people will also be the most godlike of people. The more we are in harmony with our real human nature, the more we shall be like God. If, then, there ever existed a human being who was totally in accord with human nature as God intended it to be, that is, like to God, then that person will also presumably be the most nearly divine of human beings. As we have said, to place the human in opposition to the divine is not in accordance with God's plan. The two are meant to be closely conjoined.

The orthodox Christian view is that Jesus is the only perfect human being who has ever existed. But if so, then He is also the nearest of all people who have ever existed to being God. When we think about it in that way, we begin to see that the idea of someone being both God and man is not, after all, quite so baffling.

The Incarnation was not simply a matter of God coming down to join us on our level, but also of drawing us up to His level. The Fathers called this aspect of the Incarnation the deification or divinization of human nature. In the unique case of the Incarnation, God doesn't just come down to our level in an external and momentary kind of way. It's true He doesn't cease to be God—if He did there would be no point in the exercise—but He does truly become human. He doesn't dress up in a sort of disguise, pretending to be human while actually still staying God, as we do when we impersonate somebody. No, God truly comes down to us because He really takes on our human nature, but He also at the same time, by doing so, draws us up into His life, because He doesn't cease to be God.

For it was not only that God underwent what we can only call an experience in taking our human nature, but that human nature could not have that happening to it without a radical effect on its makeup. This isn't

something that is easy to explain or understand, but it would be as if we could get right into somebody else and experience exactly what it is like to be that person, to have his feelings and his thoughts. It's not something, of course, that can ever literally happen, but it's not impossible in a way to imagine it. In fact, we have an interesting expression to indicate our reaction to somebody intruding in an unwelcome way into our life when we say that so-and-so "is getting under my skin." We don't have such a concrete and graphic expression to mean the same thing when it is a pleasant, positive experience. We can only then use the much less physical idea of somebody "empathizing" with us, that is, to recall the Greek meaning of the word, "suffering" or "experiencing" what we suffer or experience. There is, though, the more vivid visual expression of "seeing" right into somebody.

Well, in the Incarnation God does indeed not only empathize with or see into us, but, in the most positive sense, gets under our very skin. He does that by not only literally putting on our human skin, but by putting on all that is part and parcel of being a human person. There is one exception to that, although, as we have already seen, it is not really an exception at all. I am referring, of course, to the fact that the one thing God doesn't take to Himself, and can't, unless He were to cease to be God, is sin. But since sin is inhuman rather than human, by sinning the Incarnate God would make Himself less not more human.

If indeed God got into our very skin at the Incarnation, then human nature could never be the same again. It had not only been brought close to divinity, but it had actually been penetrated and impregnated by God. In that case, human nature had now entered into an even more elevated state than the original condition of innocence of sin, since Adam and Eve are depicted as enjoying close friendship and intimacy with God, but with a God who still remains apart and distinct. Through God becoming human in Jesus Christ, human nature receives an extraordinary, radical injection of new, that is, divine life. Human nature, created to be like God, now finds itself invaded by its Creator. When people emigrate to another country and another culture they inevitably have an effect on that society; there is now a new element or ingredient which more or less alters the scene. When God decided to enter the human race, He could not but change the humanity He adopted. Of course, sin remained in the race, and so from that point of view there was still loss rather than gain compared with the original sinlessness of the first creatures. But there was a revolutionary gain, too.

The old human nature remained, sinful and weak. But now there was new hope, altogether fresh possibilities. It was not that the damage that had been done was removed with a wave of a wand. That remained—nothing could change what had so tragically happened. And yet everything could change. Like the injured person carrying his disabilities for life but given a new life immensely better than anything he had ever known even before the terrible accident—so now the human race was renewed in a way that would have seemed inconceivable even in the original state of innocence. It was not just that disabled human nature was given hope that one day things would be all right. Now real possibilities opened up. Human nature suddenly found itself capable of things undreamed of before.

stpaulcenter.com/fully-human-and-fully-divine-understanding-the-incarnation/#:~:text=Catholic%20Christianity%2obelieves%20that%20the,human%20at%20the%20same%20time.

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus: Fully Human & Divine

Questions to Consider

1. In the Gospel passages of Matthew we hear God the Father telling us to listen to His Son. What are some ways that would help you listen to God's voice so as to do His will?
2. Jesus, true God and true man, understands our temptations and struggles. Which of the devil's favorite ploys (desire for comfort and pleasure, desire for recognition or desire for greatness) is the most difficult for you to overcome?
3. Are you willing to turn to Jesus for help so as to desire His will above all else?

JESUS THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN / MIRACLES

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Scripture Meditation

CURE ON A SABBATH

After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep [Gate] a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be well?"

The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me."

Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk."

Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked.

Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." He answered them, "The man who made me well told me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'"

They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk'?"

The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there. After this Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, "Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you."

The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well.

—John 5:1–15

THE CALMING OF A STORM AT SEA

On that day, as evening drew on, He said to them, "Let us cross to the other side."

Leaving the crowd, they took Him with them in the boat just as He was. And other boats were with Him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up.

Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm.

Then He asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?"

They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

—Mark 4:35–41

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 2

Jesus Heals

Carolyn Berghuis, MS, ND, CTN

What is it that people sought out in Jesus during His earthly ministry? The New Testament reveals to us the answer, people sought Him out for physical healing and they deeply desired to hear Him speak and reveal to them the Truth. Over and over we read of the masses presenting themselves to Jesus for physical healing for themselves or of their loved ones. Additionally, we read verse after verse how His followers hung on His every word and how they were amazed at His message. Yes, they needed healing of their physical ills and their spirits needed spiritual healing found only in the Truth Jesus gave the world. How blessed were they to live in the midst of God Himself made manifest as Jesus Christ—the source of true healing.

Our world today carries the same needs, we cry out for physical healing and our hearts yearn for true spiritual healing. Yes, today we are still in desperate need of Jesus' healing hand and His true words. As a Naturopath I have witnessed firsthand the physical, emotional and spiritual pain experienced by those who seek my care. Perhaps, not unlike the leper in today's Gospel, they wish to be made "clean". They wish to be brought back into their family, back into their community, back into health and wellness. And most of all, they wish to be loved and they wish to love. However, unlike Jesus, I can't will their healing into reality, I have had to rely on the natural remedies I have at my disposal.

And this is where I find myself at a crossroads. What are we missing? Why can't we "will" healing and witness it's immediate manifestation as the leper did when Jesus willed it? After all, Jesus told us in John 14:12 that we can do such works if we believe.

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father —John 14:12

Therefore the block to true healing must lie within mankind's collective disbelief. I believe we have healing beyond our imagination, yet mankind has not arrived at the place necessary for such healing to spontaneously and instantaneously occur throughout the world. So what are we doing wrong? And most importantly, what must we, God's children, do to receive our inheritance of wholeness.

The answer can be found within a need for a foundational change in how mankind sees the world. We must move into our hearts. It seems modern man lives in his head and neglects the true healing found in the heart. We need proof, we need reason, we need to make sense of things. In my opinion we put too much trust in man's reason. All the while we too often discredit miracles, faith, and we doubt our intuition—we minimize what we know to be true in our hearts. While I do not seek to discredit science or human reason, I do believe we need a proper balance between human reason and faith in God. Looking around at the world it seems mankind has much room to grow in our hearts—the place we enjoy unity with God—and the place where our belief matures.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10

No remedy could ever heal what only Love can heal. Through pain we can experience the beauty of healing, through tragedy we can learn the grace of forgiveness, through trials we can become wise and through lost love we can learn how to allow God into the brokenness of our hearts. However, we must first believe God is faithful, we must grow in our prayer lives until earth is filled with continuous prayer to Him, and we must surrender to God our hearts until we have given Him our entire heart. The journey will foster in us a deeper belief, a belief where miracles simply happen, a belief where God's Kingdom is on earth as it is in Heaven. Earth will be filled with whole and healed children of God because He wills it and because His Son came to testify to the Truth.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" —Revelation 5:13

Sacred Heart of Jesus—have mercy on us.

acatholic.org/friday-1-8-2016-jesus-heals/

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus the Divine Physician/Miracles

Questions to Consider

1. What would you say is the main area in your life that you have a hard time trusting in God's love and mercy? What do you think you could do to help you build trust?
2. What storms in your life have you experienced when you felt as though Jesus was 'asleep in the boat?' Looking back, do you now see things differently?
3. Have you ever experienced a miracle, either first-hand or otherwise? How did that affect your understanding that Christ is the Lord of life?

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 3

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”

Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what He was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before Me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through Me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know Mine and Mine know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I will lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from My Father.”

—John 10:1–18

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 3

Reflection on the Good Shepherd

Sister Linda Soler, OSB

Sheep are mentioned more than 200 times in the Bible, more than any other animal. Sheep were important as sources of wool, milk, and meat, and throughout the Bible, sheep served as symbols for God's people. Jesus is portrayed as the shepherd of His chosen flock in the prophetic words of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and most famously in the 23rd Psalm, all in which belongs to the Good Shepherd.

Sheep are followers. Following isn't something sheep have to think about—it's an instinct. Sheep remember faces. They recognize faces of other sheep and even of humans who work with them regularly. They are almost human, because sheep remember who treats them well— and even more, they remember who handles them harshly. Sheep find safety in numbers, and when grazing, sheep will keep at least 4–5 other sheep in view. They are very social and extroverted animals, for they do not do well alone, and they value supporting each other by sticking together at all costs. A lost sheep is critical because they do not do well alone.

When Jesus begins a statement with “Amen, amen I say to you” it means serious business in the Gospel of John. Twice Jesus says this to make a strong point, and He also says He is the gate twice—for He is the true gate. The Pharisees who deny Jesus as the way are no better than thieves trying to climb over the wall of a sheepfold, instead of entering through the gate.

The message of this parable is that Jesus is the true shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd who was willing to die for those who put their faith in Him. Any other person who claims to be the true shepherd is a robber or thief, for they are a false shepherd. Imagine a world where people do not expect to be served but are all

eager to serve and care for one another! Jesus is the Good Shepherd who cares, watches, and protects those who believe in Him. This is a wonderful message for anyone who seeks peace with God.

stpaulsmonastery.org/reflection-on-the-good-shepherd/#:~:text=He%20is%20the%20Good%20Shepherd,and%20care%20for%20one%20another!

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Questions to Consider

1. If you were more aware of how we humans are all like sheep who need the Good Shepherd, how would that change your everyday choices in how you live your life?
2. What are some ways that you are willing to be a good shepherd for others who need love and protection?

JESUS CONQUERS SIN AND DEATH

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 4

Daily Scripture Meditation

JESUS QUESTIONED BY PILATE

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and he questioned Him, “Are You the king of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.” And when He was accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer.

Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they are testifying against You?”

But He did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

Now on the occasion of the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called [Jesus] Barabbas. So when they had assembled, Pilate said to them, “Which one do you want me to release to you, [Jesus] Barabbas, or Jesus called Messiah?” For he knew that it was out of envy that they had handed Him over.

While he was still seated on the bench, his wife sent him a message, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of Him.” The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus.

The governor said to them in reply, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” They answered, “Barabbas!”

Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?” They all said, “Let Him be crucified!” But he said, “Why? What evil has He done?” They only shouted the louder, “Let Him be crucified!”

When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. Look to it yourselves.” And the whole people said in reply, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

MOCKERY BY THE SOLDIERS

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around Him. They stripped off His clothes and threw a scarlet military cloak about Him.

Weaving a crown out of thorns, they placed it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They spat upon Him and took the reed and kept striking Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the cloak, dressed Him in His own clothes, and led Him off to crucify Him.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

As they were going out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon; this man they pressed into service to carry His cross.

THE CRUCIFIXION

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull), they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when He had tasted it, He refused to drink.

After they had crucified Him, they divided His garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over Him there. And they placed over His head the written charge against Him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two revolutionaries were crucified with Him, one on His right and the other on His left. Those passing by reviled Him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, if You are the Son of God, [and] come down from the cross!”

Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked Him and said, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. So He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He wants Him. For He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The revolutionaries who were crucified with Him also kept abusing Him in the same way.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

And about three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “This one is calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to Him to drink. But the rest said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save Him.”

But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up His spirit.

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after His resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, “Truly, this was the Son of God!” There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him.

Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

—Matthew 27:11–56

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 4

Why Do Catholics Focus On Jesus’ Death?

Fr. John Paul Gardner

Father, some of my Christian friends are wondering why Catholics focus on Jesus’ death when He is already raised from the dead. They think we should remove our crucifixes and, instead, focus on Christ’s Resurrection. How can I respond?

Our Blessed Lord’s Resurrection is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ. Even nominal Catholics know the central importance of Easter being recognized as the most important day of the liturgical year. (Only Christmas could give it a run for its money in popularity!) Catholics, as well as other denominations, know how to celebrate Christ’s Resurrection properly and exultantly. The very source and summit of Catholic Christianity is Jesus’ Body truly present in the most Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is nothing less than His Risen Flesh, the glorified Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Additionally, the reason Catholics come to Mass on Sunday rather than any other day of the week is because that is the day that Jesus rose from the dead—the day of the Resurrection. Focus on the Resurrection doesn’t come from any lack of attention to the Crucifixion but rather a result of our focus on it.

Those who want to set aside Jesus’ suffering and death in favor of His Resurrection are setting themselves up for confusion towards the paschal mystery, that is, the central mystery of the faith: Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension. Although these four events happened at different intervals of time, they cannot be interpreted or celebrated without each other.

Since focus on our Lord’s Crucifixion takes nothing away from, but rather enhances our celebration of the Resurrection, we ought to focus on our Lord’s Crucifixion as best we can. Here are three ways we can deepen

devotion to the Resurrection by way of Our Lord's Passion: (1) by meditating on Our Lord's own words; (2) by considering the actions of the disciples first to witness the Resurrection; and (3) from the aspect of Christianity lived throughout the centuries.

First, from Our Lord's own words, when the apostles James and John expressed their desire to share His glory in heaven, Jesus reminded them that they must first be willing to drink the cup of suffering (cf. Mk 10:37–38). This, we can say that Our Lord's own desire is that we not forget the suffering we must endure in this life if we hope to be able to enter into the Resurrection with Him.

Second, think about those disciples who were closest to Him at His Resurrection. Mary Magdalene was there first; then came running Peter and John. Isn't it quite telling that they were the last to abandon Him in His agony? Of course, Peter did deny Him but not without first showing his willingness to fight to the death with the sword and even followed Jesus up to the place where they were condemning Him before his courage failed and he denied Christ. John went even further to the foot of the cross, bravely standing by Our Blessed Mother and looking upon Our Lord as He died. And, of course, Mary Magdalene who clung to Jesus' feet and wept bitterly. What we learn from Sts. Peter, John and Mary Magdalene is that authentic witness to the Resurrection comes only through closeness to Jesus in His Passion and death. We would be wise to do the same.

Lastly, the witness of 20 centuries of saints who profess their faith in the Resurrection—every single one of them come faithfully to the Cross of Christ and recommended it to all who wish to follow in their footsteps. Saint Ignatius of Antioch spoke of an immense desire to suffer with Christ, because only then could he experience the glory of His Resurrection. Saint Francis of Assisi ignited the fire of devotion to the Risen Lord in the hearts of all the faithful for centuries by promoting the Way of the Cross (Stations of the Cross). Devotion to the Cross of Christ is the very gateway to the glory of Resurrection. It is our only hope for heaven.

Even Satan wants to hide the crucifixes from our churches and our homes because he knows they express the power of the Passion of Christ and reveal how much He loves us. Let's not remove our crucifixes or lessen our devotion to the Passion of Christ. Instead, while we continue in this valley of tears, longing for the glory of Resurrection, let us not hesitate to stand next to Our Blessed Mother at the foot of the Cross. We must follow the examples of all the saints and be inspired by the words of St. Paul, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

bismarckdiocese.com/news/why-do-catholics-focus-on-jesus-death

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus Conquers Sin & Death

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have a crucifix in your home? How might seeing a daily reminder of the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made to atone for your sins help you to understand how much He loves you?
2. Jesus' suffering during His Passion made it possible for all of our sins to be forgiven. In what ways can you show gratitude for all He endured on your behalf?
3. Jesus told James and John that in order for them to share in His glory in Heaven, they would first need to share in His suffering. How might this help you offer the suffering you are enduring as a way to open your soul to your eternal happiness?

JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 5

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

But at daybreak on the first day of the week they took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. They said to them, “Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but He has been raised. Remember what He said to you while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day.” And they remembered His words. Then they returned from the tomb and announced all these things to the eleven and to all the others.

The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles, but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone; then he went home amazed at what had happened.

THE APPEARANCE ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus Himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to Him in reply, “Are You the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?”

And He replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to Him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed Him over to a sentence of death and crucified Him. But we were hoping that He would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.

Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find His body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that He was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but Him they did not see.”

And He said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures.

As they approached the village to which they were going, He gave the impression that He was going on farther. But they urged Him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So He went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, but He vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”

So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 5

Death Has No Victory

My Catholic Life!

The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the Cross. (CCC #638)

Without the Resurrection of Jesus, all hope is lost, and there is no meaning to His death. The Resurrection makes it possible for us to share in His new life and is then followed by Jesus ascending into Heaven and sending the Holy Spirit. Let's look at some of the essential truths of the Resurrection so as to understand what it's all about.

A REAL HISTORICAL EVENT

There was a specific day and time that Jesus rose from the dead. It happened in history and was witnessed by many. Mary Magdalene and the other Marys were the first to see Him. Soon after this, some of the Apostles saw Him. Some doubted, such as Thomas. Others saw and immediately believed. The process of coming to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus was a process dependent upon faith. Faith does come from seeing and hearing. It comes from hearing accounts of Jesus being alive and, for some, actually seeing it. Ultimately, the act of believing in the Resurrection required the inspired gift of faith. And this gift of faith produced knowledge of its truth. In other words, upon hearing or seeing, the person must be open to the gift of the Holy Spirit speaking in their soul, revealing the truth of Jesus' resurrection. So even though the Resurrection was a real and historical event, it was only properly understood and believed in by a gift of God speaking to one's soul.

RESURRECTION OR BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE?

Jesus did many miracles in His earthly life, including the amazing act of bringing some people back to life after they had died. For example, He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mk 5) and also brought Lazarus, His friend, back to life (Jn 11). What did Jesus do in these two cases, and how did it differ from His Resurrection?

In both these cases, a person had died. Jesus came to them after death, gave a command, and they returned to life. They were the same as they were prior to death, everyone recognized them, and they were able to resume their lives. This is different from what happened with Jesus in His Resurrection. Jesus did not just come back to life. He did not just resume the life He had been living. No, Jesus was resurrected. He took on a new form of living. He now had a transformed and resurrected body. It was His old body that was resurrected, but it was different. With this new resurrected body, Jesus brought about a new potential existence for all humanity. This new body was physical but could also appear and disappear as was reported. Many who knew Him did not immediately recognize Him in this new resurrected state. He was different. He could eat but also suddenly appear behind closed doors. He carried the wounds of the crucifixion but was not wounded. He spoke and people listened with hearts set aflame.

It's important to understand this essential point of the Resurrection. Jesus takes on a new sort of physical existence. It's an existence that is now meant for all to share in, one day when the time comes for the final Judgment and the resurrection of all the dead. All of our bodies will be raised up, and those who are just will share in this new form of living. What is this new state? It's the glorified state. It's life with a new glorified body. Jesus still has this glorified body in Heaven, and it is this body that stands before the Father. So Jesus was not just raised up to His former state, He was transformed to the new physical existence we are all predestined to share in!

A WORK OF THE TRINITY

Jesus had the power to resurrect Himself, but it was not only His action. This was an action of the entire Trinity. It was the will of the Father and done by the power of the Holy Spirit. But, as in all of their works, the entire Trinity acted as one. They were united in their one divine will for a divine purpose.

It's also significant to point out that the Resurrection unites humanity itself to the Trinity in a new way. It brings this new resurrected and glorified human state into the life of God. The new resurrected and glorified human nature is now fully united to Christ, and He is united to the Father and the Spirit, which reveals the unity of humanity with the entire Trinity.

This points to the end and goal of all humanity. We now have hope for our own lives to share in this new glorified state of the Resurrection and union with the Trinity. We look forward to this and hope in this. And hope is not just something we wish for. True Christian hope is a virtue that is grounded in some divine truth revealed to us. We have true faith in the Resurrection, and this gift of faith also produces hope of achieving what we hope for. It's a hope and desire that is fully able to be realized, because this hope is instilled in us by God and by the reality of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection of Christ tells us that all humanity is now predestined by God's plan and by this historical act of the Resurrection to share in a new glorious state of life that goes even beyond the original intention of God in the Garden of Eden. We are now called to share in God's very life, united with Him in a new and glorious existence. This should fill us with excitement, wonder and awe!

mycatholic.life/the-my-catholic-life-series/my-catholic-faith/death-has-no-victory-the-resurrection/#:~:text=The%20Resurrection%20of%20Jesus%20is,Paschal%20mystery%20along%20with%20the

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus and the Resurrection

Questions to Consider

1. When you are feeling downcast and overwhelmed, do you try to find the Lord or do you first seek other means of comfort? If you want to find Him, do you know where to look?
2. Have you ever been confused, then had something explained so well that you had a whole new understanding and appreciation for something that you had missed before? Has this ever happened in your spiritual life?

JESUS ASCENSION & THE HOLY SPIRIT

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day He was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.

He presented Himself alive to them by many proofs after He had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God.

While meeting with them, He enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard Me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

When they had gathered together they asked Him, “Lord, are You at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

When He had said this, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as He was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them.

They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen Him going into heaven.”

—Acts 1:1–11

THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem.

At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language?

We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.” They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, “What does this mean?” But others said, scoffing, “They have had too much new wine.”

PETER’S SPEECH AT PENTECOST

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, “You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘It will come to pass in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour out a portion of My spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

‘Indeed, upon My servants and My handmaids I will pour out a portion of My spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke.

‘The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.’

You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify Him. But God raised Him up, releasing Him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for Him to be held by it.

Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?”

Peter [said] to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.” He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

COMMUNAL LIFE

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need.

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

—Acts 2:1–24,36–47

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 6

The Feast of Pentecost: Fire From Heaven

Monsignor Robert Nusca

It has been fifty days since Easter Sunday and the Acts of the Apostles describes for us how the gift of the Holy Spirit appears to Our Lord's earliest followers as Fire from Heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

The disciples are empowered by the Spirit to continue Jesus' own ministry of teaching, healing and service to the poor and the outcasts, as they bring the brightness of God's purifying, transforming light into a darkened world.

As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (747):

The Holy Spirit, whom Christ the head pours out on His members, builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church.

And this gift of New Fire from Heaven marks a new stage in humanity's relationship with God as the Spirit strengthens, comforts, consoles, guides, purifies, illumines and transforms our hearts.

We should take note how the Apostles are completely transformed by this Fire from Heaven. Afraid, in hiding, unsure of what to do, they become courageous public witnesses to the faith. They are empowered by God to announce boldly the truth of the Gospel and to work miracles in Jesus' name. As they give witness to the Gospel, they do so with a power and authority that is not human, but is divinely inspired.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We too have been empowered at Baptism and Confirmation to share God's love and God's light with others. Here, the Church speaks of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit:

wisdom, understanding, counsel, piety, fortitude, knowledge, and fear of the Lord

THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

In addition to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, our faith speaks of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1832):

The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity."

The Holy Spirit's power transforms us personally, and provides us with the gifts we need to go forth into the world to be living signs of God's presence. At the same time, God's Spirit within our hearts is not a passive gift but is rather a call to an active life: a call to a life lived in response to the manifold gifts of the Holy Spirit that have been given to us.

Are we doing all that we can to receive God's gift of "New Fire from Heaven"?

The means of sanctification have been given to us:

The Sacrament of Confession

Frequent reception of the Eucharist

A time of daily prayer

A daily act of will by which we choose to stand with God, with Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, and with St. Michael the Archangel against the powers of evil

What does it mean to live one's life in a manner that is filled with the Holy Spirit?

As St. Paul reminds us, true freedom is a freedom from the power of sin, while at the same time is the freedom for life in the Spirit:

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. —1 Corinthians 3:17

arnusca.substack.com/p/pentecost-reflection

Summary of Key Concepts

Jesus Ascension: Holy Spirit

Assignment: Written Reflection

WEEK 4: DAILY MEDITATIONS— GRACE, OUR DEFENSE AGAINST EVIL

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Scripture Meditation

GENEROSITY OF GOD'S PLAN

You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you once lived following the age of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the desires of our flesh, following the wishes of the flesh and the impulses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love He had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (by grace you have been saved), raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

—Ephesians 2:1–10

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Catechism: (CCC #1987–1992)

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Justification

The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” and through Baptism: But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. The death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives He lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we take part in Christ's Passion by dying to sin, and in His Resurrection by being born to a new life; we are members of His Body, which is the Church, branches grafted onto the vine which is Himself: [God] gave Himself to us through His Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature. ... For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized.

The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification in accordance with Jesus' proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high. “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.

Justification detaches man from sin that contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God's merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals.

Justification is at the same time the acceptance of God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or “justice”) here means the rectitude of divine love. With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us.

Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ who offered Himself on the Cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of

all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of His mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life.

Sacraments: Channels of Divine Grace

John Hardon, S.J.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of understanding what we mean by the Sacraments as channels of divine grace. We might almost say that Christianity is divided into two classes: those who believe that Christ instituted the Sacraments as instruments of His grace and those who do not. In the sixteenth century, six whole nations separated from Catholic unity because their leaders no longer believed in what we Catholics call the Seven Sacraments.

This is also part of the crisis in the Christian world today. There are those who still believe that Christ instituted seven channels of His grace, and those who may use the word “sacrament” but no longer believe either in the Sacraments as communicators of grace or the Church’s authority over the Sacraments. We may even say that the future of Christianity depends on professed Christians understanding—and I mean understanding—the necessity of the Sacraments for reaching eternal life.

Our focus in this article will be on one word, “understanding.” We ask ourselves three questions: Why did Christ institute seven sacramental channels of grace? How are these channels of grace being undermined in some professedly Catholic circles today? What is our consequent duty as teachers of the true faith?

WHY THE SACRAMENT

God became man in order to bring the human race to join the Holy Trinity in a heavenly eternity. Our destiny is to return to the God from whom we came to share in His own perfect happiness that He enjoys. But this same God gave us a free will that we are to use, according to His will, in order to reach the celestial home where He is waiting for us.

The most fundamental condition that we are to fulfill is to be in His friendship when He calls us from time into eternity. Another name for this divine friendship is the possession of sanctifying grace. Having destined us for heavenly beatitude, in sheer justice, He provided us with the means of attaining what we call the Beatific Vision.

On these terms, the Sacraments are the principal ways that we can obtain the supernatural life, without which no one can be saved. It is also through the Sacraments that we grow in this life of grace, as it is also the Sacraments that provide us with a means of restoring the life of God’s friendship that we may have lost through grave sin. We see immediately that Christ instituted the Sacraments to give us the grace we need to reach heaven, to grow in His grace and thus earn a greater happiness in eternity, and regain His friendship if we have lost it through our disobedience to His will.

The moment we say that the Sacraments are channels of divine grace, we assume that we come into this world without the grace needed to reach heaven. It is not our purpose here to explore the mysterious providence of God in allowing so many people not to receive the Sacraments that Christ instituted. There is such a thing as not receiving the Sacraments actually but only in desire. Nevertheless, the basic principle remains, the Sacraments are the means that Christ provided for the salvation of the human family. Immediately certain conclusions follow. Each of the seven Sacraments has its own divinely intended purpose.

BAPTISM

We need first of all, to receive a share in the divine life. Christ instituted the Sacrament of Baptism in order to provide us with a share in His own divinity. When Christ told Nicodemus that he must be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, He meant this literally. He presumed that we have a principle of natural life for the body, which is the human soul. What He revealed to the wondering Nicodemus, however, was that we are also to have an above-natural principle of life for the soul. St. Augustine called it the soul of the soul. But whatever name you give the source of life for the human spirit, we dare not question that Christ provided the means of obtaining this life. The basic means is the Sacrament of Baptism. The Savior could not have been

clearer. When Nicodemus pressed Him on what all of this means, Jesus used the strongest language at His command. He said, “Unless you are reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, you shall not reach the Kingdom of heaven.”

THE HOLY EUCHARIST AND PENANCE

Once He told us that we need baptism to receive the life of grace in our souls, Christ made sure that we also know how to preserve this life to the dawn of eternity. Three chapters later, in St. John's Gospel, the Savior told His startled listeners that they needed to receive His flesh and blood to keep spiritually alive. No less than we need food and drink to sustain our natural lives, so we need the food and drink of the Holy Eucharist to stay alive in His grace. Again, He used the strongest language possible, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.” Baptism is necessary to obtain a share in the life of God. The Eucharist is equally necessary to remain spiritually alive. Christ foresaw that His followers would sin and even lose the divine life. He therefore provided the means for restoring this life in the Sacrament of Penance, which He instituted on Easter Sunday night.

HOLY ORDERS

The Church that Christ founded is a visible reality. It is no mere abstraction or a poetic society of believers or the predestined. During His visible stay on earth, He was Himself the channel of the graces that He gave those who believed in His name. But Christ's mission of communicating grace was to continue after His return to heavenly glory. That is why He made sure that the Church He founded would continue the work He had begun. That is why at the Last Supper, He instituted two Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist, and the priesthood which would ensure His continued bodily presence on earth and His communication of the fruits of Calvary through the sacrifice of the Mass.

HOLY MATRIMONY

Most of Christ's followers would be married. As He told the startled Pharisees, those who believed in Him would be expected to remain “two in one flesh” for the rest of their lives. No more polygamy, or a writ of divorce with the right to remarry. Lifelong monogamy would be an imperative for those who called themselves Christians. Clearly, Christ had to give His married followers the superhuman grace they would need to remain faithful to His teaching. Matrimony, therefore, had to become a Sacrament if Christians were to live an impossibly human life in the married state.

CONFIRMATION

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus made no secret of the strength His followers would need to remain firm in their faith. That is why He gave them the Sacrament of Confirmation. Over the centuries, it has been called the sacrament of spiritual strengthening. In our day, it is being seen as the sacrament of martyrdom. As He told the disciples, on the day of His Ascension, we are to witness to Him, literally be His “martyrs” (from the Greek word for witnesses) even to the ends of the earth.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

As our bodies approach the end of their days, our souls need the help that only Christ can give to enter eternity with peaceful confidence in God's mercy. That is why we have the Sacrament of Anointing. As only priests would know, people who are facing bodily death need extraordinary assistance from the Savior. This Sacrament, we may say, completes the work that Christ began when we were baptized.

CATHOLIC SACRAMENTS UNDERMINED

Over the centuries of the Church's history, the Sacraments have been one of the principal targets of what we now call dissenters but what more accurately are heretics who deny one or more of the cardinal mysteries of the Catholic faith. Already in the time of Christ, many of His disciples left the Master because they would not accept His teaching on the Real Presence of the living Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. For the next fifteen centuries, one after another of the Sacraments instituted by Christ was either openly denied or so reinterpreted as to leave nothing but the name. Finally in the sixteenth century, an avalanche of anti-sacramentalism broke loose in one formerly Catholic country after another.

It was only logical, therefore, that the Council of Trent issued the following condemnation, "If anyone says that the Sacraments of the New Law are more or less than seven, namely: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony; or even that any of these seven is not truly and properly a Sacrament, let him be anathema."

Needless to say, the followers of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and Crammer did not change their minds. Their underlying reason for rejecting the Sacraments was the more fundamental premise of "absolute predestination," or "those will reach heaven who have been predetermined to be saved." The very meaning of "grace" was changed. Instead of being a free gift of God's mercy that we are to accept and cooperate with, grace was re-defined as the selective mercy of God and that those receive it are destined to be saved.

Even more basic than the theory of absolute predestination was the denial of a supernatural life. Man was never elevated to a share in the divine life. On these terms, there could be no question of receiving the supernatural life through Baptism, or restoring this life through Penance, or nourishing this life through the Holy Eucharist. Even when the word "Sacrament" might be used, a large part of world Christianity, outside of Roman Catholicism, no longer believes either that Christ instituted the Sacraments or that we need them for our salvation.

However, a new phenomenon has entered Christian history in our day. A growing number of still professed Catholic writers are re-interpreting the Church's teaching on the Sacraments with a license and a devastating consequence that has no counterpart in the last half millennium. I will never forget the conference I attended of the Midwestern Theological Society. The keynote speaker was Richard McBrien. Through one hour of learned discourse, he gave the audience one reason after another why the Catholic priesthood was not a Sacrament instituted by Our Lord at the Last Supper. It was a later second century innovation. A logical consequence of this position is to question whether Christ had instituted any of the Sacraments.

One of the most prestigious universities on the east coast is currently teaching a course which identifies the supernatural with mythology. In fact, more than one dictionary describes the supernatural as the unreal or the fanciful.

We cannot overstate the widespread elimination of faith in the Sacraments as channels of divine grace in some still nominally Catholic circles: the widespread desecration of the Holy Eucharist as the Sacrament of Christ's physical presence now on earth through the Sacrament of the Eucharist; the massive departure from the priesthood of so many men who had received the Sacrament of Orders; the nationwide, in our country, and the worldwide internationally drop in confession; the closing of over one hundred parishes in just two dioceses in a few years; and the epidemic of annulments of persons who putatively received the Sacrament of Matrimony. All of these are symptomatic of a plague of sacramental error that threatens to undermine the Catholic Church in one so-called developed country after another.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Pope John Paul II introduces this by declaring, "Guarding the deposit of faith is the mission which the Lord entrusted to His Church and which she fulfills in every age."

As believing Christians, loyal to the Vicar of Christ, our first responsibility is to guard the deposit of faith in the Sacraments which Christ became man to give us, the grace we need to reach eternal life. This guarding of the sacramental faith carries with it a number of grave obligations.

We cannot begin to guard our faith unless we understand what we believe. In Christ's parable of the good seed that fell on different kinds of ground, the first infertile soil was the pathway. The seed fell on the hard ground and the birds of the air came along and picked up the seed. This, we are told, is what happens to those who have been given the true Faith but fail to understand what they believe. The result is tragedy. The devil comes along and steals the faith from the hearts of once professed believers.

Ours is the most academically educated age of human history. The five million Americans on college campuses every year are only a symbol of the widespread growth in knowledge in our day. But this growth in secular knowledge will not only do no good. It will destroy the faith of once believing Catholics if they have

not used their minds to grow in grasping what they believe. They must grow in understanding the meaning of their faith. They must grow in the clarity of mind in seeing the subtle distinctions hidden behind their faith. They must grow in the certitude of what they profess to believe. They must grow in knowing how to defend this faith in the face of opposition that is sweeping across the Catholic world like a demonic hurricane.

But understanding the Faith is not enough. The Sacraments will become for them what they have become for so many others, unless they put their faith into daily practice. We believe that the Sacrament of the Eucharist, as sacrifice, communion and presence, is nothing less than Jesus Christ alive and active on earth to provide us with the light and strength we need, especially to practice that charity by which we are recognized as His disciples. To remain faithful Catholics in today's self-intoxicated world we must expect to practice heroic generosity and heroic patience, which are impossible without the superhuman strength that only Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist can give us.

When Christ told us, "Without Me you can do nothing," He meant this literally. Without the grace, which He gives through the Sacraments which He instituted, we cannot hope to remain Christians or Catholics or, least of all, channels of His wisdom to those whom we are instructing in the one true Faith on which depends the salvation of the world.

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ewtn.com/catholicism/library/sacraments-channels-of-divine-grace-10776

Summary of Key Concepts

Role of the Church in Salvation

7 Sacraments

Role of Grace

Questions to Consider

1. If you have been baptized, you are able to state "I am the daughter/son of the King." How does this have an impact on your self-worth? On your obligation to live an honorable and respectable life? On believing that you are loved by God?
2. The graces that flow from the Sacraments are invisible but nonetheless real. What graces are you most in need of at this point in your life? Which of the Sacraments will you turn to in order to obtain those graces?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Scripture Meditation

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PASSOVER

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him.

"Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'"

"Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there."

The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

THE BETRAYER

When it was evening, He came with the Twelve.

And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me."

They began to be distressed and to say to Him, one by one, "Surely it is not I?"

He said to them, "One of the Twelve, the one who dips with Me into the dish.

"For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

THE LORD'S SUPPER

While they were eating, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body."

Then He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.

"Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

—Mark 14:12–26

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 2

The Holy Mass Explained

Fr. Arul Joseph V

As Catholics, we know that the Holy Mass is the center of our faith and the source of divine life. Hence, the Church teaches us to participate in the Holy Mass regularly on Sundays and on Holy Days of Obligation and also on weekdays, whenever possible. If we understand the value of the Mass, we would certainly participate in it actively and regularly. I feel that a simple explanation on each part of the Mass may help you to recognize the value of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. With this consideration, I am going to explain every part of the Mass in the forthcoming bulletins, hoping that you would read and profit by it.

JESUS OFFERS HIMSELF

The Holy Mass is, first of all, a holy celebration, because it is Christ who acts in the person of a priest. Jesus Christ offers Himself for us, as He offered on the Cross. Hence, we say that Mass is the same sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered on the altar in an unbloody manner. Just like Jesus offered His body and blood on the Cross, He offers for us on the altar. The difference is that Jesus offered Himself visibly on the Cross but on our altar, He offers himself invisibly and in an unbloody manner, hidden under the appearance of bread and wine.

FAITH MATTERS

A Catholic, who says that he/she loves Christ would not fail to love the Mass. To love the Mass does not mean just being present and nothing more; it means to be present with faith and devotion and to take part actively in the Mass realizing that it is the Sacrifice of the Cross being renewed on the altar. Participation in the Mass involves basically our faith. Without faith, all that one would see on the altar is just bread and wine; just gestures, symbols and nothing more. It is only through faith that we acknowledge that at the consecration of the bread and wine, they are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. If one would come for Mass without faith, the person would easily feel bored or get distracted. Without faith, one would fail to understand what Christ's death on the Cross would mean for us. Hence faith is the most required disposition when we come to participate in the Mass.

The purposes of the Mass are similar to the purposes for which Jesus offered Himself on the Cross. They are:

- to give glory to God
- to thank Him
- to make up for the sins
- to pray for favor to fulfill our intentions.

The first purpose is to give glory to God, our Creator, on whom we depend for everything. Acknowledging Him as the Lord, God, we need to praise and glorify Him.

What we have, what we do and what we are—everything is because of God's immense love, mercy, and kindness: our life, family, all the spiritual gifts for our eternal life, namely, sanctifying grace, faith, the Sacraments and the gift of His mother. Therefore, it is good to thank God for all the natural and supernatural gifts. The person who is too proud to say "thank you" is not only ungrateful but is bound to end up being unhappy.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ, though He was without sin, He died like a sinner because He took upon Himself our sins and made reparation for them on the Cross.

Hence, the third purpose of the Mass is to make up for our sins and those of the deceased. When we come to Mass with real sorrow for our personal sins, we can draw strength from the love of God.

The fourth purpose is to make petitions for our needs. God is the giver of all gifts. Being the most loving Father, he gives us the best. Just as Jesus has taught us to ask, so that we will receive, we make prayerful petition for our various needs.

stpeter.us/holy-mass-explained/

Summary of Key Concepts

The Holy Mass

Eucharistic Adoration

Questions to Consider

1. Christ Himself is truly present in the Eucharist, both during mass and while exposed during Eucharistic Adoration. What reasons could there be for not spending as much time with Him as possible?
2. If you have an important person to meet, you would probably spend time preparing yourself by thinking about what you might say or how you might act. How can you prepare yourself for the time you will spend with the Lord God before mass or Adoration?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 3

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE DANGERS OF THE LAST DAYS

But understand this: there will be terrifying times in the last days.

People will be self-centered and lovers of money, proud, haughty, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious, callous, implacable, slanderous, licentious, brutal, hating what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, as they make a pretense of religion but deny its power. Reject them.

For some of these slip into homes and make captives of women weighed down by sins, led by various desires, always trying to learn but never able to reach a knowledge of the Truth.

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so they also oppose the Truth—people of depraved mind, unqualified in the faith.

But they will not make further progress, for their foolishness will be plain to all, as it was with those two.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE AND TEACHING

You have followed my teaching, way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, persecutions that I endured. Yet from all these things the Lord delivered me.

In fact, all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

But wicked people and charlatans will go from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.

But you, remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known [the] Sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:1–17

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 3

Proclaiming The Truth in a “Your Truth” Culture

Nicholas LaBanca | Jun 28, 2019 | Discipleship

Perhaps you haven't noticed (or maybe you have), but the word “truth” has fallen out of favor with many of our peers. One acceptable usage of this word we still see is when someone is proclaiming or shouting “his truth.”

In a culture that is moving increasingly away from God, as seen by the rise of the “nones” over the last couple of decades, it's no surprise that Truth is rejected. It's especially no surprise since Truth happens to be a person, that of Jesus Christ. He is “the true light that enlightens everyone” (John 1:9), but very often we as human beings like to stick our heads in the sand, rejecting that light that our Lord wishes to have penetrate into our souls. In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope St. John Paul II affirms that we “are made holy by ‘obedience to the Truth.’” However, he also notes the following (my emphasis):

“This obedience is not always easy ... Man is constantly tempted to turn his gaze away from the living and true God in order to direct it towards idols (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9), exchanging ‘the truth about God for a lie’ (Romans 1:25). Man's capacity to know the Truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and skepticism (see John 18:38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from Truth itself.”

BELIEVING IN CHRIST'S TEACHINGS

Thankfully, those of us that have been baptized have become enlightened in our understanding of the Truth (see CCC 1216), but we are still affected by concupiscence throughout our lives. Another disposition we become drawn to is that of indifferentism and tolerance. This is part of what St. John Paul means when he says our capacity to know the Truth is "darkened". When this capacity to know the Truth becomes murky, we find ourselves not surrendering to Christ, nor giving a good witness for others to Christ. While our culture enshrines tolerance as a virtue above all virtues, we have forgotten as Christians that we are called to love one another.

Love in its purest form means to will the good of another, and very often we as Christians find ourselves tolerating error to the exclusion of not proclaiming and/or living the gospel. The reason for this is because we do not enjoy conflict. Wanting to avoid conflict is something that many of us hold in common. The question then becomes this: how do we reclaim the boldness to proclaim He who is the Truth, the Way, and the Life to the world at large?

Admittedly, to do this will not win us any popularity contests. When the prevailing mantra is "don't rock the boat" and "let's agree to disagree", we find ourselves reluctant to speak up to defend our belief in the Gospel, our belief in our Lord Jesus, and our belief in the teachings we have received from the Church He founded.

PSEUDO-TOLERANCE

I was recently in a discussion group with other young Catholics. One of my friends spoke up and mentioned something that really made me pause to think and evaluate my own behavior. This person asked aloud whether her hesitancy to not speak up at certain times was because she was practicing prudence, or because she was being cowardly.

I think this is something important to reflect on as many Catholics today are scared to speak up in person or online, regarding things from homosexuality to abortion, to religious differences and other hot button issues, opting to remain quiet so they can "go along to get along." Such a mentality enshrines tolerance as a virtue. Or, rather, in the words of Dr. Donald DeMarco, this mentality is actually "pseudo-tolerance." He explains further:

"The distinction between pseudo-tolerance and genuine tolerance is critical because the former is often mistaken for the latter. This mistake leads to a radical devaluation of the importance of Truth, especially truth of a moral nature. Consequently, a person may be accused of being intolerant simply because he holds to a truth, such as the iniquity of abortion or the disordered nature of homosexual acts.

"When pseudo-tolerance, severed from any relationship with Truth, reigns supreme, it is elevated to the exalted, if unwarranted, stature of being a first principle. Therefore, people will say, "Who knows what is true or false, right and wrong? Let us all be tolerant."

TO PROCLAIM ONE THING IS TO RENOUNCE ANOTHER

When we don't speak up to the Truth, we are not being effective witnesses. This is part of the reason why we see rampant secularization in our culture today. Now of course we must always proclaim the Truth in kindness and reverence for one another (1 Peter 3:15), not allowing our words to be like a clashing cymbal. Our words may be true, but if we deliver the message without charity (1 Corinthians 13:1), we aren't being effective witnesses either. What has happened, though, is that good men and women have refused to rebut errors because it's not the nice thing to do. This is something I've been very guilty of as well. But again, those words spoken by my friend truly cut to the heart. It reminded me of what our Lord said in St. Matthew's Gospel:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:34-37).

Does Jesus mean that we should despise our parents? Of course not, but with such strong language, He is proving a point. He is showing us that we must be like the apostles, leaving everything else on the shore to follow Him, even if that means leaving our good status with the world behind. Even if that means we incur conflict for our conversion to the gospel message of Christ.

TO BRING THE SWORD?

But look at the first part of the selection as well. Does Jesus mean He is also going to bring violence, through “a sword?” Again the answer is no. Jesus is highlighting the simple fact that the sword divides. The Church Fathers clarify further in the *Catena Aurea*, a collection of their writings on the Gospel compiled by St. Thomas Aquinas. St. John Chrysostom, for instance, says that Our Lord “sought by sharpness of speech so to rouse [the disciples’] attention, that they should not fall off in time of trial and difficulty.” St. Augustine offers up the following for reflection:

“Otherwise; I am come to set a man against his father; for he renounces the Devil, who was his son; the daughter against her mother, that is, the people of God against the city of the world, that is, the wicked society of mankind, which is spoken of in Scripture under the names of Babylon, Egypt, Sodom, and other names... They are severed by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And a man's foes are they of his household, those, that is, with whom he before lived as intimates.”

TRUTH AND POPULARITY

We sometimes forget that our true home is not here on earth. We are pilgrims on a sojourn, and we as the people of God are walking toward our heavenly home. But the delights of the city of the world entice us. We frequently desire the praise of the world. Looking back to the commentary for Matthew 10:37, St. Rabanus Maurus makes it very clear by saying:

“He is unworthy of the divine communion who prefers the carnal affection of kindred to the spiritual love of God.”

Basically, we should not be putting our hopes in impressing the world, worrying about how well we are regarded. All that should matter to the Christian is if our actions are pleasing to God. We want the affection of our peers, and want to be commended and built up as well. But when we feel unable to speak up against the horrors of abortion or the transgender movement, for example, because our stock with the world would take a mighty hit, this is when we must reevaluate.

As Dr. Timothy Gray put it in a recent talk:

“The Church must submit to the Truth and have the courage to preach the Truth.”

Who makes up the Church? You and I. By not speaking the Truth, in kindness and gentleness, are we acting with tolerance, or with pseudo-tolerance?

A SERVICE OR A DISSERVICE?

Consider what the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen says in his *Plea for Intolerance*. Many people would be shocked at such a title, but the points Sheen made several decades ago are still very salient for our current day:

“America, it is said, is suffering from intolerance. It is not. It is suffering from tolerance: tolerance of right and wrong, truth and error, virtue and evil, Christ and chaos. Our country is not nearly so much overrun with the bigoted as it is overrun with the broadminded...”

“What is tolerance? Tolerance is an attitude of reasoned patience towards evil, and a forbearance that restrains us from showing anger or inflicting punishment... Tolerance applies only to persons, but never to Truth. Intolerance applies only to Truth, but never to persons. Tolerance applies to the erring; intolerance to the error... Tolerance does not apply to Truth or principles. About these things we must be intolerant...”

These are sobering words. To be asked to be intolerant against anything in this day and age is a tough pill to swallow, especially as tolerance has become the paragon of all virtues in our secular culture. But as Sheen

says, we tolerate persons because we love them, and because we love them we want to help them get back on to the right path with our Lord. To knowingly withhold the truths of our faith, or to sugarcoat them in a way that makes them indiscernible from the ways of the world, does a great disservice to our fellow man.

HIDING UNDER A BUSHEL

We must be intolerant of error, however, and we see this when apologists stand up against attacks on the Pope or the Church, or when men and women of all ages march on Capitol Hill for the right to life. But we must always be aware of upholding the Truth in everyday situations, even if it entails conflict.

To paraphrase Dr. Gray, our strength pushed too far becomes our dominant weakness. As Catholic Christians we recognize the dignity of the human person and that no one can be coerced into believing something. But as we see in the Gospels, pursuing the Truth and living it out will necessarily entail conflict with the world. And if we have an inability to deal with that conflict, even going so far as to avoid it, our so-called tolerance becomes indifference, precisely because this pseudo-tolerance shuns conflict!

We've all been guilty of tolerance at one time or another, and we certainly must be discerning when to exercise the virtue of prudence. But for the love of our Lord Jesus, let us not be cowardly. The Holy Spirit desires to help us live out the gift of fortitude that we received in abundance at our Confirmation.

We need not worry what the world thinks of us, only of what our Lord thinks. If we encounter conflict for being a disciple of Jesus Christ, then so be it. This is what we signed up for. We must treat each and every person with respect, but we must explain gently and lovingly why we believe the truths of our faith. We have good news for the world. Will we share it with others, or will we keep it to ourselves?

media.ascensionpress.com/2019/06/28/proclaiming-the-truth-instead-of-your-truth/

Summary of Key Concepts

Scripture

Personal/Mental Prayer

Questions to Consider

1. It can be tempting to not speak the Truth because we are afraid of ridicule or alienation. What circumstances make it difficult for you to speak the Truth that you have come to know about the spiritual world?
2. How helpful is it for you to hear others preach the Word of God with courage and honesty? Does this inspire you to do the same? Why or why not?
3. Do you have a favorite Scripture verse that has given you courage and faith? What is it? Have you ever shared it with others?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 4

Daily Scripture Meditation

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

—Luke 1:26–38

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 4

The Role of Mary & The Saints Against Demonic Attacks

Fr. Gabriele Amorth

MARY & GRACE

"In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph."

Mary's prophecy at Fátima reassures us that—besides the corporeal struggle with the demon in exorcism—the earthly anticipation of the eschatological struggle between the Mother of God and the ancient dragon (cf. Rev. 12) also has her attention. Despite rampant sin, the tribulations of the Church will have an end. And the finale will be good: God will have the last word on history.

For this reason, Mary is always invoked during the exorcism. During the prayer, the priest repeatedly invokes her intercession and her powerful action. Without her, little is accomplished in the struggle against Satan. It is always God who liberates one from his influence—it is good to keep repeating it—but His ear is especially attuned to the mediation of Mary, the mother of His Son.

What role does the Virgin have in the liberation of the obsessed? Mary, as the Hail Mary says, is "full of grace." She is the mediatrix of God's every grace for all men, particularly for those who suffer much, including those who suffer from spiritual evils. The enmity between Mary and Satan—proclaimed solemnly by God in the first book of Genesis (Gen. 1:3–15) and manifest in the eschatological struggle with the dragon—makes her the number-one enemy of the demon. She will be the one to crush his head at the end of time.

MARY'S POWER IN OUR LIVES

The help of the Virgin, however, goes beyond the exceptional situations of the demoniacs. In man's every struggle against Satan and sin, it is always she who represents the extraordinary and the irreplaceable. The demon is terrified of her. In order to be very clear, I wish to cite an episode at which I personally assisted many years ago.

During an exorcism, Father Candido asked the devil a question: "Why are you more afraid when I invoke Mary than when I implore God Himself?"

The demon responded: “I feel more humiliated being conquered by a simple creature than by God Himself.”

Mary is a creature like us, but, having been elevated to be the Mother of God, she has extraordinary power. For this reason, I ask the persons who assist me to pray the Rosary. I would add that the Rosary, being the prayer most appreciated by Our Lady, is an extremely powerful arm against the devil, and I warmly recommend it to anyone suffering from spiritual evils. This prayer has, in fact, a strong power of protection and liberation from evil. One day Sister Lucia, a seer of Fátima, revealed that God has conferred a power so great on the Rosary that there is no evil—personal, family, or social—that cannot be defeated by its recitation with faith.

THE INTERCESSION OF THE SAINTS

The saints in heaven intercede for us with great power and efficacy. We must pray to them often. As we profess in the Creed, with them and with the suffering souls in Purgatory we are building up what we call the Community of Saints. It is worth the trouble to read what Vatican II has declared regarding this subject: “Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him [cf. Matt. 25:31] and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him [cf. 1 Cor. 15:26–27], . . . all in various ways and degrees are in communion in the same charity of God and neighbor and all sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him [cf. Eph. 4:16].”

Here is an important motive for hoping to win the struggle against the devil but also to overcome the anguish and suffering that entangles us at times. With those who already enjoy the vision of God in Paradise, an intense exchange of spiritual benefits takes place. Because of their more intimate union with Christ, the inhabitants of Heaven do not cease to intercede for us with the Father, offering Him the merits that they acquired on earth through Jesus Christ. Thus, our weakness is greatly helped by their fraternal solicitude.

For the one who is troubled by a demon, the invocation of the saints during the rite of exorcism manifests this trust of the Church in their presence. But apart from this, I counsel, in personal prayer, the frequent recitation of the litanies of the saints, choosing one's own patron or those to whom one is particularly devoted. Their presence is also mediated through devotion and through the use of their relics, which disturb many demonic actions. As I outlined not long ago, it is necessary to remember that the souls in Purgatory can also intercede for us and are also called upon for liberation from the influences of the demon. To offer one's spiritual sufferings in order to shorten their purification is another meritorious work.

Which particular saints should those who suffer from spiritual evils call upon? I advise invoking those saints who have experienced the same disturbances; for example, Blessed Eustace (Lucrezia Bellini), a Benedictine nun from Padua who lived in the fifteenth century. She died at the age of twenty-five after having been possessed by a demon from the age of four. Her religious life, begun at eighteen, was also heavily conditioned by that grave possession, which she tolerated, offering her sufferings to expiate the sins of those who caused her tribulations. Even her own consecrated sisters mistreated her, annoyed by the disturbances her possession caused the communal life of their convent. Only shortly before her death did they understand that they had been living with a saint. Even today many pray before her tomb in the church of St. Peter, imploring the grace of liberation.

As for me, when I practice exorcisms, I feel the very powerful presence of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Catherine of Bologna, and St. John Paul II. Of this last, I know for certain that he personally practiced at least three exorcisms in his private chapel in the Vatican. When I pronounce his name, the demons are literally infuriated.

I have been asked if, during the exorcism, the demon will pronounce the name of the saint. Normally he does not. It can happen that demons will make a reference to God, to the Virgin, and to some saints, although they have an authentic terror of them, but it never happens that they are able to use their names directly; if they must mention them, they use substitutions. Jesus is referred to in reference to the priest who is performing the exorcism, such as, “your leader” or “your superior”; our Lady is “that one there” or “the thief of souls”; the saints are “assassins.” They oppose the saints because, by their prayers, the saints steal souls from the claws of demons.

catholicexchange.com/the-role-of-mary-the-saints-against-demonic-attacks/#:~:text=The%20enmity%20between%20Mary%20and,at%20the%20end%20of%20time.

Summary of Key Concepts

The Blessed Mother

The Holy Rosary

Marian Consecration

Questions To Consider

1. Do you have a devotion to the Blessed Mother? If so, who brought you to the understanding of her loving intercession on behalf of her children?
2. Are there any saints for whom you feel a strong attraction and a desire to ask for their intercession? What are the circumstances of their lives that draws you close to them?
3. The Rosary is often called a weapon because of the power that is obtained through its prayerful recitation. Do you regularly use this heavenly weapon to aid you in the battle against the evil one? If not, why not?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 5

Daily Scripture Meditation

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

When He broke open the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

And I saw that the seven angels who stood before God were given seven trumpets.

THE GOLD CENSER

Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne.

The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel.

Then the angel took the censer, filled it with burning coals from the altar, and hurled it down to the earth. There were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

—Revelations 8:1–5

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 5

7 Powerful Sacramentals of the Church for Spiritual Warfare

SACRAMENTALS, SPIRITUAL WARFARE | PRAY PSALM 91

The Catholic Church offers us sacramentals that help us receive actual graces from God and keep our families delivered from evil. There are many sacramentals of the Church, but there are only seven that I consider to be the most powerful for spiritual warfare.

WHAT IS A SACRAMENTAL?

Sacramentals are sacred signs that help us to receive God's grace, and they dispose us to cooperate with God's grace (Source: CCC 1670). Sacramentals were instituted by the Church, while the seven Sacraments of the Church (Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, etc.) were instituted by Christ. The sacramentals of the Church help lead us to Christ.

“We must remember that of themselves sacramentals have no power. They only have power through the prayer of the Church which uses the authority given it by Christ.”

Source: My Catholic Faith

ROSARY

His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever He tells you.” John 2:5

When Our Lady is present the devil is absent.

The Blessed Mother's rosary is one of the top sacramentals of the Catholic Church for spiritual warfare. When you pray the rosary, you are placing yourself under the Blessed Mother's mantle for God's protection from the devil and diabolic influences.

“The rosary is a powerful weapon to put the demons to flight, to preserve the integrity of life, to acquire virtue more easily, and in a word to attain real peace.” —Pope Pius XI

THE WEAPONS OF THE ROSARY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The Rosary as a Spiritual Sword

Fr. Donald Calloway, a contemporary champion of the rosary, gives great conferences about the rosary and explains why this sacramental is a sword in spiritual warfare.

The forces of darkness in the world today threaten the very foundations of human civilization, but they are no match for the power of the rosary.” —Fr. Donald Calloway

The Rosary as a Spiritual Battering Ram

The rosary is the angelic psalter. If you pray the rosary devoutly, it is a weapon like a spiritual battering ram that will help to bring down vices and sins in your life.

“Dear Dominic, do you know which weapon the Blessed Trinity wants to use to reform the world?...I want you to know that, in this kind of warfare, the battering ram has always been the Angelic Psalter, which is the foundation stone of the New Testament.” —Our Lady to St. Dominic

The Rosary Helps to Increase Sanctifying Grace

An important thing to know about Catholic spiritual warfare is what I like to call, “resurrection protection.” If you pray the Blessed Virgin Mary’s rosary devoutly it will allow Our Lady to help increase God’s sanctifying grace in your soul, and you have to have sanctifying grace in order to be judged worthy of eternal life with God.

“Those who find me find life and win favor from God” (Proverbs 8:35).

Consider the 15 promises of the rosary according to the Blessed Virgin Mary for life long protection for you, your family, and most importantly, at the hour of our death.

“Hail Mary! Full of grace, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of the womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

Battle for Our Lady Praying the Rosary

Our Lady of Fatima made it clear to the Church in her appearances to the three child visionaries that she wants disciples of her Son praying the rosary, devoutly, every day. The only thing more powerful than praying the rosary is praying the rosary in unity with other disciples of Christ. Consider what Jesus teaches us in St. Matthew’s Gospel:

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

Hold your rosary in your hand and feel the spiritual power with it, strengthened through the intercession of the Church. Hear the beads emit sounds of holiness. If you would like to join ranks with other disciples in the Church praying the rosary in spiritual warfare, please consider joining Our Lady’s Rosary Confraternity.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do. —1 Thessalonians 5:11

CRUCIFIX

“The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

“Fr. Weber (exorcist) points out that most exorcists use the St. Benedict medal crucifix during the exorcism, and it was recommended to him in his training that he do so as well.” Charles Fraune is the author of the book *Slaying Dragons, What Exorcists See and What We Should Know*.

The Crucifix Reminds the Demons of Their Fall

One of the reasons why the demons are repelled at the sight of a holy crucifix such as the Benedictine crucifix is because the crucifix reminds them of their fall from grace. The demons rejected God, and they are eternally separated from Him.

“A crucifix torments the demons because it reminds them of their defeat by Jesus’ death on the Cross.”
—Fr. Jose Fortea

The Crucifix Provides Protection in the Home

The holy crucifix should be a focal point in the home of every Catholic family. As a best practice for spiritual protection from the diabolic, a blessed crucifix should be placed in every room of the house to help keep any roaming demons out of the home.

“If you wonder how God tries to prevent you from the yawning jaws of hell, look at the crucifix!”

—St. Thomas Aquinas

Prayers Before A Holy Crucifix Helps Protect Us

Aside from establishing right order in your home by allowing the presence of Christ to reign there with His protective love and mercy, you also want to place the crucifix in a place where the whole family can stand or kneel before it in prayer and reverence.

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” —James 4:6b–7

When Christ reigns as King in your home, the demon is repelled.

“The true meaning of Christ’s kingship is revealed only when He is raised high on the Cross” —Catechism of the Catholic Church #440

Another reason to have this powerful sacramental in every Catholic home is because the presence of Christ and His saving work on the cross in the home will help to combat the inclination to sin, whether it be in thought, word, or deed.

“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” —Matthew 26:41a

Lastly, the crucifix will help to establish gratitude in our hearts to God for Christ’s saving work on the cross. His very presence reminds us of what is at stake: salvation.

“The first words we must pronounce looking at the crucifix are ‘Thank You Jesus!’ (Fr. Gabriele Amorth).

HOLY WATER

“After Jesus was baptized, He came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him.” —Matthew 3:16

The Many Benefits of Using Holy Water

Holy water helps to keep us protected from demons. When holy water has been rightly blessed by a priest, it serves as a powerful sacramental in the Church’s fight against the dark forces of evil. Consider the reassuring words of St. Teresa of Avila.

“From long experience I have learned that there is nothing like holy water to put devils to flight and prevent them from coming back again. They also flee from the cross, but return; so holy water must have great value. For my own part, whenever I take it, my soul feels a particular and most notable consolation”
—St. Teresa of Avila

In addition, holy water can help us to receive actual graces from God, receive assistance from the Holy Spirit, overcome temptations, and help us to sleep in peace.

“Nightly I sprinkle my room with holy water and invoke the Virgin and St. Michael. And I sleep, just as I go throughout the day, with the rosary in my hands” —Msgr. Stephen Rossetti

Use Holy Water to Bless the Family and Home

Catholic families should routinely bless their houses with holy water. The father of the household should also bless his family in the evenings with holy water after the family has prayed together. Lastly, schedule a priest to make a visit to your home on an annual basis and have him bless the house in the traditional rite of blessing.

Question: What is holy water? Answer: Holy water is water blessed by the priest with solemn prayer to beg God’s blessing on those who use it, and protection from the powers of darkness. —Baltimore Catechism

ST. BENEDICT MEDALS

“Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection?” —Job 1:10a

A Catholic priest should bless the medals, and they should be blessed (exorcized) in the Old Rite.

Perimeter of Protection with St. Benedict Medals

Exorcist Fr. Chad Ripperger recommends the use of exorcized St. Benedict medals as a means of providing spiritual protection in the family home. St. Benedict is the patron saint of exorcists. The level of sanctity in his life was well known to repel the demonic.

The medal: The medal of St. Benedict contains a number of holy Latin inscriptions that will “drive the demons nuts” as Fr. Ripperger says. Some of these inscriptions noted helps explain why the medal is such a powerful sacramental against evil:

CSSML – NDSMD: This is abbreviated Latin that translates to, “May the holy Cross be my light! May the dragon never be my guide!”

VRNSMV – SMLIVB: “Be gone Satan! Never tempt me with your vanities! What you offer me is evil. Drink the poison yourself!”

CSPB: “The Cross of our holy father Benedict”

Here are Fr. Ripperger’s two primary recommendations for St. Benedict medals:

- Bury the St. Benedict medals in the four corners of the property.
- Place the St. Benedict medals over the entry points of the home.

You can learn more about Fr. Ripperger’s recommendations for spiritual protection from demons in his book about spiritual warfare, “Dominion.” Father has also given a number of spiritual warfare conferences to help Catholics combat the demonic.

Fortify Spiritual Protection Within the Home

You can also place the blessed medals in the four corners of the house and in the four corners of each bedroom, which is great idea for spiritual protection as we are more vulnerable to the presence of evil spirits while we are asleep.

Other Uses with St. Benedict Medals

On the Go: You can place St. Benedict medals in your luggage, your briefcase, carry bag, backpack, your wallet, purse, etc. Similarly, parents can place blessed St. Benedict medals in their children’s backpacks to help keep them safe.

Vehicles: You can also keep a St. Benedict medal in your vehicle to help keep you and any passengers safe from harm. The medal should also help to keep your vehicle safe.

Home or Office: You can place the medals in your workspace, in your home office, or anywhere you think the medals may be of benefit for you and your family.

Near Technology: If you are experiencing unexplained interference with any of your devices, computers, appliances, etc. place a St. Benedict medal next to it.

“A key sacramental for spiritual warfare is the St. Benedict medal. Make sure you get the medal blessed in the Old Rite. The Old Rite has all of the exorcisms” —Fr. Chad Ripperger

Miraculous Medal

St. Catherine Laboure’s Miraculous Medal can be used to provide the same level of spiritual protection as the St. Benedict Medal. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a champion of this medal and probably gave away thousands of them during her life. You can learn more about the miraculous medal here: [Miraculous Medal](#).

EXORCIZED OIL AND SALT

“Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another” —Mark 9:50b

I combined the sacramentals of exorcized oil and salt because they are similar, and they are often sold together at Catholic gift shops that sell exorcized sacramentals.

Exorcized Salt

Elisha went out to the spring and threw salt into it, saying, “Thus says the LORD: I have purified this water. Never again shall death or sterility come from it” —2 Kings 2:21

Exorcized salt provides a great deal of protection from evil spirits if they have been properly blessed and are used with faith. Legendary exorcist Father Gabriele Amorth said you have to have faith when using sacramentals in spiritual warfare.

“It is important that the faithful know how to use the sacramentals correctly. It makes no sense to keep large quantities of blessed water, salt, and blessed oil if one does not have faith” —Fr. Gabriele Amorth

Uses of Exorcized Salt

Here are five ways exorcized salt can be used in spiritual warfare:

Church: First and foremost, exorcized salt is often used in Church ministry such as at Baptisms, the reconsecration of an altar, during the blessing of Holy Water and in the ministry of exorcism for people afflicted with diabolic influences.

Home: You can sprinkle the salt alongside the walls, in the four corners of the house and rooms to help seal those places off from demons.

Cooking: You can use the exorcized salt in cooking. I have heard Fr. Ripperger say this would be a good idea for families with teenagers. An example would be sprinkling the blessed salt on a salad. I have also read where priests can go to Catholic schools and exorcize all of the salt in the school's cafeteria.

Miscellaneous: The use of exorcized salt can be used in a variety of other ways. Like Holy Water, you can sprinkle the blessed salt just about anywhere you consider there to be a disturbance, whether it be at home, in the car, etc.

Testimony: Whenever I feel like I need a spiritual boost, I will consume a small amount of exorcized salt and drink some water with it. I do this with faith in Christ, and it has yet to fail me from feeling a sense of God's protection with it.

Exorcized Oil

“They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them” —Mark 6:13

Exorcized Oil – This might be one of the most underrated sacramentals of the Catholic Church. There are two primary types of Holy Oil used by the Catholic Church:

#1 Chrism Oil – This is oil that is consecrated each year at the Chrism Mass near Easter, and it is used by bishops and priests during Baptisms, Confirmations, Ordinations, and Consecrations. Chrism oil is set apart by the Church for the Sacraments and is used by priests for other sacramental purposes such as the anointing of the sick.

#2 Exorcized Oil – This is olive oil that has been exorcized and is ready for use either by the clergy or the laity. The clergy can use the oil in the deliverance ministry. The laity can use the oil to help keep their families protected from diabolical influences.

Uses of Exorcized Oil

Forehead – This may be the best use of exorcized oil. You can take a dab of the oil and make the sign of the cross on your forehead for protection, especially before sleeping.

“Exorcized oil is good for people who suffer a lot from dreams...they can make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead with it, and it can help cut down on the dreams they are having that seem to be diabolic in nature” —Fr. Chad Ripperger

Parents, particularly the father, can use the oil and bless their children every day, making the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads and reciting a prayer:

“The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace” —Numbers 6:24–26

House – Exorcized oil can be used to help seal off family homes from demons. Demons have to follow the natural law on some level; thus, they may try to enter through the normal entry points of the house. The doors and any entry points of the house should be blessed with Holy Oil by making the Sign of the Cross with it.

The father, who has been given spiritual authority by God through the natural law over his family, should bless the entry points of the house with Holy Oil routinely.

Here is a testimonial of an exorcist blessing a room with exorcized sacramentals:

“I blessed and exorcized the room using Holy Water. I also sprinkled exorcized salt in the corners on the floor. Then I took exorcized oil and made a Sign of the Cross on the door, windows, and lintels”
—Msgr. Stephen Rossetti

You can read Msgr. Rossetti's post about the blessing of the room here:

Exorcist Diary #149: Demons Repulsed by Blessed Homes

Cooking: Exorcized olive oil can be used in cooking along with exorcized salt, but they should both be used with reverence as they are holy sacramentals of the Church.

Testimonial: “I use exorcized oil in my own spiritual warfare. I recently purchased a vial of exorcized oil that had been touched by a first class relic of St. Padre Pio. The first night I unsealed it and used it, I spiritually experienced a profound sense of peace, and there was a presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary's protection with the sacramental.”

“God's creature, oil, I cast out the demon from you by God the Father almighty, who made heaven and earth and sea, and all that they contain. Let the adversary's power, the devil's legions, and all Satan's attacks and machinations be dispelled and driven afar from this creature, oil. Let it bring health in body and mind to all who use it.” —From the Roman Ritual's Blessing of Oil

BROWN SCAPULAR

Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day.
—Malachi 3:23

Pictured above are two of my blessed Carmelite brown scapulars. I generally wear the same scapular every day, and I wear the alternate scapular during workouts.

Origins of the Carmelite Scapular

The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a man named Simon Stock, a Carmelite monk who was in despair at the time, and handed him the first scapular in 1251 AD.

“Receive, my beloved son, this habit of thy Order. This shall be to thee and to all Carmelites a privilege that whosoever dies clothed in this shall never suffer eternal fire.” —Our Lady to St. Simon Stock

What is a Scapular?

The word scapular is derived from the Latin word “scapulae” which is translated as “shoulders” in English. Thus, the scapular is to be worn around the shoulders. One side is on the chest while the other side is on the back. The scapular is made up of two squares of brown wool, usually with a Marian symbol on one of the squares.

Wearing a Scapular Provides Spiritual Protection

There is something mysterious about Carmelite spirituality that is highly effective in Catholic spiritual warfare. Wearing a blessed scapular provides spiritual protection.

“Demons particularly hate the Brown Scapular...the Scapular is very important because it provides a level of protection” —Fr. Chad Ripperger

Fr. Ripperger has mentioned that every time a demon of impurity manifested in one of his sessions, the first thing he tried to do was get the scapular off and throw it.

Another point to be made about the scapular is that they are not to be taken off. The act of wearing the scapular day and night serves as a reminder of who we are, what we believe in, and how we should live our lives as disciples in obedience to Christ.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” —John 14:15

ST. MICHAEL STATUE

“Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.”
—Revelation 12:7–8

Invite St. Michael to Defend the Family at Home

Every Catholic family should make good use of a blessed St. Michael the Archangel statue in their home. The blessed statue should be placed in a prominent location within the home, and it certainly would be a good idea to recite the St. Michael the Archangel prayer in the presence of St. Michael's statue on a daily basis.

“St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.”

Fr. Ripperger and the Liber Christo team have stated that angels will go where they are invited, while demons will go where they are not resisted.

“All the people begged the Lord with lamentations and tears to send a good angel to save Israel” —2 Maccabees 11:6b

catholicace.com/sacramentals-church-spiritual-warfare/

Summary of Key Concepts

Community & Holy Friendship

Communion of Saints

Sacramentals

Questions to Consider

1. There are many sacramentals available to us through the Catholic Church that contain powerful intercessory powers. Which of these do you currently use? Which of those described above will you bring into your home and your life?
2. The Rosary is made up of 4 Mysteries: the Joyful, Sorrowful, Luminous and Glorious. If you have already prayed the Rosary with these mysteries, which of them is most meaningful to you in the current situation of your life?
3. Holy Water and Holy Oil is easily accessible. Will you begin the practice of blessing yourself, your family and your home with these sacramental? What will you hope to gain?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Scripture Meditation

PENALTIES OF DISOBEDIENCE

Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one be deprived of the grace of God, that no bitter root spring up and cause trouble, through which many may become defiled, that no one be an immoral or profane person like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that later, when he wanted to inherit his father's blessing, he was rejected because he found no opportunity to change his mind, even though he sought the blessing with tears.

You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them, for they could not bear to hear the command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so fearful was the spectacle that Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."

No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

See that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much more in our case if we turn away from the one who warns from heaven.

His voice shook the earth at that time, but now He has promised, "I will once more shake not only earth but heaven." That phrase, "once more," points to [the] removal of shaken, created things, so that what is unshaken may remain. Therefore, we who are receiving the unshakable kingdom should have gratitude, with which we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.

—Hebrews 12:14–29

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Catechism: (CCC #2012–2016)

CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him ... For those whom He 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. And those whom He predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified" —Romans 8:28–30

"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity." All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" —Matthew 5:48

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that ... doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.

Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called "mystical" because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the Sacraments—"the holy mysteries"—and, in Him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with Him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all.

The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes: He who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end. He never stops desiring what he already knows.

The children of our Holy Mother the Church rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance and the recompense of God their Father for the good works accomplished with His grace in communion with Jesus. Keeping the same rule of life, believers share the “blessed hope” of those whom the divine mercy gathers into the “holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” —Revelations 21:2

Summary of Key Concepts

Life of Holiness

Vocation

Exercising Virtue

Assignment: Written Reflection

WEEK 5: DAILY MEDITATIONS— SCRIPTURE: THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 1

Daily Scripture Meditation

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul, my God, in You I trust;
do not let me be disgraced; do not let my enemies gloat over me.
No one is disgraced who waits for You, but only those who are treacherous without cause.
Make known to me Your ways, LORD; teach me Your paths.
Guide me by Your fidelity and teach me, for You are God my Savior,
for You I wait all the day long.

Remember Your compassion and Your mercy, O LORD, for they are ages old.
Remember no more the sins of my youth; remember me according to Your mercy,
because of Your goodness, LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD, therefore He shows sinners the way,
He guides the humble in righteousness, and teaches the humble His way.
All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth
toward those who honor His covenant and decrees.
For the sake of Your name, LORD, pardon my guilt, though it is great.
Who is the one who fears the LORD?
God shows him the way he should choose.
He will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.
The counsel of the LORD belongs to those who fear Him; and His covenant instructs them.
My eyes are ever upon the LORD, Who frees my feet from the snare.

Look upon me, have pity on me, for I am alone and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart; bring me out of my distress.
Look upon my affliction and suffering; take away all my sins.
See how many are my enemies, see how fiercely they hate me.
Preserve my soul and rescue me; do not let me be disgraced, for in You I seek refuge.
Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; I wait for You, O LORD.
Redeem Israel, O God, from all its distress!

—Psalm 25

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 1

The Unpredictable Power of God’s Word

Mr. Sean Mitchell

In the opening chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*, we read the following words of Pope Francis:

“God’s Word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26–29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the Word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.

The “unruly freedom” of the Word. The “unpredictable...power” of the Word. The unthinkable ability of the Word to “accomplish what it wills.”

This, my brothers, is what our Church needs to hear.

Too often we try to tame the Word of God. If, for example, the Word makes us uncomfortable, we assume that we have misunderstood it. Or if it seems unreasonable to us, we remind ourselves that ours is a religion of “faith and reason.” In other words, we distort God’s Word and make it our own (or even worse, Satan’s), and remain happily unchanged. If you don’t believe me, just ask yourself when the last time was that you heard the phrase “faith and reason” employed in defense of faith...

This kind of rationalizing, while understandable, is decidedly un-Christian. We must do away with it, and seek in faith to grasp the truth about the immense power of God's Word. To do so is our indispensable duty as disciples of Christ. Our salvation, in fact, hinges on our having a deep and abiding faith in the power of the Word of God.

In speaking of God's Word, I am not referring merely to the Bible. The Bible, to be sure, is the inerrant and perfectly trustworthy Word of God. It is "inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Moreover, the Church, as we read in the Catechism, "has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body" (CCC, 103). But the Word of God comes to us by means other than the Bible as well. It comes also through Church Tradition and the Magisterium, as well as in our personal communication with God in prayer.

Regardless of how it is transmitted, God's Word is always a force to be reckoned with. It always bears within itself a mighty power beyond all human comprehension. We see this very clearly in Scriptures. For example:

"The Word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" —Heb 4:12

"So shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, but shall do what pleases Me, achieving the end for which I sent it" —Is 55:11

These passages depict a Word of seemingly absolute power, in whose way stands no obstacle capable of thwarting its end. And yet, you might say that there is one limit to the power of God's Word. Namely, human free will. For, make no mistake, God will not coerce us into loving Him; hence why I said our salvation hinges on our faith in His Word. For this reason, it is extremely important that we grasp (in as much as we can) the immense power of God's Word, that we might trust in it and allow it to bear fruit in our lives. As you strive to do this, remember that you must "put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you" (Js 1:21). For His is a Word that is "able to save your souls," but not without your cooperation (Js 1:21, emphasis added).

thosecatholicmen.com/articles/the-unpredictable-power-of-gods-word/

Summary of Key Concepts

What is Truth?

Divine Revelation

Questions to Consider

1. The Word of God comes to us by means of the Bible, through Church Tradition and the Magisterium, as well as in our personal communication with God in prayer. In which of these ways have you been able to hear God's Word with the most confidence?
2. How much time are you giving to the Lord in order to hear His Word? Are you willing to commit to a more structured prayer time in order to become closer to living God's will?
3. Scripture can be studied as well as prayed. Which of these ways are you most familiar with? What have you learned as a result?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Scripture Meditation

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For He received honor and glory from God the Father when that unique declaration came to Him from the majestic glory, “This is My Son, My beloved, with Whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of Scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God.

—2 Peter 1:16–21

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 2

Daily Catechism: (CCC #101–113)

CHRIST—THE UNIQUE WORD OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

In order to reveal Himself to men, in the condescension of His goodness, God speaks to them in human words: “Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took on Himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men.”

Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in Whom He expresses Himself completely: You recall that one and the same Word of God extends throughout Scripture, that it is one and the same Utterance that resounds in the mouths of all the sacred writers, since He Who was in the beginning God with God has no need of separate syllables; for He is not subject to time.

For this reason, the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God’s Word and Christ’s Body.

In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, “but as what it really is, the Word of God”. “In the sacred books, the Father Who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet His children, and talks with them.”

Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture

God is the author of Sacred Scripture. “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”

“For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.”

God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while He employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though He acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever He wanted written, and no more.”

The inspired books teach the Truth. “Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that Truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.”

Still, the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book.” Christianity is the religion of the “Word” of God, a Word which is “not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living”. If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, “open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures.”

The Holy Spirit, Interpreter of Scripture

In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words.

In order to discover the sacred authors’ intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. “For the fact is that Truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.”

But since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation, without which Scripture would remain a dead letter. “Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by Whom it was written.”

The Second Vatican Council indicates three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Spirit who inspired it. Be especially attentive “to the content and unity of the whole Scripture”. Different as the books that compose it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God’s plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover. The phrase “heart of Christ” can refer to Sacred Scripture, which makes known His heart, closed before the Passion, as the Scripture was obscure. But the Scripture has been opened since the Passion; since those who from then on have understood it, consider and discern in what way the prophecies must be interpreted.

Read the Scripture within “the living Tradition of the whole Church”. According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church’s heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture.

Summary of Key Concepts

Scripture & Tradition

God is the Principal Author

Scripture is Inspired and Living

Questions to Consider

1. Throughout Scripture we are told to unite our sufferings to Christ. Have you been able to do that? What makes it difficult? What helps you do that?
2. Since the Scriptures are God’s Word and promises, we can trust in the message of God’s power and mercy that are contained therein. How could this help you live a more peaceful life in spite of any suffering you are currently experiencing?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 3

Daily Scripture Meditation

Therefore, since it remains that some will enter into it, and those who formerly received the Good News did not enter because of disobedience, He once more set a day, “today,” when long afterwards He spoke through David, as already quoted:

“Oh, that today you would hear His voice: ‘Harden not your hearts.’”

Now if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterwards of another day. Therefore, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God. And whoever enters into God’s rest, rests from his own works as God did from His. Therefore, let us strive to enter into that rest, so that no one may fall after the same example of disobedience.

Indeed, the Word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

No creature is concealed from Him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must render an account.

—Hebrews 4:6–13

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 3

Bible at Core of Catholic Beliefs

Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield

People ask if everything Catholics believe is found in the Bible. The answer? Both “yes” and “no.” The Church “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] no. 82 *Dei Verbum* 9). Jesus is the ultimate source of everything Catholics believe, for He reveals God’s plan to save the world from sin as He reveals the Father’s love. Jesus does this because He is the Son of God. He is always united with His Father and thus is the fullness of both Revelation.

The mission of Jesus continues through the ministry of the Church that He founded, and He has given the Church the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for guidance in everything. The Revelation of Jesus is thus extended to the Apostles and handed on through two means: Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God, the collection of sacred books that hand on the Truth of Revelation in written form.

Tradition, as understood by the Church, is more than a collection of customs or time-honored habits. It encompasses the Church’s teaching, life and worship. The living apostolic Tradition highlights the fact that the Apostles received the words and deeds of Jesus who passed on the authority to teach in His name. “Tradition transmits, in its entirety, the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit” (CCC no 81; *Dei Verbum* 9).

The Bible reveals that God fulfilled His saving plan of love to free us from sin. The culmination of the entire Bible are the words and deeds of Jesus, in particular His Passion, death and glorious Resurrection.

The beliefs of Catholics are found in the Bible in two ways: explicit and implicit. Some teachings of the Catholic Church are easily found in the Bible. For example, that Jesus is the Son of God, that He called Twelve Apostles to follow Him, that He healed, forgave sins, proclaimed the Kingdom of God present in His person, and that He suffered, died and rose again for our sins, are all very explicit in the Bible. The Holy Spirit makes known the full meaning of these events in and through the Church, and makes the power of these events effective throughout history and in our lives today.

Some beliefs are more hidden. Love loves to hide secrets, so that when we find them we are enraptured even more by their beauty. The mystery of Jesus is so profound that sometimes you have to look closely to see all the parts that He has made known. The Holy Spirit has hidden some dimensions of the mission of Jesus in the Bible. The truths of faith are clarified by the Tradition through the Magisterium, the Church’s authentic

teaching office. These truths never contradict the Word of God in Scripture, but serve to articulate its truth more clearly.

The Holy Spirit helps us to find and to articulate these mysteries. The teaching on the Trinity, that is, that there are three Persons in one God, is found in the Bible in the many instances where Jesus speaks about His relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The terms that the Church needed to express this mystery were given to her over several hundred years by the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Gospel writers as they wrote of the words of Jesus that revealed the mystery in the first place. The Church's teachings about the Blessed Mother, the saints, the role of virtue and holiness are found in the Bible implicitly in varying degrees.

uscgb.org/offices/new-american-bible/bible-core-catholic-beliefs

Summary of Key Concepts

Interpreting Scripture Properly

Biblical Fundamentalism

Questions to Consider

1. What are some Catholic teachings that are implicit rather than explicit? Which of these are the most difficult for you to understand?
2. Relying on Scripture alone can lead to multiple interpretations of the same readings, causing confusion and division about what teaching is true. How does understanding that Christ established the Church in order for us to feel secure that His Word is properly understood help you?
3. Does reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church help address your concerns or questions about the teachings of the Church?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 4

Daily Scripture Meditation

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.

And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

—Colossians 3:12–17

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 4

Podcast: Did God Change?

Fr. Mike Schmitz – 6 Min

media.ascensionpress.com/podcast/didgodchange-2/

Summary of Key Concepts

The Old Testament

The New Testament

Questions to Consider

1. Fr. Mike explains that our understanding of God is built first from the Old Testament, where we learn that God cares deeply about justice, and then builds to learning that God invites to be merciful, forgiving those who have hurt us as He forgives us when we hurt him. Do you believe that when you suffer or are treated unjustly, God cares?
2. When you have hurt others or yourself through your words or actions, do you want God to be merciful? Are you willing to show that same mercy to others? Are you willing to forgive yourself?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 5

Daily Scripture Meditation

But what does it say?

“The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the Word of faith that we preach), for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

For the Scripture says, “No one who believes in Him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon Him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

But how can they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?

And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] Good News!” But not everyone has heeded the Good News; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what was heard from us?”

Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the Word of Christ.

—Romans 10:8–17

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 5

The Gospels

USCCB

The collection of writings that constitutes the New Testament begins with four Gospels. Next comes the Acts of the Apostles, followed by twenty-one Letters that are attributed to Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. Finally, at the end of the early Church’s Scriptures stands the Revelation to John. Virtually all Christians agree that these twenty-seven books constitute the “Canon,” a term that means “rule” and designates the list of writings that are regarded as authoritative for Christian faith and life.

It is the purpose of this Introduction to describe those features that are common to the four Gospels. A similar treatment of the Letters of the New Testament is provided in the two Introductions that appear before the Letter to the Romans and before the Letter of James, respectively. The Acts of the Apostles, a work that is both historical and theological, and Revelation, an apocalyptic work, have no counterparts in the New Testament; the special Introductions prefixed to these books treat of the literary characteristics proper to each of them.

While the New Testament contains four writings called “Gospels,” there is in reality only one Gospel running through all of the Christian Scriptures, the Gospel of and about Jesus Christ. Our English word “gospel” translates the Greek term euangelion, meaning “good news.” This noun was used in the plural by the Greek translators of the Old Testament to render the Hebrew term for “good news” (2 Sm 4:10; possibly also 2 Sm 18:20, 25). But it is the corresponding verb euangelizomai, “to proclaim good news,” that was especially significant in preparing for the New Testament idea of “gospel,” since this term is used by Deutero-Isaiah of announcing the great victory of God that was to establish his universal kingship and inaugurate the new age (Is 40:9; 52:7; 61:1).

Paul used the word euangelion to designate the message that he and the other apostles proclaimed, the “Gospel of God” (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thes 2:2, 8, 9). He often referred to it simply as “the Gospel” (Rom 1:16; 10:16; 11:28; etc.) or, because of its content and origin, as “the Gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 1 Thes 3:2; etc.). Because of its personal meaning for him and his own particular manner of telling the story about Jesus Christ and of explaining the significance of His cross and resurrection, Paul also referred to this message as “my Gospel” (Rom 2:16; cf. Gal 1:11; 2:2) or “our gospel” (2 Cor 4:3; 1 Thes 1:5; 2 Thes 2:14).

It was Mark, as far as we know, who first applied the term “Gospel” to a book telling the story of Jesus; see Mk 1:1 and the note there. This form of presenting Jesus’ life, works, teachings, Passion, and Resurrection was developed further by the other evangelists; see the Introduction to each Gospel. The first three of the canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are so similar at many points when viewed together, particularly when arranged in parallel columns or lines, that they are called “Synoptic Gospels”, from the Greek word for such a general view. The fourth gospel, John, often differs significantly from the Synoptics in outline and approach. This work never uses the word “Gospel” or its corresponding verb; nevertheless, its message concerns the same Jesus, and the reader is urged to believe in him as the Messiah, “that through this belief you may have life in His name” (Jn 20:31).

From the second century onward, the practice arose of designating each of these four books as a “Gospel,” understood as a title, and of adding a phrase with a name that identified the traditional author, e.g., “The Gospel according to Matthew.” The arrangement of the Canon that was adopted, with the four Gospels grouped together at the beginning followed by Acts, provides a massive focus upon Jesus and allows Acts to serve as a framework for the Letters of the New Testament. This order, however, conceals the fact that Luke’s two volumes, a Gospel and Acts, were intended by their author to go together. It further obscures the point that Paul’s Letters were written before any of our gospels, though the sayings and deeds of Jesus stand behind all the New Testament writings.

bible.usccb.org/bible/gospelsintroduction/o

Summary of Key Concepts

Four Gospels

Questions to Consider

1. At every Catholic mass everywhere in the world, an excerpt from one of the four Gospels is proclaimed. How does hearing what Jesus did or said bring Him into the presence of the gathered community?
2. Without information shared in the Gospels, we would not have a clear picture of how Christ’s birth, death, Resurrection and Ascension occurred. Why is this important to know? Is His historical reality important to you?
3. In the Gospels we hear Jesus’ words that bring to life Who He is and what He wants to teach us. Can you love someone who you do not know? Do the Gospels help you to love Jesus?

MORNING PRAYER: DAY 6

Daily Scripture Meditation

Blessed those whose way is blameless, who walk by the law of the LORD.
Blessed those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.
They do no wrong; they walk in His ways.

You have given them the command to observe Your precepts with care.
May my ways be firm in the observance of Your statutes!
Then I will not be ashamed to ponder all Your commandments.
I will praise You with sincere heart as I study Your righteous judgments.
I will observe Your statutes; do not leave me all alone.

LORD, teach me the way of Your statutes; I shall keep them with care.
Give me understanding to keep Your law, to observe it with all my heart.
Lead me in the path of Your commandments, for that is my delight.
Direct my heart toward Your testimonies and away from gain.
Avert my eyes from what is worthless; by Your way give me life.
For your servant, fulfill Your promise made to those who fear You.
Turn away from me the taunts I dread, for Your judgments are good.
See how I long for Your precepts; in Your righteousness give me life.

—Psalm 119: 1–8, 33–40

EVENING PRAYER: DAY 6

Summary of Key Concepts

Epistles

Assignment: Written Reflection

Reflect On How the Past 30 Days to Freedom Have Impacted Your Life and Relationship with God and Others.

How do You Believe God Is Still Calling You to Grow?

PRAYER PATHWAYS

TRACK A – 30 DAYS

- Abstinence Fridays Only
- Monthly Confession, or as Needed

Week 1

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 2

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 3

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 4

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Rosary – OP + 1 Decade
Examen – St Ignatius

Week 5

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Rosary – OP + 1 Decade
Examen – St Ignatius

TRACK B – 30 DAYS

- Assigned Litany or Specific Prayer (Fridays of Each Week)
- Fasting Fridays Only
- Pray Full Rosary on Sunday Only
- Monthly Confession, or as Needed

Week 1

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 2

Morning Prayer

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Rosary – OP + 1 Decade
Examen – St Ignatius

Week 3**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Rosary – OP + 2 Decade
Examen – St Ignatius

Week 4**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Short-Form Deliverance Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Rosary – OP + 3 Decade
Examen – St Ignatius

Week 5**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Short-Form Deliverance Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Daily Rosary
Examen – St Ignatius

TRACK C – 30 DAYS

- Assigned Litany or Specific Prayer (Fridays of Each Week)
- Fasting Wednesdays and Friday
- Daily Rosary
- Weekly Holy Hour: Eucharistic Adoration
- Monthly Confession, or as Needed

Week 1**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Lectio Divina – 10 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 2**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Silence – 5 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 3**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Short-Form Deliverance Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 4**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Short-Form Deliverance Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

Week 5**Morning Prayer**

Prayer Against Retaliation
Miracle Prayer
Short-Form Deliverance Prayer
Silence – 10 Minutes
Lectio Divina – 15 Minutes

Evening Prayer

Examen – St Ignatius

PRAYER RESOURCES

PRAYERS OF PROTECTION & DELIVERANCE

Prayer Against Retaliation

Lord Jesus Christ, in Your love and mercy, pour Thy Precious Blood over me so that no demon or disembodied spirit may retaliate against me. Mary, surround me with thy mantle, blocking any retaliating spirits from having any authority over me. St. Michael, surround me with thy shield, so that no evil spirit may take revenge on me. Queen of Heaven and St. Michael, send down the legions of angels under your command to fight off any spirits that would seek to harm me. All you saints of heaven, impede any retaliating spirit from influencing me. Lord, Thou art the Just Judge, the Avenger of the Wicked, the Advocate of the Just, we beg in Thy mercy, that all we ask of Mary, the angels and the saints of heaven be also granted to all our loved ones, those who pray for us and their loved ones, that for Thy Glory's sake, we may enjoy Thy perfect protection. Amen.

The Miracle Prayer

Lord Jesus, I come before Thee, just as I am, I am sorry for my sins, I repent of my sins, please forgive me. In Thy Name, I forgive all others for what they have done against me. I renounce Satan, the evil spirits and all their works. I give Thee my entire self, Lord Jesus, I accept Thee as my Lord God and Savior. Heal me, change me, strengthen me in body, soul, and spirit. Come Lord Jesus, cover me with Thy Precious Blood, and fill me with Thy Holy Spirit, I love Thee Lord Jesus, I praise Thee Lord Jesus, I thank Thee Jesus, I shall follow Thee every day of my life. Mary, my Mother, Queen of Peace, all the Angels and Saints, please help me. Amen.

Prayer for Inner Healing

Lord Jesus, You came to heal our wounded and troubled hearts. I beg You to heal the torments that cause anxiety in my heart; I beg You, in a particular way, to heal all who are the cause of sin. I beg You to come into my life and heal me of the psychological harms that struck me in my early years and from the injuries that they caused through my life.

Lord Jesus, You know my burdens. I lay them all on Your Good Shepherd's heart. I beseech You—by the merits of the great, open wound in Your heart—to heal the small wounds that are in mine. Heal the pain of my memories, so that nothing that has happened to me will cause me to remain in pain and anguish, filled with anxiety.

Heal, O Lord, all those wounds that have been the cause of all the evil that is rooted in my life. I want to forgive all those who have offended me. Look to those inner sores that make me unable to forgive. You Who came to forgive the afflicted of heart, please, heal my own heart.

Heal, my Lord Jesus, those intimate wounds that cause me physical illness. I offer You my heart. Accept it, Lord, purify it and give me the sentiments of Your Divine Heart. Help me to be meek and humble.

Heal me, O Lord, from the pain caused by the death of my loved ones, which is oppressing me. Grant me to regain peace and joy in the knowledge that You are the Resurrection and the Life. Make me an authentic witness to Your Resurrection, Your victory over sin and death, Your living presence among us. Amen.

Short-Form Deliverance Prayer

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of His Cross, His Blood and His Resurrection, I bind you Satan, the spirits, powers and forces of darkness, the nether world, and the evil forces of nature. I take authority over all curses, hexes, demonic activity, and spells directed against me, my relationships, ministry, air space, finances, and the work of my hands; and I break them by the power and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. I bind all demonic interactions, interplay and communications between spirits sent against me, and send them directly to Jesus Christ for Him to deal with as He wills. I ask forgiveness for, and denounce all negative inner vows that I have made with the enemy, and ask that Jesus Christ release me from these vows and from any bondage they have held in me. I ask Jesus, the Son of the living God, to pour His shed Blood over every aspect of my life for my protection. I pray all these things in the precious name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Purification Prayer

Jesus, pour Thy Precious Blood over me, my body, mind, soul, and spirit; my conscious and subconscious; my intellect and will; my feelings, thoughts, emotions and passions; my words and actions; my vocation, my relationships, family, friends and possessions. Protect with Thy Precious Blood all other activities of my life. Lord I dedicate all of these things to Thee, and I acknowledge Thee as Lord and Master of all. Mary, Immaculate Conception, pure and holy Virgin Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, draw each of us under thy veil; guard me and shield me against all attacks and temptations that would violate the virtue of chastity. Lord Jesus Christ, I beg Thee for the grace to remain guarded beneath the protective mantle of Mary, surrounded by the holy briar from which was taken the Holy Crown of Thorns, and saturated with Thy Precious Blood in the power of the Holy Spirit, with our Guardian Angels for the greater glory of the Father. Amen

St. Alphonsus Ligouri

Mary, Mother most pure, and Joseph, chaste guardian of the Virgin, to you I entrust the purity of my soul and body. I beg you to plead with God for me that I may never for the remainder of my life soil my soul by any sin of impurity. I earnestly wish to be pure in thought, word and deed in imitation of your own holy purity. Obtain for me a deep sense of modesty, which will be reflected in my external conduct. Protect my eyes, the windows of my soul, from anything that might dim the luster of a heart that must mirror only Christ-like purity. And when the "Bread of Angels" becomes my food in Holy Communion, seal my heart forever against the suggestions of sinful pleasures. Finally, may I be among the number of those of whom Jesus spoke, "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God." Amen.

ESSENTIAL SCRIPTURES

Lectio Divina

Mental Prayer

Holy Rosary

Chaplets

Divine Mercy

Five Wounds of Jesus

To Obtain Great Confidence

St Michael

LITANIES

Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Litany of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus

Litany of the Holy Cross

Litany of Reparation to Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist

Litany of the Holy Spirit – Litany One

Litany of Loreto

Litany of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – Litany Two

Litany of Our Lady of Sorrows

Litany of Humility

Memorial Prayer for the Suffering Souls in Purgatory

Litany of the Mercy of God

NOVENAS

praymorenovenas.com/healing-from-childhood-trauma

Forgiveness Novena

Healing From Childhood Trauma

Mary, Undoer of Knots

Against Evil

Spiritual Warfare

For Chastity

End Porn Addiction

Novena For Conversion

MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Catholic Energumen Packet

Topics

Sacramental Life – Eucharistic People

Fundamentals of Prayer – Mental Prayer

Fundamentals of Jesus: Looking at Scripture, Jesus vs. Demonic

Blessed Mother: Her Role in Salvation & Demonic

Demonic Tactics

Arriving Spiritually Prepared for Each Prayer Session

Steps Towards Liberation

Developing a Relationship with Jesus Christ

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Helpful Instructions:

Read the passage below: What do you think it means?

Pause, and then read the passage again very slowly, waiting for a line, phrase, or word that draws your attention.

Hebrews 12: 1–13

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges.

Endure your trials as “discipline”; God treats you as sons.

For what “son” is there whom his father does not discipline?

If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards.

Besides this, we have had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not [then] submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live?

They disciplined us for a short time as seemed right to them, but he does so for our benefit, in order that we may share his holiness.

At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.