



Live4More

Men's Discipleship Ministry

"A three-ply cord is not easily broken."Brothers better together

Playbook for Disciples

Series III

Spiritual Growth Essentials

Fellowship

Prayer

Scripture

Sacraments

Service & Witness

With video content provided by



Empowering men to become better disciples of Jesus Christ

Playbook for Disciples

Spiritual Growth Essentials



www.Live4More.us

Empowering men to become better disciples of Jesus Christ

Playbook for Disciples

This book is dedicated to all of the men who will use it together with their brothers in Christ. May our exploration of the Catholic faith empower us to become better disciples of Jesus Christ!

This book was developed in the power of the Holy Spirit through the efforts of the following contributors (listed in alphabetical order):

Jonathan Cyr

Bill Gent

Dave Myler

Ed Wickey

Clay Woodard

To God be the glory!! Jesus we trust in You!

Live4More Men's Discipleship Ministry

A recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

www.Live4More.us

info@live4more.us

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Empowering men to become better disciples of Jesus Christ

Table of Contents

Live4More Introduction.....	iii
A Guide for Using the Playbook for Disciples.....	v
Accessing the Videos.....	vii
Discipleship Group Meeting Format.....	viii
Our Need to Grow in Faith and Intentional Discipleship.....	1
Fellowship.....	3
Fellowship with God.....	3
Fellowship with Others.....	5
Prayer.....	9
The Power of Prayer.....	9
The Conditions of Prayer.....	13
The Benefits of Prayer.....	15
The Battle of Prayer.....	17
Scripture.....	19
The Authority of God’s Word.....	19
The Authenticity of God’s Word.....	23
The Power of God’s Word.....	27
The Application of God’s Word.....	29
Sacraments.....	33
Baptism and Confirmation.....	33
The Eucharist.....	37
Reconciliation.....	41
Anointing of the Sick.....	43
Holy Orders.....	45
Marriage.....	47

Table of Contents

Service & Witness.....	49
Our Need for Service.....	49
Types of Service.....	53
Our Mission to Witness.....	55
Our Power to Witness.....	57
Appendices.....	59
A – Reading and Interpreting Scripture.....	59
B – Going Deeper with the Eucharist.....	67
C – How to Go to Confession.....	71
D – Going Deeper in Witness.....	73

Live4More Introduction

“Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken.”
~ Ecclesiastes 4:12

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” ~ Proverbs 27:17

Live4More is a non-profit ministry with the mission to promote the development of small groups where men can comfortably discuss and grow in their faith within Catholic parish life.

The goal is to encourage men to form small groups to study the faith, learn from each other and help hold each other accountable in their faith journey so they can go out to their family, friends, parish, workplace and community living out their Catholic faith as it is intended to be lived.

At Live4More, we believe that we, as men, are simply better disciples when we are walking our spiritual journeys as a band of brothers growing and sharing in faith together. Iron cannot sharpen iron if iron doesn't repeatedly touch iron and a three ply cord cannot be formed with only one single strand. We need to meet together regularly to grow and share in our faith together so that we are fully empowered to go forth and live out our faith in every aspect of our lives. We were made for relationship. We were made for greatness. We need each other! Brothers are better together!

“We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.” ~ Hebrews 10:25

A Guide for Using the Playbook for Disciples

The Playbook for Disciples is designed to be a directed study of intentional Christian Discipleship for use by men's small groups. Of course it can be used by anyone individually or in any type of group, but we believe its greatest impact occurs through men's small groups. This section provides a few useful tips on how this book is intended to be used.

The ideas presented in this brief guide are intended as guidelines to help lead you on your journey as a group and not as hard and fast rules. Every group is unique and has its own special character. Think of these ideas as the guardrails on a bridge. They are here to keep you from falling over the side so that you stay on the road moving forward, but you get to choose which lane to drive in.

Playbook Format

- *Spiritual Growth Essentials* is presented in five **Pillars** with multiple topics for each **Pillar**.
- Each topic can be covered in one gathering or in multiple gatherings of the group. There is no rush to “finish the book”. Take your time and explore the scriptures and questions as a group. If you spend an entire group gathering discussing only one question, no problem. Simply pick up with the next question at the next gathering.
- Each topic has an associated video component which is an episode of the *Crossing The Goal* TV show produced by EWTN as a ministry to men. These videos can be viewed for free by streaming them live from the [Crossing The Goal website](#) by simply following the links provided in the **Watch Video** section for each topic.
- If you do not have internet access where you meet, there are a few alternatives you can consider.
 - Each man in the group can view the associated episode at home prior to the group gathering.
 - You can purchase the appropriate DVD(s) via the [Crossing The Goal website](#) and watch them as a group during your gathering, if you have access to a TV and DVD player.
 - You could simply not use the videos. The Playbook is still quite effective even without use of the *Crossing The Goal* episodes. They are a great feature but not absolutely required.
- See the [Accessing the Videos](#) section of this Introduction and Guide for more detailed information about finding and using the *Crossing The Goal* video content.

Group Gatherings (Meetings)

- We recommend a weekly group gathering, however bi-weekly also works for many groups.
- We have found that it works best when the gatherings are about 90 minutes long. However, 60 minutes can also work well. It just takes a little longer to complete the Playbook, but as noted above, there is no rush to finish the book. See our suggested [Discipleship Group Meeting Format](#) in the next few pages.
- Each man should make a commitment to make his attendance at each gathering a priority in his life. Of course, on occasion a man might not be able to attend, but it should not be because he would rather watch the game!

Playbook for Disciples – Spiritual Growth Essentials

- It is important that each gathering be a safe environment where each man can share his thoughts freely and confidentially. What is shared in group gatherings stays in the group!
- Select a quiet place to gather so that you will not be disturbed.
 - Turn off or silence your phones.... and better yet, just leave them in the car!
 - Each man should keep an open mind and heart to grow in faith in the Lord.
- Select a leader (or facilitator) for each group gathering.
 - Rotate the role among multiple men in the group.
 - Select the facilitator for each gathering in advance of the gathering, preferably before concluding the previous gathering.
- Be respectful of each other's time and schedule by starting and ending on time.
 - Always begin and end with prayer. You may want to consider including a worship song or two but keep it simple. Worship helps to open our hearts for listening and sharing.
 - Remember, there is no rush! You can continue the discussion at the next gathering.
 - This is about spending time together learning and sharing our faith and having a little fellowship too!
- Each man should have a Bible and bring it with him to each gathering of the group.
 - Take turns doing the scripture readings.
 - Share your thoughts on the questions. There may be different views and some may be strongly felt.
 - Listen to your brothers and embrace different viewpoints. God loves the discussion and we all grow when we share our faith with each other.
- Relax and enjoy each other. Lean on the Holy Spirit for guidance!

Action Plan

- Always complete this activity near the end of every gathering, even if you don't finish all the other sections.
- Take a few minutes for each man to make an action plan to work on between now and the next group gathering. Write it down.
 - Use the actions suggested or make your own plan.
 - You can make individual plans or the entire group could decide to take on one common challenge.
- At the beginning of the next gathering, each man should have an opportunity to share on how he is doing with his action plan and how things are going in his life.
 - Celebrate together when things go well.
 - Support one another when progress is slow.

Accessing the Videos

The Playbook for Disciples was created in conjunction with video material from the [Crossing The Goal](#) TV show produced by EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network).

The video component which is associated with each topic is an episode of [Crossing The Goal](#) (CTG) and can be viewed for free by streaming them live from the CTG website at crossingthegoal.com. Many of the episodes can also be found through YouTube. The various topical series CTG DVD's can be purchased through the [Crossing The Goal](#) website.

We wish to note that the *Playbook for Disciples* was originally developed by the men of [Live4More](#) for use by [Crossing The Goal](#) and was subsequently made available on the [Crossing The Goal](#) website. [Live4More](#) has since updated the content of the *Playbook for Disciples*, but has not substantially changed which video components are used with each topic. We believe the updated version is an improvement you will enjoy using in your group.

To access the appropriate video, simply follow the link provided in this document in the **Watch Video** section for each topic. Use **Left Click** to follow the link.

There are two alternate paths you can also choose to follow in order to access the videos, both of which lead to the [Crossing The Goal website](#).

1. Use the link provided on our website at Live4More.us. Once you are on the home page:
 - Click on **Resources** at the top of the page. This will take you to the Resources page.
 - Select **Playbook for Disciples**. Then select **Playbook Videos** in the lower center of the page. This will bring you to the **Video Library** page of the [Crossing The Goal](#) website.
 - Use the drop down menu on the top right of this Video Library page to select the appropriate CTG Series for the video prescribed in the **Watch Video** section. The CTG Series is the title *before the colon* in the parenthesis of the **Watch Video** section.
 - This will bring you to a page with the videos for that particular CTG Series from which you can select the prescribed video (the title *after the colon* in the parenthesis).
2. Go directly to the [Crossing The Goal website](#). Once you are on the home page:
 - Click on **Video Library** at the top of the page. This will bring you to the Video Library page.
 - Use the drop down menu on the top right of this Video Library page to select the appropriate CTG Series for the video prescribed in the **Watch Video** section. The CTG Series is the title *before the colon* in the parenthesis of the **Watch Video** section.
 - This will bring you to a page with the videos for that particular CTG Series from which you can select the prescribed video (the title *after the colon* in the parenthesis).

Please do not hesitate to [contact us](#) with any questions regarding access of the videos. We are glad to assist you so you can begin to experience all that God has planned for you with your group! We can be reached through our [website](#) or by sending an email to info@live4more.us.

Video content provided by



Discipleship Group Meeting Format (4-12 Members)

Live4More generally recommends that a typical Men’s Discipleship Group consists of about 4 to 12 men who meet every week or at least twice monthly.

Why do we gather regularly? - 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown but we an imperishable one.”

Step 1 – Gathering, Worship and Prayer (About 20 minutes)

- Worship - Beginning with a worship song which is easy for men to sing is *highly recommended* but optional. “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”
- Prayer - Spend a few minutes in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide the group through the discussion of the topic of this gathering. Including a brief time for intercessory prayer is suggested for established groups.
- Life Sharing - Group members are encouraged to share how things went personally and spiritually since the previous gathering with a **focus** on their personal action item from the previous gathering.

Step 2 - Discussion and/or View Video (About 60 minutes)

- Introduction - One group member reads the introductory material for the selected topic in the Playbook and the group discusses any thoughts or impressions they have.
- Discovering - The group discusses each question in the **Discovering** section; taking turns reading the questions and associated scripture and catechism passages.
- Watch Video - The group watches the designated CTG episode and discusses their impressions.
- Responding to – The group discusses each question in the **Responding to** section; taking turns reading the questions and associated scripture and catechism passages.
- Summary – One group member reads the **Summary** section and the group discusses any thoughts or impressions they have.

Step 3 - Action item/Prayer (About 10 minutes)

- Each group member takes a couple of minutes to silently write down one personal action item he would like to accomplish before the next gathering.
- Make any needed announcements. Keep it *brief*!
- All the men sing together a worship song (Optional). Keep it simple!
- Close the meeting with a brief time of prayer led by one group member and concluding with all the men reciting together a common prayer such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be or Saint Michael the Archangel prayer.

Total Time – 90 minutes

Foundation: Our Need to Grow in Faith and Intentional Discipleship

“In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don’t.” ~ Blaise Pascal

As men of faith we should be forever seeking to deepen our faith walk. To keep our faith journey moving in a positive direction requires attention and perseverance. The only way we can hope to become the man that God created us to be is to focus on the areas of our life that help us to see the light of faith and to also be open to making the changes necessary to avoid the shadows that blind us.

The shadows that blind us are caused by the doubt that we have inherited in our fallen nature. Adam and Eve failed to trust God. As their progeny, we also carry this weakness. We also struggle to trust God. God has taken powerful steps and provided amazing graces to help us overcome doubt and to be able to trust in Him. We need to intentionally seek out and walk in the graces God provides.

The nature of sin is to fill the void. It is right and useful to renounce sin and to avoid the near occasion of sin, yet it is even better to be filled with grace. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is “full of grace”. When it was time for Mary to give birth to Jesus, there was no room for her in the inn. Similarly, the sins of man could find no room in Mary’s heart because she was filled with grace and love for God. We need to intentionally seek ways to grow in grace. There are several primary means that God provides for us to be filled with grace; Fellowship, Prayer, Scripture, the Sacraments, and Service and Witness. In this Playbook, we will take a close look at each of these vehicles for growing in grace in our lives.

Discovering Our Need to Grow

We have many examples of great faith in those who have gone before us, both in the Sacred Scriptures and in our own experiences with family, friends and others. From Noah, to Abraham, to Joseph and Mary, to the Apostles and saints, we have countless examples of those who have grown in their faith.

CCC 145 The *Letter to the Hebrews*, in its great eulogy of the faith of Israel’s ancestors, lays special emphasis on Abraham’s faith: “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.” By faith, he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the promised land. By faith, Sarah was given to conceive the son of the promise. And by faith Abraham offered his only son in sacrifice.

CCC 146 Abraham thus fulfills the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Because he was “strong in his faith,” Abraham became the “father of all who believe.”

1. How is our faith different from the faith of the Ancients? How have I shown faith in my life?

Hebrews 11:1-40 _____

2. How have I grown in my faith? How has that growth been of benefit to me?

Psalms 92:13-16 _____

Watch Video: [Our Need to Grow](#) (*Becoming Disciples: Totally Obedient*)

Responding to Our Need to Grow

As we grow in our faith and learn more of who our Savior is, we come to understand more clearly His love for us and our purpose in life. Although this clarity is never perfect in this life, our increased knowledge serves to further strengthen our faith. Stronger faith increases our effectiveness as disciples. God cannot be outdone in generosity. He promised that those who seek Him, will find Him.

CCC 158 *“Faith seeks understanding”*: it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens “the eyes of your hearts” to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God’s plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the center of the revealed mystery. “The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood.” In the words of St. Augustine, “I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe.”

CCC 794 *Christ provides for our growth*: to make us grow toward him, our head, he provides in his Body, the Church, the gifts and assistance by which we help one another along the way of salvation.

3. In what ways does knowledge of Christ increase our faith?

2 Peter 1:3-11 _____

4. What role does faith play in helping us to have joy in our trials and obtaining wisdom for our lives?

James 1:2-8 _____

Summary

“To live is to change; and to be perfect is to have changed often.” ~ Cardinal John Henry Newman

Growth in faith demands that we be open to change. As Catholic men we have every tool at our disposal to help us grow and mature in faith. The ancients had a faith based in God’s word and in the Law. We have a faith based on the love of God through the manifestation of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ who was born of a virgin, was crucified, died and was resurrected so that we could have eternal life! Our concupiscence will always be a drag on our growth but we have an Advocate, The Holy Spirit that Jesus provided for our benefit.

Action Plan

I will step out of my comfort zone, ask Jesus to guide me, listen to His voice and do what He is calling me to do.

Memorize: John 14:12-14

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. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.

Pillar 1: Fellowship

We are made in the *“image and likeness of God”* (Gen 1:26) and thus, we are made for and called to fellowship. No being is an island. Even God is a community of three persons in one being. The Holy Trinity lives eternally in perfect fellowship. Jesus calls us as well to live as one body united with God (John 17:20-21). This is one of the ways we are each made in God’s image; we are communal and called to unity. God desires a deep and intimate relationship with each of us! He also desires for all of us to be united as one body in Christ sharing our joys and our burdens with each other. We are called first to love God and also to love one another just as Jesus has loved us (Matt 22:36-40, John 13:34).

Fellowship with God

Fellowship begins with our personal relationship with God. As we develop this relationship, we come to realize His great love for us and that He desires a deep and intimate relationship with us. We realize that Jesus became man, lived on the earth, suffered, died, was buried and rose again, just for me; even if I were the only person ever created. He created us and He has known us since the dawn of time. He is always there for us and He yearns for us to make Him the center of our life.

“You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” ~ St. Augustine

Discovering Fellowship with God

Virtually all of us struggle with these revelations of just how much God loves us at some point during our life. This is due to our fallen nature. Our call to fellowship can only truly prosper when our fallen nature is overcome by the presence of the Holy Trinity in our lives. God alone is faithful, so we need to build our lives in relationship with Him. He alone is our rock. With God as our faithful rock we can then focus outward to take our place in the Body of Christ.

“A rule I have had for years is to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend. He is not a creed, a mere doctrine, but it is He Himself we have.” ~ Dwight L Moody

CCC 959 *In the one family of God.* “For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy Trinity—all of us who are sons of God and form one family in Christ—we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church.”

Note below that the *epiclesis* is part of the Eucharistic Prayer said during every Mass.

CCC 1109 The epiclesis is also a prayer for the full effect of the assembly’s communion with the mystery of Christ. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” have to remain with us always and bear fruit beyond the Eucharistic celebration. The Church therefore asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit to make the lives of the faithful a living sacrifice to God by their spiritual transformation into the image of Christ, by concern for the Church’s unity, and by taking part in her mission through the witness and service of charity.

“God is a gentleman and will not force heaven on anyone who says, ‘No thank you’. Implied in the encouraging words ‘seek and you shall find’ is a dire warning: If you do not seek, you will not find. Earth is automatic, but heaven is freely chosen and therefore can be freely refused.”

~ Peter Kreeft, *Heaven, the Heart's Deepest Longing*

1. Why are we called to fellowship with the Holy Trinity?

Matthew 22:36-40 _____

John 17:20-24 _____

2. How can we find fellowship in the Holy Trinity?

John 15:1-5 _____

1 Corinthians 3:16 _____

1 John 1:1-10 _____

Watch Video: [Fellowship with God](#) (*Becoming Disciples: Following Jesus*)

Responding to Fellowship with God

Our right response to God’s great love and mercy is to love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength by placing our relationship with Him at the center of our life. We can achieve this through desiring to spend time with Him through prayer, scripture and the sacraments and by loving one another as He has loved us; knowing that to love another is to always seek the good of the beloved.

“God wants to walk with us, speak with us, share our hopes and dreams, bear our burdens and sorrows, guide us, guard us, and lead us to our perfection in Heaven.” ~ Mike Pacer, Mercy and Hope

3. With what attitude can we confidently approach fellowship with the Holy Trinity?

Hebrews 10:19-23 _____

4. What does God promise to those who seek Him? How have I experienced this in my life?

Matthew 7:7-8 _____

Revelation 3:20-21 _____

Summary

God desires a deep and intimate personal relationship with each of us. He has promised to be with us always and that when we seek Him, we will find Him. He created us to be with Him forever in eternity.

Action Plan

This week, spend more time with God seeking Him in prayer including the reading of Scripture.

Memorize: Matthew 7:7-8

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Fellowship with Others

Our fellowship with God leads us into fellowship with others. True love of God places in us the desire to love one another. We need each other. We are social beings and have an intrinsic need for companionship and to be together. Proverbs tells us that *“As iron sharpens iron; so one person sharpens another”* and Ecclesiastes tells us, *“Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken.”*

Discovering Fellowship with Others

Fellowship with others starts in our family, within our own home, and then branches out to our friends, those in our parish, our co-workers and all those we encounter wherever we go. However, fellowship is more than doing a few random acts of kindness for those we happen to encounter during our day. This is a nice start, but real fellowship is about relationships. Relationships require time spent together in order to grow. Today’s culture does not make this easy and we have to become intentional about building and maintaining relationships with others.

The call to be one body runs against the grain of the spirit of individualism that is one of the cornerstones of today’s culture. Therefore, approaching fellowship and the call to be one body requires us to rethink and reform our approach. For example, individualism emphasizes independence which is highly favored today. However, recognizing our dependence on God and our interdependence with others is a more robust and healthy approach. Another popular mantra today is “if it feels good do it” which appears to place emphasis on individual happiness. Ironically, true happiness is actually encountered in pursuit of the common good in union with God through giving love selflessly and receiving love humbly. Self-focus is shortsighted and leads to emptiness. A God centered communal focus leads to spiritual growth, purpose and meaning. The Christian reality is that we truly are one body and one family and we are called to care for one another, especially those in need.

CCC 790 Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body, become intimately united with him: "In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his Passion and glorification." This is especially true of Baptism, which unites us to Christ's death and Resurrection, and the Eucharist, by which "really sharing in the body of the Lord, . . . we are taken up into communion with him and with one another."

CCC 806 In the unity of this Body, there is a diversity of members and functions. All members are linked to one another, especially to those who are suffering, to the poor and persecuted.

1. How is fellowship a source of encouragement for us?

Hebrews 10:24-25 _____

Hebrews 12:1-4 _____

2. What are some of the benefits of our fellowship with others? How have I experienced this?

Ecclesiastes 4:12 _____

Proverbs 27:17 _____

Watch Video: [Band of Brothers](#) (*Becoming Disciples: Band of Brothers*)

Responding to Fellowship with Others

The Church has great wisdom to help us understand how to see each other as God intended. Three specific principles taught by the Church that provide the basis for community are *the dignity of each person*, *the common good* and *solidarity*.

The Dignity of Each Person. Having been created in the image of God, each and every human person possesses invaluable dignity for they are not just something, but someone (CCC 357).

"Each human being is single, unique, and unrepeatable, someone thought of and chosen from eternity, someone called and identified by name." ~ Saint Pope John Paul II, Christmas Message, 1978

"The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in His image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a child in the Son and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God. For this reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual."
~ Saint Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*

"By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being. This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who "so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16), but also the incomparable value of every human person."
~ Saint Pope John Paul II, *Gospel of Life*

Clearly, Saint Pope John Paul II learned to appreciate the dignity of each person. He learned how to recognize the beauty in each soul because his own life was rooted in God. He therefore recognized God in each soul; the Almighty ever-living God who has thought of us, created us in His image, chosen us, called us by name, redeemed us, filled us with His Spirit and called us to perfect union with Himself and each soul. If we likewise live in Christ, God can help us to appreciate the dignity of each soul and this will radically change how we see and relate to others. We will be able to transcend our previously critical and undernourished perspective because our minds will be transformed by the omniscient mind of God. For this process to run its course we first need to invest in God through prayer, scripture reading and sacrament where we are filled with His grace and are formed in His will. Then we are sanctified, literally purified of the old self and reborn in Christ. Then we will recognize each soul not as object but as subject, not as someone foreign but as family, not as interruption but as inspiration. This is God's plan for us to live life to the full. We can move beyond false self-identities and find our true self and take our place as children of God in the body of Christ.

"Today if we have no peace it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other—that man, that woman, that child is my brother or my sister." ~ Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa), *Love: A Fruit Always in Season*.

3. What does the fullness of God's plan look like? How do we allow God's plan to unfold in our life?

Colossians 3:1-17 _____

The Common Good. The secret to understanding the principle of “*The Common Good*” is to think of “*common*” as applying to every and therefore to each person without exception, and “*good*” as that which contributes to human flourishing.

“The common good comprises the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” ~ Gaudium et Spes 26 1

“The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists “with” others and “for” others.” ~ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church

Catholic teaching is replete with encouragement to work for the common good and is particularly concerned about caring for the poor. The spirit of this caring flows from a participation in union with God. As we practice the presence of God we are enabled to give love freely and receive love freely. We are led by the Holy Spirit to do the will of God. We are not concerned with success but faithfulness, it is not a practical matter but a matter of the heart and filial unity that happens to have practical benefits.

CCC 1926 The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good. Everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life.

4. Why is humility important to fulfilling the common good?

Philippians 2:1-11 _____

5. How do I use my gifts for the common good?

Romans 12:3-18 _____

Solidarity. Solidarity is treating the other as another self. It is looking at another and not turning away, but taking an interest in the origin of his or her condition.

“Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” ~ Saint Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*

This call to solidarity is based on our identity as one family. We are all made in God’s image and through the blood of Jesus Christ enter into the mystery of union with God as adopted children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus’ prayer for all describes the depth and purpose of this union.

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” ~ John 17:20-21

This type of union is characterized by selfless love and is built on the command to love others as we love our self. This kind of *love* is defined as thinking, speaking and acting in a way that will best bring each of us into union with God. Our goal is union with God and building up the Church through our loving witness. Solidarity is not based on sameness but on being united in Christ even though we are different. We come together and our different gifts strengthen the body.

CCC 791 The body’s unity does not do away with the diversity of its members: “In the building up of Christ’s Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church.” The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful: “From this it follows that if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice.” Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

So, it is important that we accept and appreciate each other’s gifts. Comparing ourselves to others can lead us to envy and criticalness.

6. How should we see the gifts of others? How do I really see the gifts of others?

1 Corinthians 12:12-25 _____

7. How do we rejoice and suffer with others? How am I accomplishing this in my daily life?

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 _____

Summary

Fellowship is integral to living the life of Christ. Jesus did not work solely on His own but raised up the apostles. He emphasized the importance of praying in union with our brothers and sisters when He said, “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20). When He sent His disciples out to minister the good news, He sent them out two by two (Luke 10:1). Just as we are called into fellowship with The Triune God, we are also commanded to share this same fellowship with one another. Jesus tells us that we are to love one another just as He has loved us (John 15:12). Fellowship brings JOY into our lives. JOY stands for:

J = Jesus

O = Others

Y = Yourself

If we keep this in perspective we can have true fellowship with God and others!

Action Plan

Add to the JOY in your life by doing something for someone in your family that you usually don’t do for them at a time when you would have normally been doing something for yourself. Keep it simple and just between you and Jesus. Report the results to your group at the next meeting.

Memorize: John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Pillar 2: Prayer

Prayer is the life blood of our relationship with God. Prayer is the spiritual air that we breathe because it is as vital to our spiritual life as air is to our physical life. Without a consistent devotion to daily prayer, we simply cannot continually grow in our relationship with God and live a spiritual life dedicated to discipleship.

“Prayer and Christian life are inseparable.” ~ CCC 2745

In our previous studies we have learned of God’s infinite love for us, His desire for a deep intimate relationship with each one of us and our total reliance on Him. It is through prayer that we get to know Him and begin to see His love for us manifested in our life. Prayer is most simply two way communication with God. No human relationship, especially friendship and marriage which most closely resemble our relationship with God, can survive without effective two way communication. Any of our relationships, even our marriage would die a quick death if we seldom talked with the other person in the relationship. The same is true of our relationship with God. We must talk to Him often and be open to hear what He has to say to us. In fact, He is not only always willing, but even eager, for us to spend time with Him!

The Power of Prayer

A fundamental way to have prayer be an ongoing part of our life and to live the command to “*pray constantly*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) is to practice the presence of God. We begin to do this by believing; seeing through the eyes of faith and experiencing in the depths of our souls that God is always with us. Unfortunately, since God is out of our physical sight He is often not on our minds and we neglect to seek His guidance and to include Him in our experiences. Once we recognize that God is with us always, we can then communicate with Him constantly about our experiences: successes, failures, joys, sorrows, etc. We can ask His help and thank Him. We can ask for His insights about our desires and our plans and how they need to be tweaked to conform to His much better plan for our lives. As we go through our day we can literally make everything we do a prayer; like incense offered to God. Staying in contact with God gives us His peace and joy. At the end of each day we can assess how we did in walking with God and whether we were walking with Him building His kingdom or we were too busy building our own. The beautiful thing is that He is always there for us; loving us unconditionally.

Discovering The Power of Prayer

Since prayer is so very vital, we should ask ourselves two very important questions.

What is prayer?

How should we pray?

There are as many answers to these questions as there are disciples of Christ. We can sing a song of praise, shout with joy, cry in anguish, rejoice with friends or sit alone in complete silence. All of these and infinitely more, which are sincerely offered to God, are prayers.

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God...” ~ St. John Damascene

The best prayer is an honest prayer. Tell God what is going on in your heart. Yes, He does already know, but He wants to hear it from you anyway. What parent does not want to hear their child, no matter how old, tell them what is on their mind. Simply put, there is no wrong way to pray. Any thought, idea or emotion sincerely offered up to God is a valid prayer.

CCC 2559 “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. “Man is a beggar before God.”

We are truly humble when we recognize our place before God and our total reliance on Him. Humility is vital in our prayer life, because it is only in this spirit that we can fully surrender to God and be free from our will and the desires of our flesh. We can then enter into union with God, be led by His Holy Spirit and live in His will.

CCC 2565 In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is “the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity... with the whole human spirit.” Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ. Prayer is *Christian* insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ’s love.

1. How did Jesus say that we should pray? What virtue is required?

Matthew 6:9-15 _____

2. Where and when did Jesus pray? What did He pray for?

Mark 1:35 _____

Luke 9:16 _____

Matthew 26:38-39 _____

Watch Video: [The Power of Prayer](#) (*Keys for Life: Prayer Life*)

Responding to The Power of Prayer

The Catholic Church has a rich and deep tradition of prayer. There are literally thousands of traditional prayers. The Catechism which is divided into four main parts, devotes one of these four parts, Part 4 (paragraphs 2558 – 2865), entirely to the subject of Christian prayer. That is 308 paragraphs to guide us on prayer! There are the Rosary, Adoration, Benediction, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Divine Mercy chaplet, charismatic prayer, contemplative prayer, novenas and on and on.

One common method of prayer is typically referred to as ACTS which is an acronym for Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication. The prayer which follows this format contains all four of these elements in that order. We begin by adoring God for who He is, we express our sorrow for our sins and ask His forgiveness, we give Him thanks for the many blessings He has poured upon us and then we offer our intentions for others and for ourselves. This prayer can be as short or long as we like and probably varies in length from day to day. The ACTS prayer method is a good way to add form and intention to our prayer time.

CCC 2644 The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

3. How often should we pray?

1 Thessalonians 5:17 _____

Ephesians 6:18 _____

4. With what attitude should we pray? Why do I pray?

Matthew 6:5-8 _____

Luke 10:38-42 _____

Summary

Prayer is simply talking to God and listening for His response. This two way communication with God can have many different forms. No matter its form, prayer is the primary way by which we come to know God and His will for us. Any thought, idea or emotion sincerely offered up to God is a valid prayer.

“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.” ~ Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Action Plan

Complete the following Prayer Life Evaluation. Write down the answers to these questions. First say a prayer asking God to help you honestly look at your prayer life.

Do I pray every day? _____ What Time? _____

How often do I pray? _____

What forms of prayer do I use? _____

What has to happen for me to pray? _____

Memorize: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

The Conditions of Prayer

The condition of our heart when we pray is extremely important. The Lord tells us to be both persistent and confident in our prayers. We are to pray with the faith that nothing is impossible for God, the patience to wait for His response and the trust to accept and follow His will.

Discovering The Conditions of Prayer

We pray not to change God’s mind for He is unchanging. Rather, we pray in order to seek to know the will of God and His love for us. Finding success in this requires entering into our prayer in the right frame of mind and heart. We can pray with confidence but our prayer should be offered in humility and gratitude.

“Humility is the foundation of prayer.” ~ CCC 2559

CCC 2608 From the *Sermon on the Mount* onwards, Jesus insists on *conversion of heart*: reconciliation with one’s brother before presenting an offering on the altar, love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors, prayer to the Father in secret, not heaping up empty phrases, prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart, purity of heart, and seeking the Kingdom before all else. This filial conversion is entirely directed to the Father.

CCC 2609 Once committed to conversion, the heart learns to pray in *faith*. Faith is a filial adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand. It is possible because the beloved Son gives us access to the Father. He can ask us to “seek” and to “knock,” since he himself is the door and the way.

CCC 2610 Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gifts, so he teaches us *filial boldness*: “Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will.” Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt: “all things are possible to him who believes.” Jesus is as saddened by the “lack of faith” of his own neighbors and the “little faith” of his own disciples as he is struck with admiration at the great faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman.

1. How should we enter into prayer? What conditions of our heart make for fruitful prayer?

James 4:7-10 _____

1 Peter 5:6-7 _____

Philippians 4:4-6 _____

2. How can we be confident that God hears and answers our prayers?

Matthew 7:7-11 _____

John 16:23-24 _____

1 John 5:13-15 _____

Watch Video: [The Conditions of Prayer](#) (*Jesus Said: Do Not Be Anxious*)

Responding to The Conditions of Prayer

There is no wrong way or wrong time to pray. We are even challenged in scripture to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We can and should pray anytime, anywhere and under any conditions. However some conditions which help facilitate effective contemplative prayer which seeks to know God and His will are solitude, silence, consistency and persistence.

CCC 2611 The prayer of faith consists not only in saying “Lord, Lord,” but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan.

3. Doesn't God already know what we need and desire? Why should we persist in prayer?

Luke 11:5-13 _____

Luke 18:1-8 _____

4. What do you think God wants us to pray for? How should we approach Him in prayer?

Matthew 9:38 _____

Luke 10:2 _____

Psalm 95:1-11 _____

Summary

The condition of our heart as we pray must be disposed to seek and accept the Will of God in any situation. We should pray anywhere and at any time without ceasing. However, contemplative prayer which seeks to clearly hear the still small voice of God must be entered with a quiet stilled heart, open to hearing the word of God. This requires solitude, silence and the patience to persist.

“For it is out of the silence that clarity emerges” ~ Matthew Kelly, The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic, p. 53.

Action Plan

Spend an hour in Eucharistic Adoration this week. Start out with the Our Father and ask the Lord to speak to you. Then sit in silence and wait for His answer. Remember to be patient! The answer may not come during your hour but keep listening as you go about your activities during the week.

Memorize: Psalm 46:11

“Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.”

The Benefits of Prayer

Prayer is communion with the infinite God. Thus, the benefits of prayer are infinite. We benefit personally from our own prayer and the prayers of others offered on our behalf, but even greater, when we pray, the entire Body of Christ benefits. This is because we are part of the body of Christ. Not only are we part of the body of Christ we are sons of our heavenly Father and growing in our relationship with our Father as His sons is the primary benefit of prayer. It is through prayer that we gain our proper understanding of our identity as sons of God. As we spend time with God this true identity replaces any false identities we may have adopted, for example, an identity based on what we have or what we have accomplished.

Discovering The Benefits of Prayer

In our prayers we come to know God more and to be able to more clearly see His love for us manifested in our life and in the lives of others. Our prayers bring us closer to God who loves us beyond all imagining. Our prayers enable us to fulfill God's greatest desire for us, a deep and intimate personal relationship with Him both now here on earth and someday in eternal life in heaven with He who saved us. The greatest benefit of prayer is eternal life!

CCC 2615 Even more, what the Father gives us when our prayer is united with that of Jesus is “another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.” This new dimension of prayer and of its circumstances is displayed throughout the farewell discourse. In the Holy Spirit, Christian prayer is a communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also *in him*: “Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

1. What promises does Jesus make to those who love Him? How are these promises fulfilled in our life in the Church?

John 14:16-17 _____

John 14:23-26 _____

2. What fruits of prayer are we promised in the scriptures? How have I seen these in my own life?

1 Peter 5:10 _____

Philippians 4:6-7 _____

Watch Video: [The Benefits of Prayer](#) (*Keys for Life: Rest In Life*)

Responding to The Benefits of Prayer

We pray not only for ourselves of course, but for others. We are encouraged by God through the Scriptures to pray for one another, for forgiveness and mercy for those trapped in sin and for healing for those who are sick. We pray with each other and for each other and we invoke those who have gone before us, the “communion of saints”, to pray with us as well. Jesus encourages us to pray in His name and promises that we will receive what we ask for in faith in His name.

CCC 2616 Prayer to Jesus is answered by him already during his ministry, through signs that anticipate the power of his death and Resurrection: Jesus hears the prayer of faith, expressed in words (the leper, Jairus, the Canaanite woman, the good thief) or in silence (the bearers of the paralytic, the woman with a hemorrhage who touches his clothes, the tears and ointment of the sinful woman). The urgent request of the blind men, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” or “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” has been renewed in the traditional prayer to Jesus known as the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” Healing infirmities or forgiving sins, Jesus always responds to a prayer offered in faith: “Your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

St. Augustine wonderfully summarizes the three dimensions of Jesus’ prayer: “He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us.”

3. For whom should we pray? In what frame of mind should we pray for them?

James 5:13-18 _____

4. For what should we pray for others? What are the benefits of our prayers for others?

Colossians 1:9-14 _____

Summary

The primary benefits of prayer are growing in faith, hope, love, peace and contentment in relationship with our heavenly Father. When we seek to know and love God every day of our life, God forms and then fulfills the desires of our heart. We are better able to hear Him speak to us, to see Him working in our life and the lives of those around us and to understand, trust and participate in His will for us and those we care for.

Action Plan

Without telling anyone else, choose one particular person that you know and pray this week for their healing or forgiveness. Write down your prayer and continue to pray it every day until your prayer is answered.

Memorize: James 5:16b

The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful.

The Battle of Prayer

An effective prayer life requires consistency and docility to the Holy Spirit. An effective prayer life results from commitment, humility and persistence. We must decide daily to give the first fruits of our day to God. This is contrary to our human nature of comfort and complacency. How do we win the battle to remain devoted to pray without ceasing?

Discovering The Battle of Prayer

The best defense is often a good offense. We know that we will face temptation to skip or shorten our prayer time so that we can engage in other activities. We must go to God first thing in the morning before these temptations can get a foothold and ask Him for His help and protection. We must put on the armor of God to prepare ourselves for the battles we will face during the day. We cannot hold back in this fight. We must pull out all the stops and fight to win in the daily battle to spend time in prayer with our Creator.

CCC 2752 Prayer presupposes an effort, a fight against ourselves and the wiles of the Tempter. The battle of prayer is inseparable from the necessary “spiritual battle” to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ: we pray as we live, because we live as we pray.

1. **What does the armor of God consist of? Do I regularly put on the armor of God when I begin my day?**

Ephesians 6:10-17 _____

2. **What steps must I take in my life to establish and maintain a daily commitment to prayer?**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 _____

Watch Video: [The Battle of Prayer](#) (*Marks of a True Christian: Constant in Prayer*)

Responding to The Battle of Prayer

We can and should pray anywhere we are and at any time during the day. However, establishing a routine is critical to maintaining an effective daily prayer life. Our routine must include when, where and how we will pray each day.

Just as we tithe with our treasure, we should tithe our prayer time with God by setting aside our very best for Him. We do this by purposely devoting a specific amount of time at a specific time in our day to spend in solitary prayer.

Finding a prayer place is helpful. This should be a place where we can be quiet and focused and not distracted by other people or activities no matter how important they are.

We also must establish what we will do during this time in this place. Matthew Kelly calls it the routine within the routine in his book *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*. Whether it is praying the Rosary or other prayers, reading scripture, Eucharistic Adoration, Liturgy of the Hours, or any other form of

prayer, it is vital that we establish our own personal ritual of what we do during this prescribed time of prayer.

This does not mean we cannot and should not pray in other forms and at other times during our day. We absolutely should pray often throughout the day. We are called to pray without ceasing which is to maintain a consistent and frequent lifting of our heart and mind to God throughout our day. We just want to make sure every day that we set aside this one specific time in this one specific place for this particular prayer.

CCC 2753 In the battle of prayer we must confront erroneous conceptions of prayer, various currents of thought, and our own experience of failure. We must respond with humility, trust, and perseverance to these temptations which cast doubt on the usefulness or even the possibility of prayer.

CCC 2754 The principal difficulties in the practice of prayer are distraction and dryness. The remedy lies in faith, conversion, and vigilance of heart.

3. What must we do to resist the devil and persevere in prayer?

1 Peter 5:8-10 _____

4. How can we remain persistent in our prayers even in the midst of our struggles?

Romans 8:26-27 _____

Hebrews 12:1-2 _____

Summary

Maintaining a daily prayer life is a battle with ourselves and the distractions of the world which the devil throws at us. There are many good things we can and need to do each day, but first we must choose to spend time with our Creator, the One who loves us more than any other. We must seek to discover what He wants us to do each day. We can win the battle through His grace and strength.

“We will never learn to live the years prayerfully unless we learn by prayer to live the seconds deeply and well” ~ Fr. Benedict Groeschel, Listening At Prayer, p 14.

Action Plan

Write down a personal prayer plan for the coming week. Be intentional and specific about what the week ahead looks like and write down the following:

- What time will I pray each day this week?
- Where will I pray each day this week?
- What specifically will I do when I pray each day this week?

Memorize: Ephesians 6:11

Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.

Pillar 3: Scripture

The Sacred Scriptures contained in the Bible are collectively the divinely inspired Word of God which allows us to know God and His will for us. The Bible consists of many books, written over thousands of years in different literary styles by many different human authors. Even though men put the words on paper, the truths expressed in these words are inspired by God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Authority of God's Word

The Bible is God's written expression of who He is and His will for us. Without the oral and written revelation of God, we could not truly know God or His plan of salvation for us.

CCC 104 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."

Discovering The Authority of God's Word

Why do we believe that Scripture is God's Word? Perhaps the strongest confirmation of this is Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the confirmation of Jesus' works and teachings and the authority He granted to the Church. Through His rising from the dead, Jesus has proven that He is the Son of God and that His words are "truth and life". Jesus' resurrection proves that He does indeed have all authority in heaven and on earth and that He has passed on this authority to Peter and his successors. Under this authority, led by the Holy Spirit, the Church has determined which books were to be included in the canon of Sacred Scripture based on theological content, scholarship, and Sacred Tradition, which was revealed and solidified at the Council of Rome in 382 AD.

CCC 651 "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ's works and teachings. All truths, even those most inaccessible to human reason, find their justification if Christ by his Resurrection has given the definitive proof of his divine authority, which he had promised.

We learn in the catechism that Scripture has one common source, the Holy Spirit (CCC 80) and two distinct modes of transmission, oral and written. (CCC 81-82).

CCC 80 "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal." Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own "always, to the close of the age."

CCC 81 "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit."

"And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching."

CCC 82 As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."

Jesus has entrusted the authentic interpretation of the Word of God to the *"living teaching office (Magisterium) of the Church alone"* (CCC 85) and the three, Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are intertwined and dependent on each other (CCC 95).

CCC 85 "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

CCC 95 "It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

1. How does Scripture itself attribute the writing of Scripture to God?

2 Samuel 23:1-2 _____

Jeremiah 1:6-9 _____

2. What does Scripture say is the origin of the thoughts and words written in Scripture?

2 Peter 1:20-21 _____

1 Thessalonians 2:13 _____

Watch Video: [Authority of the Word](#) (*Shocking Claims of Jesus: All Authority*)

Responding to The Authority of God’s Word

Jesus instituted the Church and entrusted it with preserving and interpreting God’s Word. He worked through many different men in many different places and in many different times to write down His Word for us. Our response to this truth is to read Scripture with all of this in our mind and heart. We read Scripture to learn about who God is and about who we are as His children. We go beyond simply reading Scripture to studying Scripture, using the resources the Church provides to try and understand the authentic meaning of God’s Word. We treat the Scriptures as sacred and holy. The Bible is not just another book, it is the *Living Word of God*. As such, every week when we come together as a community to celebrate the Mass, as Jesus instructed us to do, we experience Jesus in each other, in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Body and Blood of Christ Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

"Christ, the word of God, comes to us through Scripture, the word of God. It is no coincidence that the same title is given to the man and the book, for the whole point of this book is this man."

~ Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*

CCC 101 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."

CCC 103 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.

CCC 106 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."

CCC 107 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."

CCC 108 Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book". Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, "not a written and mute word, but 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."

3. What is unique about Scripture? In what or whom does it derive authority?

John 1:1-18 _____

1 John 1:1-4 _____

4. What importance does God place on His Word?

Isaiah 55:10-11 _____

Psalms 138:1-8 _____

Jeremiah 31:31-34 _____

1 Peter 1:23-25 _____

5. What does Jesus say about the importance and endurance of Scripture?

Matthew 4:4 _____

Matthew 5:17-19 _____

Luke 11:27-28 _____

John 5:39 _____

John 6:63 _____

Summary

Scripture is, in fact, “God’s Word.” St. Paul testified clearly to that truth: *“For this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

When St. Peter proclaimed *“there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation,”* (2 Peter 1:20), he is saying that we must understand that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves. The point is that Peter was not referring to the *interpretation* of Scripture but to the *origin* of Scripture. It was not a man's idea or thought but it is from God revealed to men through the Holy Spirit.

Action Plan

Commit to reading scripture at least ten minutes a day. Focus on praying through the scripture, rather than attempting to cover a certain number of verses.

Memorize: 1 Thessalonians 2:13

And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.

The Authenticity of God's Word

In Jesus' three years of ministry, He is recorded as quoting the Scriptures 104 times. Thus, Jesus expressed His confidence in the Scriptures and He witnessed to us the reliability of Scripture. Through God's grace we have received the immeasurable treasure of God's Word. It is eternal and absolute in that Jesus Christ is the *Living Word* made flesh and dwelling among us.

Discovering The Authenticity of God's Word

We are confident that God has inspired the Sacred Scriptures because Jesus referred to them so often and used them to teach us about Himself. The New Testament was carefully discerned in a gathering of the church seeking in prayer the will of God.

CCC 105 *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."

There are several other reasons we can have confidence in the authenticity of Sacred Scripture.

Textual Consistency and Uniqueness. The Bible is remarkably self-consistent, despite having been written by more than 40 different writers over a timespan of about 2,000 years. Moreover, the Bible is uniquely authentic among ancient literary works in terms of the number of ancient manuscripts found, the quality of those manuscripts and the smallness of the time span between when the work was first written and our earliest copies of those works. The reliability of Scripture manuscripts far exceeds that of any other ancient documents.

Old Testament Canonicity. Jesus gave credence to the entire canon of the Old Testament.

- Jesus made reference to the Law and Prophets as a unit, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.*" (Matthew 5:17)
- Jesus explained the Scriptures, "*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.*" (Luke 24:27)
- Jesus referred to the entire Canon by mentioning all the prophets from Abel (from Genesis, the first book and first martyr) to Zechariah (from Chronicles, the last book and last martyr) (Matthew 23:35).

External Evidence. The truth of Scripture can be validated on the basis of various lines of external evidence. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed many events of the Bible and modern scientific and investigative techniques have consistently supported the historical relevance of Scripture.

Predictive Prophecy and Science. Numerous passages in the Bible have predicted future events in great detail—events that were future to the writers but are now in our past. The Bible also touches on matters of science in ways that go beyond what was known to humankind at the time.

1. In what ways does Jesus use God’s Word?

Matthew 4:1-11 _____

Mark 7:6-9 _____

Luke 10:25-28 _____

John 17:17 _____

2. What is Paul's encouragement to Timothy regarding the Scripture?

2 Timothy 3:14-17 _____

Watch Video: [The Authenticity of God’s Word](#) (*S-Series: Scriptures*)

Responding to The Authenticity of God’s Word

When we respond to God’s Word in Holy Scripture our response needs to be rooted in both faith and reason. When applying these faculties it is the gift of faith that guides the gift of reason.

We exercise the gift of reason when we consider what history and our own experience tell us. From historical records we have determined that the Holy Scriptures, although not a history book per say, are historically reliable. In fact, the books of the Bible have a more credible historical record of manuscripts and supporting text than any other historical text.

The central character of the New Testament, Jesus, is a historical figure. We know He lived, started the Church and died on the cross. This is undisputed historical fact. Even the most ardent atheist assents to Jesus as a historical figure. The stumbling block for some is His resurrection from the dead. The supernatural nature of the resurrection requires a “gift of faith” to accept. Not everyone has received this free gift. Still even the resurrection is not a leap of faith. There have been approximately 500 eye witness accounts of the resurrected Jesus and many of these witnesses have died for their witness. This is serious evidence. When we read Scripture, in addition to engaging reason, we need to read with eyes of faith. We need to read it with the same Spirit which inspired the author (CCC 111). We need to ask the Holy Spirit to open our mind to the living word of God. So when we read Holy Scripture it is an exercise of reason directed by faith.

CCC 143 *By faith*, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, "the obedience of faith".

CCC 156 What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe "because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived". So "that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit." Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability "are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all"; they are "motives of credibility" (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is "by no means a blind impulse of the mind".

3. What should our confidence in Scripture be?

Joshua 23:14 _____

Proverbs 30:5 _____

Luke 16:17 _____

Isaiah 40:8 _____

4. How does the Holy Spirit give us confidence in the Word of God?

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 _____

2 Peter 3:15-16 _____

Summary

The record of manuscripts that exist provide irrefutable historical evidence for the accuracy of how Scripture has been translated over the millennia. The historical elements recorded in Scripture in almost all cases can be confirmed by agreement with other historical documents. The extent of manuscripts, their consistency and the accuracy of the historical references in Scripture certainly appeal to our gift of reason and provide a basis for confidence in the authenticity of Holy Scripture. Jesus’ resurrection and the power of His teaching and ministry, in combination with the witness of the faithful provide a basis for faith that God is watching over His Word and His Church.

Action Plan

Using the Gospel for the next upcoming Sunday Mass, spend 15 minutes doing the following:

- Begin with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten you as to the meaning of the passage.
- Read the passage in your Bible once to get a sense of what the author is communicating.
- Read it a second time. Underline or highlight a word, phrase or passage that touches you.
- Contemplate how the highlighted section can be applied to your life.
- Determine one action item from the passage and share with the group at the next meeting.

Memorize: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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.

The Power of God's Word

The apostle Paul listed many defensive pieces of the armor of God, but only one was an offensive weapon: the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

The sword is the only item listed by Paul that serves in an offensive capacity. Even if we have all the rest of the armor equipped perfectly, without our sword, we amount to little more than heavily armored moving targets.

Discovering The Power of God's Word

The Scriptures are powerful in that they can change our lives. They can provide us with nourishment and strength in living the Christian life, be a source of prayer for spending time with God and teach us the truth about God and life. Just as time spent with God in prayer changes our hearts, time spent with God in His Word shows us not only who He is, but who we are and what He intends for us to be. This allows us to make the changes we need to make through His power and love.

CCC 131 "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life." Hence "access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful."

CCC 141 "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord": both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

CCC 2654 The spiritual writers, paraphrasing *Matthew 7:7*, summarize in this way the dispositions of the heart nourished by the word of God in prayer "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation."

1. Who are we fighting against in our spiritual combat?

Ephesians 6:12 _____

2. Why is it important for us to be armed for battle?

Ephesians 6:11,13 _____

1 Peter 5:8-9 _____

3. What are we fighting for?

James 1:21-25 _____

Acts 20:32 _____

Romans 1:16-17 _____

1 Peter 1:3-5 _____

Watch Video: [Our Spiritual Sword](#) (*Spiritual Combat: Put on the Armor of God*)

Responding to The Power of God’s Word

Paul compares God’s Word to a sword. The people of that time would have understood the purpose and the power of the sword in the hands of a skilled soldier. The Roman gladius became known as "the sword that conquered the world." Adapted from a Spanish design, the prowess of the gladius in close range combat made it a fearsome tool in the hand of a skilled Roman warrior. When sharpened, its dual edges wreaked havoc on unarmored foes, while its tapered point could pierce through even heavy metal armor.

4. Why did Paul compare the Word of God to a sword?

Hebrews 4:12 _____

5. Why is the Word of God such a powerful weapon in our spiritual arsenal?

Psalms 119:9-11 _____

Psalms 119:105-112 _____

2 Timothy 3:14-17 _____

6. What would the results be if we applied the Word of God in our daily life on a regular basis?

John 20:30-31 _____

Luke 6:46-49 _____

Psalms 37:28-34 _____

Summary

“The gospel is not a book; it is a living being, with an action, a power, which invades everything that opposes its extension. Behold it upon this table; this book, surpassing all others. I never omit to read it, and every day with some pleasure. Nowhere is to be found such a series of beautiful ideas, and admirable moral maxims, which pass before us like the battalions of a celestial army. The soul can never go astray with this book for its guide.” ~ Napoleon Bonaparte, On St. Helena, 1816

Through continuous practice, we will keep our blades of God’s Word razor sharp and always be ready to defend the hope that lies within us.

Action Plan

A sword needs to be sharpened if it is to remain useful and it certainly won't sharpen itself. Set aside some time every day for regular Bible study.

Pick a character trait you would like to improve and look up a passage in your Bible’s concordance. Share what you find with the group in the next meeting.

Memorize: Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.

The Application of God’s Word

Since scripture is God’s Word and a primary way we come to know God and learn how to live a good life; and since God’s Word has the “power to save” (Romans 1:16-17, James 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:14-15), applying the Bible to our daily lives just makes sense. If we don’t apply it, the Bible becomes nothing more to us than a dry, tedious book; an impractical collection of old manuscripts. That’s why Paul says, “Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:9) When we apply the Bible to our daily lives, we bear much fruit.

Discovering God’s Word in Our Heart

Scripture is often referred to as the “*living Word*”. We experience this when we read the same passage on two different occasions and it impacts us differently. This results because the Holy Spirit is at work in different ways at different times in our lives. He helps us to grow and mature as we encounter various circumstances in our life and thus the same Scripture passage can take on new meaning for us.

In order to successfully apply Scripture to our daily lives, we must go beyond simply reading and also study, memorize, and meditate on what we have read. Merely hearing or reading the Bible, for example, can be like a short rainfall on hard ground. Regardless of the amount or intensity of the rain, most runs off and little sinks in. Meditation opens the soil of the soul and lets the water of God’s Word soak in deeply. Our goal is to treasure God’s Word in our hearts (Psalm 119:11, Deuteronomy 6:6).

Study: While studying certainly involves reading, reading is not the same as studying. To study God’s Word means that we prayerfully devote time and attention to acquiring advanced knowledge on a particular person, subject, theme, passage, or book of the Bible.

Memorize: It is impossible to apply what we cannot remember. In order to *treasure the Word in our hearts*, we have to first get it in there by means of memorization. Memorizing Scripture produces within us a well from which we may continually drink.

Meditate: Writer and philosopher Edmund Burke once said, “*To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting.*” We cannot afford to “eat” God’s Word without “digesting” it. Once we have read and studied, we need to spend some quiet time reflecting upon what we have learned and seen through our reading and studying. It can be helpful to write down the insights and thoughts that come to us so that we can refer to them later. We want to let the Word *soak in* throughout the day.

When we apply this method to our attempts to understand the God’s Word, the result is an extraordinary fruitfulness and spiritual prosperity.

1. How can we understand the Word of God?

Psalm 1:1-3 _____

Matthew 13:18-23 _____

1 Corinthians 2:10-16 _____

2. What is the best way for us to memorize and recall God’s Word?

Psalm 119:1-24 _____

Watch Video: [Applying Scripture](#) (*Spiritual Combat: Battle for the Mind*)

Responding to God’s Word in Our Heart

Scripture assures us that the man who meditates on God’s Word is blessed. Our meditation must be based on a proper interpretation and understanding. In order for God’s Word to effectively soak in and take root in our lives, we must learn to properly interpret the Scriptures we read so that we can gain a true understanding that we might bear much fruit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides significant guidance on properly interpreting and understanding Scripture. Some of this guidance is provided below and a more detailed guide can be found in Appendix A of this Playbook: [Reading and Interpreting Scripture](#) (for Spiritual Scuba Divers).

CCC 109 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.

CCC 110 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."

CCC 111 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.

These three criteria are provided and explained in paragraphs 112-114 of the Catechism. They are:

1. Be especially attentive “to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.” (CCC 112)
2. Read the Scripture within the “living Tradition of the whole Church.” (CCC 113)
3. Be attentive to the analogy of faith. (CCC 114)

Catechism paragraphs 115-118 introduce us to and instruct us on the four *senses* of Scripture: the *Literal sense* and the three *Spiritual senses*; the *Allegorical sense*, the *Moral sense* and the *Anagogical sense*. In short these senses can be understood as the Literal speaks to deeds, the Allegorical speaks to faith, the Moral speaks to how to act and the Anagogical speaks to our destiny (CCC 118).

With a proper interpretation and understanding, we can fully treasure God’s Word in our heart and it can effectively take root in our lives and we can produce great fruit which is pleasing to God.

3. How did King David value God’s Word? How do we value God’s Word?

Psalm 119:65-80 _____

4. What actions can we take to treasure God’s Word in our hearts?

Proverbs 4:4-23 _____

5. How can we grow in faith and obedience?

Psalm 119:9-11 _____

Deuteronomy 11:18 _____

James 1:21-25 _____

Philippians 4:9 _____

Summary

To successfully apply the Scriptures to our lives we must do more than simply read the Bible. We must also study the Scriptures to gain proper interpretation and further understanding and then reflect, ponder and meditate upon what we have read and learned in our study. Memorizing scripture passages can give us a source of strength and comfort in challenging and difficult situations and deepen our joy in times of celebration.

Action Plan

Plan at least two days next week to spend 30 minutes studying and meditating on God’s Word.

Memorize: Deuteronomy 11:18

Therefore, take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them on your arm as a sign, and let them be as a pendant on your forehead.

Pillar 4: Sacraments

A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace to us at memorable and important stages throughout the Christian life. The word “sacrament” comes from a Greek word, which can be translated “mystery”. Mystery refers to something that is not immediately apparent to our senses, but is accessible and real to us through faith. When we participate in the sacraments something real and supernatural takes place through ordinary means. Grace is supernaturally given to us through the tangible symbols of water, oil, bread and wine. A sacrament then is a sign that makes visible what is invisible for the purpose of making us holy (CCC 1127) (1 Corinthians 4:1).

There are seven sacraments. They are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Marriage. These seven sacraments are manifestations of God’s love and care for each of us. God knows us better than we know ourselves and meets us in the Sacraments in a material way so we can better relate to and experience His presence tangibly. Whether He uses water, bread and wine, holy oils or appears in persona Christi, God wants us to feel His caring love (CCC 1210).

Baptism and Confirmation

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist are called the “sacraments of Christian initiation”. Baptism is the beginning of our spiritual journey. It opens the door to all of the other sacraments by cleansing us of original sin (CCC 405) (1 Peter 3:21). In Baptism we are also united to Christ and become adopted members of God’s family, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church (CCC 1213) (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Confirmation is the strengthening of the new life in Christ received in Baptism. *“Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.”* In Confirmation we are more perfectly united to the Church and we are given a *“special strength of the Holy Spirit”* to be *“true witnesses of Christ to spread and defend the faith by word and deed”* (CCC 1285) (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

“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.” ~ Acts 1:8

Discovering the Beginning of the Journey

In Baptism we are born into new life in Christ and united to His death and resurrection. Thus, we are given access to all the tools we need for the spiritual journey to eternity. We are claimed forever for Christ; indelibly imprinted with a spiritual sign which sets us apart for worship of God in the Christian life. In Baptism we are immersed in water or have water poured over our heads as a sign of the purification which occurs inwardly and is unseen. To baptize means to immerse. Baptism has its origin in water purification rites found in the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:4, 16:23-24).

Baptism removes the spiritual impact of original sin and any existing personal sin. The soul of a baptized person immediately following Baptism is spotless. Baptism does not free us from concupiscence, also referred to as our fallen nature, so thankfully, we also have the Sacrament of Reconciliation to help us along our conversion journey.

CCC 1277 Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.

CCC 1278 The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

CCC 1279 The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

CCC 1280 Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Because of the character Baptism cannot be repeated.

1. As a Catholic, how can we answer someone who asks if we have been “born again”?

Colossians 2:11-12 _____

Matthew 3:13-17 _____

John 3:1-5 _____

2. How can understanding our Baptism help us learn to balance between our personal spiritual life and our relationship to others in the Body of Christ, the Church?

Romans 6:3-4 _____

1 Peter 2:1-5 _____

Watch Video: [The Holy Spirit](#) (*Marks of a True Christian: On Fire with the Spirit*)

Responding to the Beginning of the Journey

Confirmation is an opportunity to affirm one’s faith, to profess it for oneself and to own it in a meaningful way. Pledging faith to God is a lifetime effort, not a one-time action. In Confirmation, we receive the strength and the power to profess our faith in Christ publicly. Confirmation is indeed a sacrament of commitment aided by the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:1-2). It pleases the Father to give us His Spirit! When we are confirmed we are sealed with holy chrism and we receive the Spirit of God into our souls. This is an amazing gift and is perhaps the most under-utilized gift we have ever received. If we are wise we will stir up the Holy Spirit in us and receive the grace and gifts that God has for us!

CCC 1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."

CCC 1302 It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

CCC 1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, “Abba! Father!”
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.

CCC 1304 Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the "character," which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.

CCC 1305 This "character" perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and "the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially."

CCC 1831 The seven *gifts* of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

If we are moving in the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit we will also bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, modesty and chastity (CCC 1832). A good way to tell if you are moving in the Holy Spirit is to review if these fruits are present in your life.

3. How have I evidenced the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Hebrews 6:1-3 _____

Isaiah 11:1-2 _____

4. How often do we truly rely upon the Holy Spirit so that we might never be ashamed to be a witness for Jesus Christ?

Romans 1:16-17 _____

Luke 12:11-12 _____

John 14:25-26 _____

Summary

Baptism and Confirmation are clearly foundational to living a life in Christ and for Christ. The supernatural action of God's grace made available to us in a visible way ought to inspire us to become true disciples prepared to live out our mission to reach out to and love others for Jesus Christ.

Action Plan

Pope Benedict XVI is quoted as referring to unfaithful Christians as “baptized pagans”. Become more familiar with the details surrounding your own Baptism and if applicable your reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Reflect on your willingness to live out the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation, and decide to live them out intentionally.

Memorize: Romans 6:3-4

Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

The Eucharist

The word “*Eucharist*” literally means to “give thanks”. The Eucharist is the “*Real Presence*” of Jesus Christ, “*Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity*”. The bread and wine become the Eucharist through the power of the Holy Spirit only during the celebration of the Mass when a validly ordained priest says the words of consecration. Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood at the Last Supper as a perpetual remembrance of His passion, death and resurrection. It is the *risen* Christ we receive in Holy Communion! The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist completes our initiation as Christians that began with our Baptism and Confirmation. The Eucharist provides for us, the faithful, the spiritual food necessary for our journey of faith towards eternal life (CCC 1322-1323) (Luke 24:24-35).

Discovering Jesus As the Bread of Life

The roots of the Eucharist go back to the beginning; some say even to Genesis. In the center of the Garden of Eden was the Tree of Life with fruit which would allow man to live forever (Gen 3:22). In Exodus, when God freed the Israelites from Egypt, He instructed that each Hebrew family procure an unblemished lamb and four days later to sacrifice it, splash it’s blood on their doorposts and consume it’s roasted flesh together in a manner in which they were ready to go, to leave. The following day, they were freed from Egypt. God stipulated that this “*Passover Meal*” be celebrated every year in remembrance of the Passover “as a perpetual institution.” (Exodus 12:1-14).

About a year before the Last Supper, near the time of the Passover (John 6:4), the day after feeding the 5,000 and later that night walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee, while preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59), Jesus told his disciples, “*I am the bread of life.*” (John 6:48) and that His Body was true food and His Blood was true drink (John 6:55).

“Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” ~ John 6:53-55.

He knew that when the Last Supper came a year later, they would remember what He had done near the time of the previous Passover for this was a radical teaching. So radical that, for the only time recorded in Scripture, many disciples stopped following Jesus because of this teaching (John 6:66). They fully understood that Jesus was speaking quite literally and not simply symbolically. Jesus did not try to dissuade them when they left which confirms that they understood him correctly.

At the Last Supper which was this Passover Meal, Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant in establishing the New Covenant. Jesus instituted the Eucharist when He broke the bread, blessed the cup of wine and shared them with His disciples saying “this is my body” and “this is my blood”. He then repeated the same instruction from Exodus that this act be repeated over and over for all time in remembrance of Him (Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

So, looking all the way back to Genesis, when Jesus gave His life on the cross, that cross became a new “*Tree of Life*” which produces fruit (the Eucharist) which allows man to live forever!

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” ~ John 6:54

CCC 1339 Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the passover meal for us, that we may eat it..." They went... and prepared the passover. And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood."

CCC 1340 By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

1. How does knowing some of the Jewish roots of the Eucharist affect my faith in the *Real Presence* of Jesus in the Eucharist?

Exodus 12:1-14 _____

2. How does Jesus referring to Himself as the "*Bread of Life*" impact my daily spiritual life?

John 6:22-59 _____

3. If we experience doubt in believing that mere bread and wine literally become the Body and Blood of Christ, what steps should we take to address this dilemma?

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 _____

Romans 6:11-12 _____

The Catholic Church has been doing this celebration of the Eucharist, what we now call the Mass, ever since the Last Supper. It has remained remarkably the same for 2,000 years honoring the Lord's command. At every hour of every day, somewhere in the world, the Mass is being celebrated.

CCC 1342 From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord's command. Of the Church of Jerusalem it is written:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . . Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts.

CCC 1345 As early as the second century we have the witness of St. Justin Martyr for the basic lines of the order of the Eucharistic celebration. They have stayed the same until our own day for all the great liturgical families. St. Justin wrote to the pagan emperor Antonius Pius (138-161) around the year 155, explaining what Christians did:

On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.

The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.

When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.

Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . .and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.

When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.

Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.

He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (in Greek: eucharistian) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.

When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: 'Amen.'

When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread, wine and water and take them to those who are absent.

4. Do I really believe that the reception of the Eucharist truly imparts life that is eternal?

John 6:54, 60-69 _____

Revelation 3:20-21 _____

5. How does my understanding of the Eucharist change the way in which I participate at Mass?

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 _____

Watch Video: [The Bread of Life](#) (*Shocking Claims of Jesus: Eat The Flesh?*)

Responding to Jesus As the Bread of Life

The Church says that reception of the Eucharist and the celebration of the Mass is the greatest thing we do in the Christian life. The Eucharist is the *"source and summit of the Christian life"* (CCC 1324).

CCC 1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.

At the beginning of every Mass the priest processes into the church. This is a reminder that during the early life of the Church the Eucharist was consecrated by the apostles and was processed to the Christian communities where an apostle was not present. This procession was a holy celebration and the faithful joyfully anticipated receiving Jesus' Body and Blood.

Today the grace and power we receive in the Eucharist is dependent upon our desire and preparation to receive Him and our willingness to be transformed by Him. Are we “*hungry*” when we present ourselves to receive Him in Holy Communion? This is why God gives us His very own Spirit so that He can lead us into a more perfect union with the Body and Blood of Jesus. So we need to prepare ourselves to receive Jesus; inviting the Holy Spirit to make us ready to become one with the Most High Son of the Living God!

6. How does the tradition of the Church celebrating the *Eucharistic Feast* affect my faith in the *Real Presence* of Jesus in the Eucharist?

Matthew 26:26-30 _____

1 Corinthians 11:1-2, 23-26 _____

Acts 2:42-47 _____

7. Knowing that Jesus Christ is truly present “*Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity*” in the Eucharist, how should we prepare ourselves to receive Him?

1 Corinthians 11:27-33 _____

Summary

“It is Christ Himself, the Eternal High Priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice.” ~ CCC 1410

See Appendix B, *Going Deeper with the Eucharist*, for a more detailed exploration of the Eucharist.

Action Plan

Take a few minutes one day this week before Mass on Sunday and read through the readings and prayers for Mass.

Arrive a few minutes early for Mass this week and spend the extra time in prayer preparing your heart to receive Jesus in Holy Communion realizing that you will also be in communion with all of your brothers and sisters in Christ on earth as well as all the angels and saints in heaven.

Before Mass this week, pray the *Preparation for Mass* prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas which can be found on the last page of the *Breaking Bread* hymnal and on the last page of Appendix B of this Playbook.

Memorize: John 6:53-56

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a sacrament of healing and conversion. It is one of the two *sacraments of healing* along with the Anointing of the Sick. The grace of salvation we receive in our Baptism does not cure us of our fallen nature. We still sin, missing the mark of God's love, and are called by God to repent of our sin, convert and move forward in our relationship with Him. God longs to forgive us through the authority that Jesus gave the Apostles and their successors, the priests. When we go to reconciliation we encounter Jesus who is present in the priest by grace "*in persona Christi*". It is very encouraging to hear the words "*I absolve you of your sins*" particularly when we keep in mind they are Jesus' own words spoken through the priest (CCC 1420-1421) (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Discovering the Gift of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores our relationship with God. This relationship began at our Baptism, but has been broken through our sin. Sin is an offense against God; a going away from God and His principles. The word "*sin*" literally means "missing the mark". It is defined as any deliberate thought, word, deed or omission contrary to the eternal law of God. Serious or *mortal* sin eradicates the grace we received at Baptism and requires that we seek forgiveness through this Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. God longs to forgive us and restore the deep intimate relationship He desires with us and thus, in His great mercy, He established this sacrament to provide this grace to us.

CCC 1423 It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

CCC 1424 It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."

It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God." He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."

1. How do I understand God the Father's view of being reconciled with us as sinners?

Luke 15:11-32 _____

2. What does the word "*Confession*" mean to me? Why should we be willing to acknowledge our sinfulness to a priest who is only another human being?

John 20:19-23 _____

Matthew 9:2-8 _____

Watch Video: [The Gift of Reconciliation](#) (*S-Series: Salvation*)

Responding to the Gift of Reconciliation

As Catholics we believe in ongoing conversion as we live from one act of faith to another. It is important for us that some of these acts of faith are to take advantage of this sacrament of mercy and healing on a regular basis. Perhaps there is no better feeling than making a good confession. This is particularly true when we are burdened by the consequences and guilt of mortal sin. To make a good confession we need to make a prayerful examination of our life. It is important to ask the Holy Spirit to lead us in this process. The Holy Spirit helps us to see our lives more clearly in the light of God's love that gently reveals to us the life God calls us to and how we have fallen short of His call. This brings us to a spirit of true contrition and a desire to repent of any ways in our life that we have offended God our Father who is deserving of all our love. The Holy Spirit also helps us to amend our ways and show us how we can avoid similar sins in the future. Finally, we need to reform our character since our character has been weakened by our failings. We can help bring this about by entering wholeheartedly into the penance given by the priest as well as by intentionally applying the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives to avoid the near occasion of sin.

CCC 1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."

CCC 1490 The movement of return to God, called conversion and repentance, entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, and the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future. Conversion touches the past and the future and is nourished by hope in God's mercy.

3. How has understanding sin affected my view of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

1 John 1:5-10 _____

1 John 5:16-17 _____

4. What is *repentance*, and how is it related to *contrition*?

Psalm 51:1-19 _____

Luke 18:9-14 _____

Summary

Common to us all is the experience of guilt! Since we are sinners we suffer under its weight. However, God longs to be in relationship with us so much, that He has made a way for us to tangibly experience not only His forgiveness, but also an opportunity to be open to further conversion in our lives.

Action Plan

Celebrate the opportunity to avail yourself of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a more regular basis growing in your appreciation of God's patient love on your behalf.

Memorize: 1 John 2:1

My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one.

Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is one of the two *sacraments of healing*, along with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the prayers of the priest and all of us as the body of Christ, entrust those who are sick “*to the suffering and glorified Lord, that He may raise them up and save them*”. Our prayers also encourage the sick to freely unite their suffering to that of Christ for the good of others (CCC 1499).

Discovering Anointing of the Sick

In this sacrament which can only be conferred by a priest or bishop, we trust in Jesus to heal the seriously ill person physically, if that be what is best for their salvation, and to heal them spiritually including the forgiveness of their sins if they are unable to confess them. This sacrament is not just for those in the last moments before death and may result in physical healing and thus may be properly received multiple times under the right conditions. The faithful are encouraged to ask for a priest to administer this sacrament of healing at any time one becomes seriously ill or otherwise is reasonably in danger of death. The graces provided through this sacrament flow from the death of our Lord Jesus, strengthen us against anxiety, discouragement and temptation and give us the gifts of peace and fortitude (CCC 1520, Matthew 8:17)

CCC 1514 The Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived."

CCC 1515 If a sick person who received this anointing recovers his health, he can in the case of another grave illness receive this sacrament again. If during the same illness the person's condition becomes more serious, the sacrament may be repeated. It is fitting to receive the Anointing of the Sick just prior to a serious operation. The same holds for the elderly whose frailty becomes more pronounced.

CCC 1516 Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick. It is the duty of pastors to instruct the faithful on the benefits of this sacrament. The faithful should encourage the sick to call for a priest to receive this sacrament. The sick should prepare themselves to receive it with good dispositions, assisted by their pastor and the whole ecclesial community, which is invited to surround the sick in a special way through their prayers and fraternal attention.

1. How can we trust in the healing power of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?

James 5:14-15 _____

Mark 6:12-13 _____

2. How are the sick healed? Where does the power to heal come from?

Matthew 10:8 _____

Acts 3:1-10 _____

Watch Video: [Anointing of the Sick](#) (*S-Series: Suffering*)

Responding to Anointing of the Sick

Illness and suffering are simply a fact of human life. In illness we experience our need for God through our powerlessness and limitations. Through suffering we discover that we are finite. This can lead us into anguish and selfishness and sometimes even into despair. These things can cause us to move away from God and feel like He has abandoned us. Our faith informs us that He is always with us and never abandons us. Suffering can also lead us closer to God and helps us to discern what is not important and focus on those things that are truly necessary. Thus, suffering can bring about “*a search for God and a return to Him*” (CCC 1500-1501). God, in His mercy, has provided the Church with this sacrament as a means of providing us the strength and grace to endure the sufferings of this life.

CCC 1532 The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects:

- the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church;
- the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;
- the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;
- the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;
- the preparation for passing over to eternal life.

3. Does God always heal? What purposes could God have for not healing?

Galatians 4:13-14 _____

1 Timothy 5:23 _____

2 Timothy 4:20 _____

4. Why doesn't God always heal? What is the value of suffering?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 _____

2 Corinthians 12:6-9 _____

Summary

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered to bring spiritual and possibly even physical healing during an illness, especially near the time of death. It is most likely one of the last sacraments one will receive. In His great love for us, the Lord gives us grace through this sacrament to strengthen us and give us peace during the sufferings of the last stages of our earthly journey.

Action Plan

Pray for and if possible visit with an elderly person whom you know especially if they are ill or ailing.

Memorize: James 5:14-15

Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.

Holy Orders

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is the means by which a baptized man becomes a deacon, priest or bishop. In Holy Orders, the man ordained is set apart by Christ with special graces, powers and responsibilities to offer sacrifices and provide the other sacraments for the benefit of the whole Church. This *“sacrament of apostolic ministry”* is the means *“through which the mission entrusted by Christ to His apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time”* (CCC 1536).

Discovering Holy Orders

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred in three degrees of clergy: bishops, priests and deacons. Only a bishop may administer the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In prayer and through the imposition of hands the bishop passes on the grace and powers of the priesthood to other men and continues the unbroken line of apostolic succession from Christ Himself. Like Baptism and Confirmation, this sacrament *“confers an indelible spiritual character and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily”* (CCC 1582). Thus, similar to marriage, the ordained life is a permanent, life-long commitment.

Bishops are responsible for the care of multiple congregations and ordain, direct and discipline priests and deacons. *“As successors of the apostles, the bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope, successor of St. Peter.”* (CCC 1594) Priests, also known as *presbyters* or *elders*, *“are united with the bishops”* in sacred dignity and *“they are called to be the bishops’ prudent co-workers”*. They have the responsibility of teaching, governing and providing the sacraments in a single and specific congregation (CCC 1595). Deacons are the assistants of the bishops and their *“ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity”* (Acts 6:1–6; CCC 1596).

The Church confers this sacrament *“only on baptized men”* suitable *“for the exercise of the ministry”*. Jesus chose men as His twelve apostles and the apostles did the same when they chose those who would succeed them. *“The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord Himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible.”* (CCC 1577, 1598)

CCC 1578 No one has a right to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. Indeed no one claims this office for himself; he is called to it by God. Anyone who thinks he recognizes the signs of God’s call to the ordained ministry must humbly submit his desire to the authority of the Church, who has the responsibility and right to call someone to receive orders. Like every grace this sacrament can be received only as an unmerited gift.

1. Who chooses the clergy members of the Church? How does this impact us?

Mark 3:13-19 _____

Luke 6:12-16 _____

2. Why is the imposition of hands significant? How does this action help to encourage us?

Numbers 27:15-23 _____

Acts 13:1-3 _____

Watch Video: [Holy Orders](#) (*S-Series: Sacrifice*)

Responding to Holy Orders

Every man has a God given vocation and is called to discern God’s will for his life. Ordination is one of the three possible vocations. The other two are marriage and living single for the Lord. All of them are designed to help us prosper in the will of God. The ordained life is defined by sacrifice and an ordained man can expect plenty of opportunity to die to his own will. It is through the bishops, priests and deacons that the non-ordained faithful have access to the sacraments. Without the bishops, priests and deacons, *“one cannot speak of the Church”* (CCC 1593). Therefore, we owe them a debt of gratitude for their sacrifices and their “yes” to God in order to serve and equip us for our works of ministry and mercy. All of us are priest, prophet and king as a result of our baptism. *“The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the “common priesthood of the faithful.”* Still, our ordained ministerial priests have given an extra measure of themselves *“to serve in the name and in the person of Christ”* (CCC 1591).

CCC 1592 The ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching (*munus docendi*), divine worship (*munus liturgicum*) and pastoral governance (*munus regendi*).

3. How does *Apostolic Succession* affect our daily lives?

Matthew 16:18-19 _____

John 20:19-23 _____

4. How can we trust in the preaching and teaching of the clergy? What is their role in our lives?

Ephesians 4:11-12 _____

2 Timothy 1:6-8 _____

Summary

Holy Orders is the sacrament by which a baptized man becomes a deacon, priest or bishop. Only the bishop *“receives the fullness of the sacrament”* and thus can confer this sacrament on other men. The sacrament is *“conferred by the laying on of hands followed by a solemn prayer of consecration asking God to grant the ordinand the graces of the Holy Spirit required for his ministry. Ordination imprints an indelible sacramental character.”* (CCC 1593, 1594, 1597, 1600)

Action Plan

Take a moment after Mass on Sunday to thank the priest and deacon for all that they do for the parish.

Memorize: John 20:21

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Marriage

Marriage is a permanent, exclusive and life-giving covenant relationship between a baptized man and a baptized woman “*who freely express their consent*” and “*mutually give themselves to each other*” which results “*in the two becoming one flesh*” (CCC 1625-1627). In marriage the man and woman become one in Christ and become a family. The groom and bride are called to give fully of themselves to one another in a lifelong commitment of fruitful fidelity. The married couple model the Holy Trinity in their life giving union. Christ-centered married love is the foundation the family is built upon. The family in turn is the basic building block of the Church and the community.

Discovering Marriage as Sacrament

In the Sacrament of Marriage, the man and woman, united in Christ, are given the grace to live out God’s plan for their married life. As men, we are called to lay down our lives daily for our wife and our children. We are to be faithful to our wife physically, emotionally and spiritually. We are to protect her and provide for her welfare and that of our children in every way. The most important way we love our wife and our children is to assist them in their respective Christian journeys. This involves both providing practical provisions to support their physical wellbeing and, primarily, praying for them. As the spiritual leader of our household, we are to provide a good Christian example and create a forum for learning and living out the Christian faith, both in our home and in the broader community.

CCC 1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God." This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."

CCC 1660 The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament.

CCC 1661 The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.

1. What does God have to say about what Marriage should be?

Genesis 1:26-28 _____

Genesis 2:21-24 _____

Matthew 19:3-12 _____

2. How are we to view marriage, both in society and specifically with our wife?

Hebrews 13:4-8 _____

Proverbs 18:22, 19:14 _____

Watch Video: [Forever Together](#) (*Marriage and Family: Wake Up Call*)

Responding to Marriage as Sacrament

Marriage is one of the three vocations available to a man as a disciple of Christ. The other vocations are ordained priesthood and living single for the Lord. Every disciple has a God given vocation and is called to a discernment process to discover God’s chosen vocation for them. All Christian vocations are designed to help us prosper in the will of God. Therefore, in married life we can expect plenty of opportunity to die to our own will. Let’s be real, our will and God’s will can be a world apart. God’s plan in marriage is that our salvation is through our spouse and the many opportunities we have to die to our own will and embrace the will of God and what is best for the faith journey of our wife and children. This is not our natural orientation so we need help, lots of help! In order to live a fruitful married life, we need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and enter into a deep prayer life with the Holy Trinity. This takes place in the context of the Mass, daily prayer, daily scripture reading and in fostering a vibrant Catholic Christian community both at home and in the community, where we can worship, dialogue and serve.

CCC 1666 The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.

3. How are we to live out Marriage as a Sacrament?

Ephesians 5:21-33 _____

Colossians 3:18-21 _____

1 Peter 3:7-9 _____

4. What is love? How can we love our wives for a lifetime?

1 Corinthians 7:1-16 _____

Ephesians 4:1-4 _____

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 _____

Summary

Marriage is life-long covenant relationship of love between a man and a woman. Love is not always a warm and fuzzy feeling, but the sacrificial giving of oneself for the beloved. Love is a decision.

Action Plan

Decide to love your wife by doing something for her that you usually don’t do but that you know she would be pleased to have done for her. Then kiss her and tell her again how much you love her.

Memorize: Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her.

Pillar 5: Service & Witness

The greatest commandment to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as our self; along with a plethora of other scripture passages, call all of us to service and witness. Many Christians seem to perceive this call as optional or at least excuse themselves as unqualified for the task. This is a lie. We are all called, as baptized Christians, to serve others and to witness to the Gospel. We are qualified by the Holy Spirit given to us at Baptism and affirmed in us at Confirmation. We are qualified through His love which is alive in us. It is of the utmost importance for our own spiritual growth that we serve and witness in His love.

Our Need for Service

When Jesus washed His apostles' feet He gave us an example that we should do as He did. This means that we should serve one another and do so with humility and love. Jesus, Lord of all, served His apostles so that we would know that we can be the servant of all.

Discovering Our Need for Service

Why do we need to serve and be served? It is not merely because Jesus said so. We are the body of Christ and we are one family. When we serve one another we serve Christ the Head of the Body, we serve our neighbor and we serve ourselves. This is true because we share a unity in the Spirit of God through our adoption at baptism. This reality becomes even more vivid as we die to self and live in the community of the Body of Christ. Some ways we live in community are by worshipping God in fellowship with our brothers and sisters, by serving our brothers and sisters with the same interest and care as we take care of our own needs and those of our family, and by sharing in love the truth of the Gospel. In addition, participating in works of mercy helps us to reform our character that has been damaged by our sin and by the sinful nature we inherited through the fall of Adam and Eve.

1. Read John 13:1-15, The Washing of the Disciple's Feet.

Why does John start this account by referring to Jesus having all things in His hands and that He was going to God?

Why does Peter resist having his feet washed?

What limitations have you placed on your willingness to serve or be served?

2. Read Matthew 25:31-46, The Judgement of the Nations.

Jesus describes what it will be like when He comes to judge all people. What does Jesus focus on as important to enter into His Kingdom?

Who does Jesus identify Himself with?

Who does Jesus says we are serving when we serve others in need?

How do you think you would fair if you were one of those present at this judgment process today?

Watch Video: [Serve The Lord](#) (*Marks of a True Christian: Serve The Lord*)

Responding to Our Need for Service

Bob Dylan is well known for his song “*You Got To Serve Someone*”. It is a matter of opinion whether he sang well, but he hit on a reality that most of us seem to miss. We tend to be too busy to actually think about it, but we are all serving someone or something. Our passion, our energy is directed, or perhaps misdirected, to obtain or achieve something. What is your passion? What are your goals? Do you know how these desires were formed in you? Do you know the source of these desires? Do you really believe they are worthy of your life?

The beginning of service is worship. We are servants of God’s Word, His Church and His mission. True service is motivated by love; love of God and love of neighbor. Our love of God leads us to look to serve Him in every situation we find ourselves in our daily lives, whether we be with our family, at work, in our parish or in our community. Those we serve are a gift to us. They are a path to a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior. “*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*” (Matthew 25:40).

“To follow Jesus involves living as He lived, accepting His message, adopting His way of thinking, embracing His destiny and sharing in His project which is the plan of the Father. It involves inviting everyone into communion with the Trinity and having the burning desire to invite others to encounter the One whom we have encountered. This is the start of the evangelizing mission of the whole Church.”
~ Saint Pope John Paull II, *Ecclesia in America*

CCC 910 “The laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them.”

CCC 1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the “old man” and to put on the “new man.”

3. Have you made a conscious decision about who you choose to serve? If not, who are you most likely serving? If you have chosen to serve God, how does this play out practically in your life?

Joshua 24:15-24 _____

Malachi 3:17-18 _____

4. What attitude should we have when we serve?

Sirach 2:1-9 _____

Romans 12:9-21 _____

Philippians 2:3-4 _____

Summary

Disciples of Christ continually grow in their desire to serve His Church. Their lives exhibit joyful service to others motivated by genuine concern for those around them. We are all called by Christ and His Church to throw off the chains of individualism that encourage a life filled with selfish pursuits to embrace the life of community in the Body of Christ where we can be more fully alive experiencing a reality that reaches far beyond ourselves.

Action Plan

Make or renew a conscious decision to serve God and His Church. Prayerfully discern how God wants you to serve Him and those around you as part of your daily life. Then, start doing it.

Memorize: Romans 12:11

Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Types of Service

There are an infinite number of ways we can serve others from the very simple to the sublime. The Church has traditionally referred to Christian service as “works of mercy” and has defined 14 specific works of mercy which are commonly separated into two types: the corporal works of mercy and the spiritual works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy are explicitly listed by Jesus in chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew. The spiritual works of mercy are explicit and implicit in the teachings of Christ throughout the gospels.

“All Christians are called to be hospitable. But it is more than serving a meal or filling a bed, opening the door—it is to open ourselves, our hearts to the needs of others. Hospitality is not just shelter, but the quality of welcome behind it.” ~ Dorothy Day

Discovering How We Can Serve

The seven corporal works of mercy are:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Visit the imprisoned
5. Shelter the homeless
6. Visit the sick
7. Bury the dead

The seven spiritual works of mercy are:

1. Admonish the sinner
2. Instruct the ignorant
3. Counsel the doubtful
4. Comfort the sorrowful
5. Bear wrongs patiently
6. Forgive all injuries
7. Pray for the living and the dead

- 1. Which of these works are you involved in? Have you ever walked away from an opportunity to serve in these ways? Why? What are the implications of walking away from opportunities to serve?**

Matthew 25:40-46 _____

- 2. How has your relationship with Christ changed your perspective of being a servant? Do you feel like you are making a difference, and is serving making a difference in you? If so, how?**

Luke 4:16-19 _____

Proverbs 28:25-27 _____

Watch Video: [Stand Up for the Poor](#) (*Stand Up: Stand Up for the Poor*)

Responding to How We Can Serve

As long as the world turns there will be more than enough needs to be met. In fact, most of us are acutely aware of the vast problems and needs that exist in our communities and the world. It is easy to be overwhelmed and think that we cannot make a difference. Yet as vast as these problems are; the Body of Christ is bigger. The Church militant, you, me and our brothers and sisters around the world, can overcome if we follow Jesus' lead and work for the common good. It starts with one person at a time, you!

St. Theresa of Calcutta (Mother Theresa) was once asked if she could change one thing about the church, what would that one thing be? Her simple reply was "Me."

Our decision to serve has a ripple effect. Consider the simple act of smiling. When we smile at someone there is a high probability they will smile back at us. Smiles are contagious. Similarly, when people see others helping, or are helped it often times inspires them to do likewise. Like smiling serving is contagious.

CCC 2044 The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church's mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians. "The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God."

3. How can we become better servants?

Matthew 5:3-12 _____

Philippians 2:1-8 _____

4. What is the most important thing about how we serve?

Matthew 20:25-27 _____

I Corinthians 13:1-3 _____

Summary

Jesus is the perfect model of a servant. As His disciples we are called to serve those in need. This includes the spiritually poor and the physically poor. The more we die to self and in Christ's love serve those in need, the deeper we will enter into the kingdom of God and the stronger the Church will be.

Action Plan

If there are any areas you have been afraid to serve, pray for God's perfect love to cast out this fear and cast out into the deep by serving in these areas.

Memorize: Hebrews 13:16

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have; God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind.

Our Mission to Witness

Imagine there is no water to be found anywhere. The entire population is going to die of thirst in less than 48 hours. Then you discover a way to absorb water from the air that can meet everyone's need for hydration. What would you do with this knowledge?

Today billions of people walk in darkness. They do not know the Lord of light and life. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; the way to everlasting joy. This life of ours is less than 48 hours compared to our life in eternity. We have the knowledge of eternal life. What are we doing with this gift?

Jesus has given us a mission. Mark's and Matthew's gospels and the first chapter of Acts contain Jesus' commandment to bring the good news to all people. It is notable that this is His final instruction to His apostles, a fact that highlights its importance. The apostles took Jesus serious and they and their successors have brought the good news to every continent, country and tribe. Today there are approximately three billion Christians. Over half of these are Catholics. Unfortunately, the past several decades have resulted in a significant increase in agnosticism and atheism in western countries. There are many contributing factors for this. Two primary factors are that many Christians have embraced two falsehoods, namely: faith is too personal to talk about, and second, all people are going to heaven any way so why should I share the good news of Jesus Christ. If we have been affected by these attitudes we need to shake free of them and embrace the loving call of Jesus to introduce others to His saving grace. Our faith is indeed very personal, but it is not and was never intended to be private. Jesus has given all of us the mission to share our faith with others and help make them disciples too.

"He said to them, 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.'" ~ Mark 16:15-16

Discovering Our Mission to Witness

How do we start to witness? Grab your Bible and run out and hit everyone you see over the head with it. No! Seriously, how do we start to witness? First we do our best to follow Jesus. To truly follow Jesus, we must learn who He is. So, we read His Word. We pray throughout the day and we participate in the sacraments as often as we can. We share our lives with other Christians. Then, we can imitate Jesus. We meet people where they are and ask God to help us to care about them. Then we share what God has done for us and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- 1. What does Peter witness about? How does he witness? Where does his inspiration come from? What is the result of his witness?**

Acts 2:32-41 _____

- 2. Who are we to witness to? Peter shares about his encounters with Jesus. What encounters with Jesus can I share about?**

Acts 10:34-48 _____

Watch Video: [Our Mission to Witness](#) (*Becoming Disciples: Go Make Disciples*)

Responding to Our Mission to Witness

It has been noted many times that one of the great saints once said, “Preach at all times and when necessary use words.” While it is true that we must witness to others in our actions and in the way we live out our life, it is imperative to also use words and speak to others about how God has worked in our life when the opportunity presents itself. Often that may even mean that we have to initiate things, speak first or turn an ongoing conversation toward God. We have the power. We can do it in the power of the Holy Spirit!

CCC 854 By her very mission, “the Church... travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.” Missionary endeavor requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are “a sign of God’s presence in the world,” and leads to the foundation of local churches. It must involve a process of inculturation if the Gospel is to take flesh in each people’s culture. There will be times of defeat. “With regard to individuals, groups, and peoples it is only by degrees that [the Church] touches and penetrates them, and so receives them into a fullness which is Catholic.”

CCC 2472 The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as witnesses of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known.

3. How is my life bringing Christ to others?

Matthew 5:13-16 _____

4. How far am I willing to go to bring Christ to others?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 _____

Summary

All baptized Christians are commanded to share the Gospel. Assuming we realize how great a gift our faith is, and that all people are our brothers and sisters, we should all desire to share our faith as well. The most effective witness is sharing how God has worked in our lives motivated by love for those we encounter.

Action Plan

Create a brief story that summarizes how God has worked in your life. Pray for an opportunity to share your story with a friend. Share your story with another in love.

Memorize: Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.’

Our Power to Witness

As disciples we do not represent ourselves. We represent Christ. We witness not in our own power but in the Power of the Holy Spirit. We are powerful when we are weak. In fact, when we have surrendered our will and it is no longer we who live but Christ that lives in us it is then we are most powerful. We are motivated by love for our brothers and sisters to exercise the power given us to witness to them about what God has done in our life. Faith comes through hearing and God wishes that none should perish and all be saved.

Discovering Our Power to Witness

It is rare if not unheard of that someone steps onto an athletic court or field and is an instant success. Our gifts and talents need to be developed. We need to train and grow. This is also true with sharing the Gospel. As we exercise the gifts we have received in baptism and confirmation we grow in our trust and faith in the promises of God and in our confidence and commitment to share the Gospel. As in any facet of life, the key is to get into the game. Nothing good will happen if we sit on the sidelines.

CCC 1304 Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the “character,” which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.

1. How do you know if the Holy Spirit has come upon you?

Acts 1:3-5,8 _____

2. Describe a time when the Holy Spirit provided you the words to say?

Luke 12:11-12 _____

3. How does Jesus’ final command and promise affect my ability to witness for Him?

Matthew 28:16-20 _____

Watch Video: [Our Power to Witness](#) (*Becoming Disciples: Mission Starts With Me*)

Responding to Our Power to Witness

If you will, we are all modern day John the Baptists. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (717-720), we learn that John the Baptist is the Lord’s immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare His way. “Prophet of the Most High,” John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother’s womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being “the friend of the bridegroom,” whom he points out as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Going before Jesus “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.

CCC 719 John the Baptist is "more than a prophet." In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets. John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah. He proclaims the imminence of the consolation of Israel; he is the "voice" of the Consoler who is coming. As the Spirit of truth will also do, John "came to bear witness to the light." In John's sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfills the longing of the angels. "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.... Behold, the Lamb of God."

Jesus is going to return someday, and it is our responsibility to prepare ourselves and to help prepare others. It is never too early or too late to start. Like John the Baptist, we have been given the one Spirit. It is time to stir it up, so as to do good works and to witness to the Gospel.

"We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers and sisters who, like us, have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God. For each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity." ~ Saint Pope John Paul II

4. How would you describe the Spirit of Power that is at work in you to share the gospel? If you are not experiencing this power, what are you willing to do to be filled with it?

2 Timothy 1:7-11 _____

5. How have you experienced the power of God in your weakness? Describe a time when you endured insults, hardships or persecutions for the sake of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 _____

Summary

We have been blessed with the gift of faith. Everyone hungers for this gift, yet they look for it in all the wrong places. As Christ's disciples, we have the responsibility to share this gift with all we meet. The power to do this comes from the Holy Spirit that lives in us. In the Holy Spirit, we can bring eternal life to the lost by being the love and mercy of Christ to others.

See Appendix D, *Going Deeper in Witness*, for a more detailed examination of our power to witness.

Action Plan

Rejoice and be glad for you are loved by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Every day share this joy with those you meet.

Memorize: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Appendix A

Reading and Interpreting Scripture

(For Spiritual Scuba Divers)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides significant guidance for applying scripture to our lives. The Church strongly encourages us, the faithful, to frequently read and study the Bible.

CCC 133 The Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'"

The Holy Spirit, through His Church, also encourages us to go beyond simply reading and to study the Scriptures and has provided, through the Catechism, detailed guidance on how we can properly interpret the Scriptures we are reading. The Holy Spirit is the author and interpreter of Sacred Scripture and thus we must read and understand Scripture through the Holy Spirit. In the Catechism paragraphs presented below, we learn about the three principles which should guide us in our quest to fully understand the Scriptures we are reading. We also learn about the four *senses* of Scripture which must also be applied to our attempts at understanding God's Word.

CCC 109 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.

CCC 110 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."

CCC 111 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.

CCC 112 1. *Be especially attentive "to the content and unity of the whole Scripture."* Different as the books which comprise 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.

CCC 113 2. *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 ("according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church").

CCC 114 3. *Be attentive to the analogy of faith.* By "analogy of faith" we mean the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.

CCC 115 According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

CCC 116 The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal."

CCC 117 *The spiritual sense.* Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

1. *The allegorical sense.* We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism.

2. *The moral sense.* The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction".

3. *The anagogical sense* (Greek: *anagoge*, "leading"). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

CCC 118 A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses:

The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith;
The moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

To fully understand the following passage, it is helpful to know the term *exegesis*, which is from a Greek word meaning "to lead out", is a critical explanation or interpretation of a text, particularly a religious text. An *exegete* is one who practices exegesis, thus we are the exegetes referred to below.

CCC 119 "It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgement. For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgement of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God."

But I would not believe in the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church already moved me.

How Good Readers Can Learn Meaning from the Bible

When we apply the guidance provided by the Church we begin to recognize how to approach scripture exegetically, seeking how to properly interpret, understand and explain it. Proper exegesis of Scripture systematically analyzes at least the following six aspects of the text: Historical, Grammatical, Rhetorical, Canonical, Liturgical, and Magisterial. The first letter of these six aspects can be remembered by the acrostic: “**H**ow **G**ood **R**eaders **C**an **L**earn **M**eaning.” This approach to interpreting Scripture is applied with respect to all four *senses of Scripture* described above.

The *Historical* Background of the Text.

It can be helpful to know the historical (and cultural) background of a biblical text, when it is possible to determine such matters. Commentaries are a good source to find historical background. Sometimes we don't know much about the background of a biblical text, and speculating about the possibilities can be fruitless or even misleading.

For example, a knowledge of ancient Near Eastern culture during the time the Old Testament was written can be very helpful in understanding the true meaning of certain passages. Take this law from Exodus and Deuteronomy:

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.” ~ Exodus 23:19, Deuteronomy 14:21

What is the point here? Is it that mixing milk and meat is an offense to God? A little research into ancient history and culture will reveal that boiling a young goat in its mother's milk was a magic ritual used in Canaanite sorcery. This helps us to understand the point of the passage: God doesn't want His people to imitate the witchcraft practiced by their pagan neighbors.

Likewise, in the New Testament, a knowledge of the history and culture of the times is helpful. For instance, consider this well-known story from John's gospel of the woman caught in adultery.

***A Woman Caught in Adultery.** Then each went to his own house, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.” ~ John 7:53-8:11*

There is much depth to this story. Without further study, we could easily interpret that Jesus excuses this woman's sin and that since all of us are sinners, none of us is in a position to judge the sinful acts of another. However, this is not fully consistent with Catholic teaching. It is important to know that at this time in history under Roman law, the Jews were not able to legally execute anyone. This is a matter of historical record and is also confirmed in Scripture itself in the passion narratives. It is also important to know that execution (in some cases stoning) was the legal punishment under the Mosaic Law for those caught *"in the very act of committing adultery"* as the scribes and Pharisees in this passage charge the woman. We can find these laws in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22-24. Note that these passages prescribe that both the woman and the man are to be executed. So a very important question to ask ourselves is "where is the man who was caught with this woman?" Why have the accusers not also presented to Jesus the man who was caught with the woman? What is really happening here is that these scribes and Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus and they have blatantly violated the very law they are condemning the woman of violating. Jesus recognizes this and utters the line, *"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."* They know that Jesus is telling them that this is a travesty of fair judgement and they quietly depart one by one. When Jesus tells the woman that He does not condemn her either, He is saying to her that He cannot legally condemn her without witnesses so she is free to go **and** He encourages her to change her ways and *"do not sin anymore"*. Jesus fully upholds and follows the law while at the same time showing mercy to the woman. He is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful. Also, we as His disciples are right to judge the sinful acts of others as wrong and are encouraged to teach them the errors of their ways, but we are never to judge another's heart nor their state of grace; that is God's business alone.

At other times, a knowledge of the history and culture may not change our understanding, but it does give us a greater appreciation of what the author is communicating. Take, for example, this statement of Jesus to the church in Laodicea in Revelation.

"I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." ~ Revelation 3:15-16

The city of Laodicea was notorious in the ancient world for its poor drinking water. Its water supply was brought from hot mineral springs many miles from the city. By the time it arrived in town, the water had cooled to lukewarm temperature, but still had a foul (probably sulfuric) taste.

The Grammar of the Text.

Grammar comprises two elements:

- Lexical Issues: the meaning of words
- Syntactical Issues: the arrangement of words (syntax)

Obviously, knowing the meaning of words is very important to the proper exegesis of a text! That is why, in order to do serious exegesis, it is necessary to master the languages in which Scripture was written. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew with a little Aramaic and Greek. The New Testament was written in Greek. Later, the Scriptures were translated into Latin and then much later to the various languages of the nations.

Since most of us are not masters of Hebrew, Greek or Latin, we must rely on those who are. We can consult the Magisterium through the Catechism, Church documents and the writings of the Saints. We can also or alternatively try to compare many translations and consult several commentaries that discuss the meaning of individual words. Even after consulting various translations we may not be sure which best captures the intended meaning.

Here is an example of when the meaning of words can make a difference in interpretation. Older translations of John 14:2 used to say, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” But the word used in the original Greek actually means “dwellings”. Thus, more recent translations render as follows: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” There is an important difference. When we translate with “*mansions*,” the emphasis is placed on the luxury of our heavenly accommodations. However, when the proper word “*dwellings*” is used, we see that Jesus is not emphasizing the luxury of heaven, but simply the fact that there will be room for us there and we will be in communion with Him.

The *Rhetorical* Features of the Text.

The *Rhetorical* features of a text refers to all the higher-level literary features beyond simply the meaning of the words and their arrangement. The *rhetorical* features of a text include such concepts as Genre, Literary Devices and Structure.

Genre. The *Genre* of a text refers to the type of literature of the text such as history, poetry, hymn, psalm, proverb, parable, apocalyptic or others. A great number of interpretive mistakes are made by confusing genres; such as reading poetry as if it were history. For example, consider the following description of God:

“Smoke rose from his nostrils, a devouring fire from his mouth; it kindled coals into flame.” ~ Psalm 18:9

Does God really look like a fire-breathing dragon? Of course not. This is not historical or scientific writing, it is poetry, which uses images to communicate meaning.

Literary Devices. The term *Literary Device* covers a broad range of ways in which words are used in artistic, unconventional, or non-literal ways. One such literary device is *hyperbole* which consists in making an overstatement for the sake of emphasis. As was customary in the Jewish culture of His day, Jesus used hyperbole to emphasize the seriousness of principles. Consider the following statement of Jesus during His teaching about adultery in the Sermon on the Mount.

“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” ~ Matthew 5:30

Seen any one-handed saints lately? The Church has always realized and taught that Jesus was speaking non-literally here, using a bold statement to emphasize the seriousness of His point. Lists of literary devices are readily available on the internet, if you simply google “literary devices.”

Structure. The term *structure* refers to the way a text is arranged as a whole. A common structural device in biblical literature is *chiasm* which is arranging a text so that the first and last elements correspond, the second and second-to-last correspond, and so on. There are many other structural patterns as well. This device is used extensively in the Noah narratives.

The *Canonical* Context of the Text.

The word *canon* refers to the authoritative list of books which are inspired and therefore constitute the Bible. The *canonical context* of a text is the place of that text within the context of the whole canon (i.e. the whole Bible; all Scripture). When we read any passage of Scripture, we need to interpret the meaning of that passage within the context of all of Scripture.

When we examine a text in its canonical context, we need to look for a few things. First, examine the structure of the canonical book. Where does the text fit into that structure? Some texts are placed in more important positions than others. For example, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) have an important position in Matthew. Matthew likes to group Jesus' teachings into blocks. He has five such large blocks of teaching in his book. The first and largest block is the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most definitive statement of his teaching (Chapters 5-7). Within the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes have the first place. As the introduction to Jesus' first and most important discourse in Matthew, the Beatitudes are extremely prominent. Whatever they have to say is key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' message as a whole.

Secondly, when examining the place of a text within the context of the book, examine how the text interacts with other texts within the same book. We can ask ourselves several questions:

- Is this passage related to other passages?
- Does another passage in the same book speak to the same issues as this passage?
- If so, does that cast light on the significance of this passage?

For example, in the Gospel of John, Mary appears only twice; at the wedding at Cana and at the foot of the cross. One event begins Jesus' ministry and the other event closes Jesus' ministry. Mary being at both events ties the two events together and suggests two things:

- There is something important about Mary relevant to Jesus' ministry.
- The wedding at Cana and the cross are somehow related.

When we read the two passages in light of each other, interesting correlations start to appear. We begin to find nuptial images in the account of Jesus' crucifixion.

Thirdly, when examining the place of a text within the context of the same book, pay attention to how the text relates to the themes and overall message of the book. Using the Beatitudes as an example again, we may observe that the Kingdom of Heaven is perhaps the major theme of Matthew, and Jesus as the King of that Kingdom might qualify as the overall message of the book. Now the Beatitudes describe the attitudes and dispositions that characterize kingdom citizens, that is, those who belong to the kingdom and will inherit it. That's how Matthew 5:1-12 fits into the larger message of Matthew.

Fourth and finally, it is also important to examine the text within the context of the canon (the Bible) as a whole. This is what the Catechism means when it says to "*be especially attentive the content and unity of the whole Scripture.*" (CCC 112) In other words, we must interpret the text in light of all of Scripture, the whole canon. This means we must understand what place the text has within the divine economy and we must also be aware of related texts both earlier and later in the canon. Related texts are texts that speak on the same subject, or perhaps serve as a source for the present text, or use the present text as a source.

The following exercise is an example of interpreting a text within the canon as a whole. Consider this Old Testament passage:

“When a man, after marrying a woman, is later displeased with her because he finds in her something indecent, and he writes out a bill of divorce and hands it to her, thus dismissing her from his house,” ~ Deuteronomy 24:1

Does this verse imply that divorce is acceptable for God’s people?

To answer that correctly, one first has to be aware that Deuteronomy was written by Moses after struggling with the people of Israel and their rebellious ways for forty years. In several places, Deuteronomy has laws that clearly have a lower standard, especially from a moral and liturgical standpoint, than laws that were spoken by God earlier at Sinai in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.

Then, one also has to be aware of what Jesus says later on the same subject:

“He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.””
~ Matthew 19:8-9

Here Jesus clearly holds up the creational model for marriage of one man and one woman, for life, as being the divine intention, not the concessions introduced later by Moses due to the Israelites’ stubbornness for forty years in the wilderness.

One also should ponder the following verse from an Old Testament prophet long preceding Jesus:

“For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, ... You should be on guard, then, for your life, and you must not break faith.” ~ Malachi 2:16

The point is this: one cannot simply read Deuteronomy 24:1 and apply it directly to contemporary life. When interpreted in the context of the whole canon, we see that God does not desire divorce, though for a time He allowed Moses to permit it for hard-hearted Israel. Why did God permit it? The rabbis said: to prevent spousal abuse or even murder among the Israelites.

The following paragraphs from the Catechism provide guidance on the Canonical Context principle.

CCC 112 1. *Be especially attentive “to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.”* Different as the books which comprise 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.

CCC 134 “All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ”

The Liturgical Context of the Text.

Another principle of interpretation mentioned by the Catechism is to keep in mind the living tradition of the Church. If one studies the major theologians of tradition (Congar, Corbon, etc.) one will soon discover that the liturgy is the privileged expression of the Church's living tradition. Therefore, we can gain spiritual insight into the meaning of a text by observing its use within the liturgy.

The Magisterial Context of the Text.

As *Dei Verbum* and other magisterial documents and the Catechism (CCC 95, 100) have stated, the ultimate interpreter of Scripture is not the guild of biblical scholars (who never completely agree among themselves anyway) but the Church's Magisterium (teaching authority). Therefore it is necessary to see if the meaning of a given text has been defined in a definitive way by the Magisterium at some point in church history. It is also relevant to examine the papal, conciliar, and patristic comments on a certain text, even if they are not infallible.

Discovering where and when the Magisterium has spoken about a certain text of Scripture is not easy. One place to start is to check the biblical indices in the popular compendiums of dogma or church documents (like Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*; or Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*). One can also search papal or magisterial documents electronically for keywords or text references. The biblical index to the Catechism can also be checked. A recent resource is a website hosted by the Congregation for the Clergy: www.bibliaclerus.org. It allows one to search an electronic database of patristic and magisterial documents for references to a specific text.

Appendix B

Going Deeper with the Eucharist

(For Spiritual Scuba Divers)

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that the Holy Eucharist is the “Real Presence” of Jesus Christ, “body, blood, soul and divinity”.

“Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, “Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.”

As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.” ~ John 6:53-66

Today more than half of Catholics do not believe the Eucharist is literally the physical body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Perhaps even some of us doubt Jesus words and this teaching of the Church. Why do we doubt what Jesus said? Do we struggle to believe that Jesus loves us this much? Do we not believe that Jesus, who spoke all of creation into being, can come to us in the form of bread? Do we struggle to believe the King of kings could be so humble? Perhaps we will find the words Jesus spoke in John 20:27 to Thomas helpful. After Thomas probed the wounds in Jesus’ hands, feet and side; Jesus said, “...do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Also, the response of the father in Mark 9:24 after he questioned Jesus’ ability to cast out the demon from his possessed son are similar, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” Whatever is at the root of our struggle to believe; we need to humbly take the attitude of this desperate brother. Lord, “I do believe, help my unbelief!” We need to trust that God does indeed love us *that* much.

CCC 1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

CCC 1327 In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."

We know we really finally have come to believe when we cannot get enough of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus is available to us every day in the Eucharist, "body, blood, soul and divinity'. He invites us to receive Him. Do we really want Him? Are we willing to give something up in our daily schedule to receive Him? Fr. Mike Schmitz teaches that three things mark the life of a true disciple. "When one truly becomes a disciple of Christ they spend their time differently, they spend their money differently and they choose their friends differently." Each day we opt to receive Jesus in the Eucharist we do just this; we change the way we spend our time and who we spend it with and we forgo an opportunity for worldly riches. To the world this may be nonsense, but it is literally *perfect* sense.

Scripture exhorts us to receive the Eucharist well. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying." ~ 1 Corinthians 11:27-30

This is pretty daunting! God's compassion and mercy are inexhaustible and yet we are called to be holy and faithful. So here are some big picture ways we can prepare to receive the Eucharist well:

- Try to discern His will for our life and do it.
- When we fail, repent, seek His mercy in confession and continue the fight.
- Regularly ask for more of His Holy Spirit and allow His Spirit to be stirred-up within us through prayer.
- Surround ourselves with others who are also trying to do His will.
- Pray and read Scripture every day. If we say we love God and do not spend time with Him in prayer every day we are deceiving ourselves. Praying in Adoration is particularly powerful.

Clearly there are many other ways in our daily lives we can prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist. If we spend quality time with God, He will show us how.

Here are a few elements of the Mass that can help prepare us to receive the Eucharist well:

- Before Mass, read the *Preparation for Mass* prayer written by Saint Thomas Aquinas which can be found on the last page of the *Breaking Bread* hymnal and the final page of this appendix. This prayer helps us to focus on the importance and power of the Eucharist.
- When the priest processes into the church, recall how in the early days of the church Eucharistic processions would take place from where the apostles would consecrate the bread and wine to the surrounding towns where the new Christians lived so they could share in the Eucharist. Also recall how today at every moment somewhere on this planet the Eucharist is being consecrated.
- During the offering of the gifts, think of how God can do great things with the simple gifts we bring.

- The words of the Eucharistic Prayer leading up to the “Holy, Holy, Holy” remind us that we are joining in the one Mass where Jesus is both priest and victim; offering Himself unendingly to the Father. We enter into heaven to partake in this one Mass joining the choir of angels and all the saints in their unending song of praise to experience a taste of heaven. (CCC 1326)
- During the Eucharistic Prayer, be aware of the miracle that takes place on the altar and the power of the words of Jesus – who through His word speaks all creation into being – and through His words spoken by the priest *in persona Christi* “*This is my body, this is my blood*” transforms the substance of bread and wine into His Body and Blood.
- Then the words of the Our Father also point us to the Eucharist where His will is done on earth as it is in heaven and we are provided with His daily “super substantial bread”.
- The Sign of Peace also reminds us how important is to forgive and to be forgiven before we receive the Lord and points to the unity that we will all share as we become one with Jesus in the Eucharist.
- Then we here, “*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world*”, and we know Jesus is the one true sacrifice who died once on the cross. Again we hear, “*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world*”, and we know He is the Lamb that was slain who now stands before the Father interceding for us. A third time we hear, “*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world*”, and we know He is the source of all peace and brings us peace in the Eucharist.
- As we pray “*Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed*”, we recall the centurion who first spoke these words and his great faith in the authority of Christ, and we are reminded to pray for greater faith.
- As we walk up the aisle to receive Jesus, we may consider the road to Emmaus and how the hearts of the disciples who walked with Jesus burned with fire as their minds were opened to the truth of the Gospel and the love of God.
- When we receive Jesus, we know that we are one with Jesus for a time so we know to be still and listen, to desire the Great Physician’s scalpel to cut away the disobedience in our lives and help us to obey Him, the Lord of all love and truth.

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” ~ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Preparation for Mass

Prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas

Almighty and ever-living God, I draw near to the sacrament of your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I come sick to the physician of life, unclean to the fountain of mercy, blind to the light of eternal brightness, poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth.

So I ask you, most generous Lord: graciously heal my infirmity, wash me clean, illumine my blindness, enrich my poverty, and clothe my nakedness.

May I receive the Bread of angels, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, with such reverence and humility, such contrition and devotion, such purity and faith, and such resolve and determination as may secure my soul's salvation. Grant as I may receive not only the visible sign of the Lord's Body and Blood, but also all the reality and the power of the sacrament.

Grant most kind God, that I may receive the Body of your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, which He received from the Virgin Mary, and may receive it in such a way that I become a loving part of His Mystical Body and counted among His members.

O most loving Father, grant me your beloved Son.

While on this earthly pilgrimage, I receive Him under the veil of this sacrament; so may I come at last to see Him face to face for all eternity. For He lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. Amen.

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Your wounds, hide me.
Separated from You, let me never be.
From the evil one, protect me.
At the hour of my death, call me.
and close to You, bid me.
That with Your saints, I may be.
Praising You forever and ever. Amen.

Appendix C

How to Go to Confession

Adapted from the Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

Preparation – Examination of Conscience:

Before going to confession, take some time to prepare. Begin with prayer and reflect on your life since your last confession. How have you; in your thoughts, words, and actions; neglected to live Christ’s commands to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39)?

As a help with this “*Examination of Conscience*” you might review the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21) or the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10 or Luke 6:20-26).

You can find several samples of Examinations of Conscience on the USCCB website under [Penance/Examinations of Conscience](#).

Greeting:

The priest will welcome you. He may say a short blessing or read a Scripture passage.

Together, you and the priest will make the Sign of the Cross.

You may then begin your confession with these or similar words: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [give days, months, or years] since my last confession.”

Confession:

Confess all your sins to the priest. If you are unsure what to say, ask the priest for help. It is only necessary to list your sins. You do not need to tell the priest all the conditions which led to your sin. Simply tell him what you did and about how many times you did it.

It is usually helpful to remember that the priest is present “*in the person of Christ (in persona Christi)*”. So it is really Jesus you are telling your sins to and Jesus who absolves you. God longs to forgive us and restore the deep intimate relationship He desires with us.

When you are finished, conclude with these or similar words: “I am sorry for these and all my sins.”

Penance:

The priest will propose an act of penance. The penance might be prayer, a work of mercy or an act of charity. He might also counsel you on how to better live a Christian life.

Act of Contrition:

After the priest has conferred your penance, pray an Act of Contrition, expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving to sin no more. Some suggested Acts of Contrition are:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against You Whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with Your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy.

Or:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.

Absolution:

The priest will extend his hands over your head and pronounce the words of absolution.

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You respond: Amen.

Praise:

The priest will usually praise the mercy of God and will invite you to do the same. For example, the priest may say, “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.” Your response would be, “His mercy endures forever” (Rite of Penance, no. 47).

Dismissal:

The priest will conclude the sacrament, often saying, “Go in peace.”

Notes:

If it has been a while since your last confession, remember, “Do not fear” (Isaiah 41:10). The priest will help guide you.

For more information, visit the [Penance section of the USCCB website](#).

Appendix D

Going Deeper in Witness

(For Spiritual Scuba Divers)

Obstacles to Helping Others Encounter Jesus

Today we face a crisis of truth. Indeed, throughout history we have faced this same crisis. The father of lies may have rolled out a few new deceptions, perhaps none more effective than distraction and relativism. Today people are more interested and know more about Yoda and other fictional characters than they know about Jesus Christ. We all seek meaning in our life. Today some find fiction as good a source of meaning as truth, as relativism blurs the lines between time tested tenants of divine law and natural law with the babel of confused narcissistic minds. Bauerlein in his book *The Dumbest Generation* noted an increasing ignorance of history, philosophy and the big picture.

“The fonts of knowledge are everywhere, but the rising generation is camped in the desert, passing stories, pictures, tunes, and texts back and forth, living off the thrill of peer attention. Meanwhile, their intellects refuse the cultural and civic inheritance that has made us what we are up to now.”

This is more and more becoming the norm. People all around us do not know their own plight. They are unfamiliar with who made them, who their Father is, what their inheritance can be, the consequences of their choices, their need for Christ, as well as their membership in a great family, the glories of heaven and the finality of hell. They are blown here and there like a ship without a rudder. *“A man who stands for nothing, will fall for everything.”* (Malcolm X). Aimlessly afloat, their destination is bleak. However, their stories do not need to end badly. We have an amazing opportunity to make a glorious difference led by the Holy Spirit to be salt and light that helps direct others to the Author of Life!

A large portion of the world’s population exist at level one of Aristotle’s pyramid of happiness; focused on self-indulgence and addicted to junk food, sensuality and adrenaline rush. Many others are stuck at level two seeking fulfillment in accomplishment and possessions. Yet, there is a way to direct their attention away from themselves and toward levels three and four of Aristotle’s hierarchy where they can encounter the freedom and joy of loving and serving God and others. For those stuck in this rut, Christ is the answer. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6) and *“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10)

Let’s be clear. Jesus is a historical reality. There is no valid intellectual argument that Jesus did not live. The most hardened atheist knows Jesus really lived and was crucified and may even acknowledge His moral teaching. They trip over His resurrection and His claims to be God; as well as the existence of any God. The thing is, Jesus’ life, claims and resulting impact on others demand a verdict. If Jesus is not a liar or a lunatic, He must be Lord. He has done more than anyone could ever imagine to be the way for us back to the Father. Jesus is not only Good News – He is the best news!

As great as the good news is and as supreme as Jesus is, still a general air of indifference toward Him, if not animosity, rests over our communities. Even, most of those who attend church every Sunday seem to miss the significance of Jesus. Why is this? Perhaps it is due to ignorance, presumption, distraction, selfishness, self-importance and self-reliance.

Ignorance. Ignorance flows from a lack of education and openness to truth. Today there is greater access to more information than ever before. Ironically, this combined with other social factors has contributed to rising ignorance of Christ. The pure volume of information has increased the competition for the ever shrinking amount of perceived discretionary time people have. Not only is there more information, there are more pursuits. People's lives are so busy today they have not learned how to discern. Even if they have developed the ability to discern, they hardly have the time to do so. This combined with the hijacking of our public schools and media have resulted in a very confused population. Somehow we need to make time for things that really matter. Bobby's baseball game and Jenny's soccer game as well as shopping for new furniture need to take their proper place.

Presumption and Distraction. When it comes to the significance of Jesus, presumption is also a big problem. If everyone thinks that everyone is going to heaven, then Jesus becomes superfluous. If one believes sin is not a problem, then that one will see no need for a savior. Virtually everyone wants to go to heaven, the problem is everyone assumes or at least has a vague hope that they are going to heaven. God is merciful, right? God is indeed merciful, yet He is also just and confusion among believers and unbelievers alike regarding the "Four Last Things" (death, judgement, heaven and hell) is rampant. Devoid of reason (tending toward sentiment) and lacking an awareness of paradise lost, since they are ignorant of who they truly are, where they come from, and where they are going, souls close themselves from God in a life of distraction and self-amusement; steadily sinking into self-absorption and sin. Ignorant of reason, morality, cultural norms and historical lessons they have little to protect them from falling prey to sensual desires and other distractions. We can see why ignorance and presumption are dangerous bedfellows. They lead to a vortex of sin and separate us from God and the truth. Relativism, materialism, hedonism and other "isms" are sweeping generations away from Jesus. It is difficult enough to stay in God's will for our own life, let alone bring others along with us.

St. Bernard presents an analysis of the downward spiral of sin that echoes the theme of souls walled off from God, *"Let him who yields to sin take note that he has raised another wall against himself by that wicked and unlawful consent. A man of this kind cannot boast that for him the Bridegroom stands behind the wall, because not one wall but walls now intervene...But what if the repetition of sin becomes a habit, or the habit induces contempt, as Scripture says: When wickedness comes, contempt comes also". (Proverbs 18:3) If you die like this, will you not be devoured a thousand times by those that roar as they await their food, before you can reach the bridegroom now shut off from you not merely by one, but a succession of walls? The first is sensual; the second consent; the third, the action; the fourth, habit; the fifth, contempt."*

Self-Centeredness. Self-importance and self-reliance are also obstacles to receiving Christ. It is hard to accept Jesus as Lord if one is their own lord. It is also difficult to take Jesus seriously if we take ourselves too seriously. We see this truth in Proverbs 3:5, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely”*. Saint Teresa of Avila also testified to the outcome of self-reliance in her life. *“Self-reliance was what destroyed me. I give you one counsel; that you don’t think that through your own strength or efforts you can arrive, for reaching this stage is beyond our power; if we try to reach it, the devotion you have will grow cold.”* Jeremiah hit the nail on the head, *“Blessed are those who trust in the Lord; the Lord will be their trust.”* (Jeremiah 17:7)

Effectively Helping Others Encounter Jesus

So with all these obstacles and perhaps others facing the gospel, how do we effectively help others encounter Jesus? The first thing we need to keep in mind is that the Great Commission is God’s work and that He calls us to share in that work. If we experience pressure or anxiety as we approach this mission it may be a sign that we have forgotten that we are doing His work by the power of His Spirit. Next, as we move in the Holy Spirit we can do no better than to focus on the primacy of love. Jesus’ life and the New Testament clearly emphasize the need to love one another. The key to opening the hearts and minds of others to the truth of the gospel is the genuine experience of God’s love. The greatest deficiency in the lives of many is the lack of receiving God’s love and this more than ignorance, presumption, distraction, self-importance and self-reliance discussed above is of primary concern. People don’t care what you know until they know that you care. We need to be God’s love by truly loving others. We need to win each person, not each argument. It cannot be over emphasized that, in general, love brings people to the truth. This is also how Jesus related. Only in the case of the spiritually proud did He lead with the truth. He always related to the confused sinner with love, and then gently revealed the truth. His love took the form of recognizing their value and helping to meet their needs. Then He called them to God’s will. Like Jesus, we are called to humbly affirm others in service and witness. We, like Jesus, need to take a real interest in others. In doing so we will remind them of their dignity, value and potential. Our witness should be specific and affirming; messages like “I believe you can do it” or “I like the way you did that” are good ways to empower others. We have to meet people where they are and love them into the kingdom. Jesus said, *“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:35)

We are the messengers of the great commission, ambassadors for Christ, called and moved by love, genuine concern and care for others in this life and the next. In order to love we need to recognize Christ in others and the plan He has for others. Consider this story. Two Capuchin Brothers were walking in New York City and were passing by a prostitute. Sensing her presence, one of the brothers diverted his eyes and walked quickly by. After several strides he noticed the other brother was no longer at his side. He stopped and looked back to witness his brother’s back to him and gazing at the prostitute. He returned to “rescue” his brother and as he approached he noted tears streaming down his face. The returning brother asked him “What is wrong?” The other brother responded “I can see the woman that God is calling her to be.” If we are to effectively evangelize, we need to see Jesus in others and envision His plan for each soul in faith and hope. If we look through critical eyes, God’s love in us dies and we cannot bring the living Word to them. However, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be the presence of Jesus’ love for them in their life.

Our effectiveness as God's messengers is dependent on our union with God. This means if we are to be effective we need to stay in communion and communication with God. To be in communion with God we need to stay in grace by being free from sin. This, practically speaking, means repenting and working through ways to avoid falling into sin. We also need to frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Once a month is a good minimum frequency of confession for an effective disciple.

We can avoid falling into sin by focusing on how God is leading us. When we repent we need to ask the Holy Spirit to show us the true way to fulfill the desire that led us to sin, or the way to heal the dysfunction that led us to sin. To stay in communication with God we also need to pray constantly. God is in the present so we need to stay in the present and stay attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need to take time to develop our interior life so we continue to grow in faith, hope and love as well as docility to the Holy Spirit.

When evangelizing today it is helpful to keep in mind common aversions of people we may encounter including aversion to philosophical banter, contemplation and quiet, hard work and suffering, and religious formula. It also helps to be prepared for widespread ignorance of Christ and the Christian worldview as well as historical and cultural lessons. Furthermore, today in conversation it is common to encounter illogical thought processes and positions. Evangelistic efforts should then tread carefully, especially in the early stages, as most will not embrace inconvenience or leave their turf. A simple question that provides a good starting point is: Are you content and at peace with your life? This or similar questions can rock the boat and open a door here or a window there to share and show that Jesus is the only way to peace and contentment. Continuing in this way of thinking, there must be a replacement for the habits that only breed discontentment. A Christian must identify and provide surrogates for their movie, music and distracting habits that introduce them to God rather than distract them from God. The purpose of this is to meet them where they are most comfortable, and to introduce them and lead them deeper into knowledge and relationship with Jesus through quality movie, music, books etc. that they are likely to enjoy. Careful consideration should be given to the selection of such items to provide surrogates that provide a manageable progression away from worldly distraction to a living encounter with Jesus. Other questions that may also help others to look deeper include:

- What is the driving purpose for your life?
- Do you experience a lack of freedom in your life?
- Do you feel enslaved to any behaviors, objects or people?

Aside from this approach as a formula, God in His infinite mercy may see fit to dispatch with such plans and cut right to the heart. Those who are docile to the Holy Spirit may receive words of knowledge similar to Jesus in His encounter with the woman at the well. Again, in all of our efforts, it is imperative to relate to others in Spirit-filled love and humble, genuine concern for them. Loving service often paves the way to helping others on their journey with Jesus.

Let's go make disciples!