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Syllabus Handouts

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My Career and Me

Summary

How does my career define me? Am I happy with my career? Looking for change or reaffirmation? Do I have the right balance of work & family?

Objective

Who is the same job as they were five years ago? Who will be in the same job in five years from now? There are no more 35 year jobs anymore. We are in a different economy than our father's. Today's career is mobile and dynamic.

We all need plans (1, 3 & 5 year plans). We need to be always transitioning to the next phase of our career. Every day, we are constructing our exit ramps. Networking is key in a "small" city like Cincinnati.

As a provider for our family, we have a responsibility to provide through a working career both contingency and growth. However, we have to achieve that with humility and balance.

Bible Readings

1. Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you-oracle of the LORD-plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me—oracle of the LORD and I will change your lot; I will gather you together from all the nations and all the places to which I have banished you-oracle of the LORD-and bring you back to the place from which I have exiled you.

2. Proverbs 24:27

Prepare your outside work, Make it fit for yourself in the field; And afterward build your house.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2427-2429

2427 Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another.²¹⁰ Hence work is a duty: "If any one will not work, let him not eat."²¹¹ Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work²¹² in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ.

2428 In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work.

Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community.

2429 Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

Small Group Questions

1. Have you had a career change in recent years? How did it affect your family?
2. Does your current job align with long term plans?

Recommended Resources

1. "What Color is My Parachute?" by Dick Bolles
2. "Dream Manager" by Matthew Kelly
3. <http://www.adultmentor.com>
4. Balancing Work and Family
<http://umaine.edu/publications/4186e/>

Accountability

1. Go through "Dream Manager" activity or similar program.
2. Discuss goals with wife and family.

Author(s)

Walt Moll & Anthony Your

Included Resources

Work-life balance: Tips to reclaim control

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/work-life-balance/WL00056>

There was a time when the boundaries between work and home were fairly clear. Today, however, work is likely to invade your personal life — and maintaining work-life balance is no simple task. Still, work-life balance isn't out of reach. Start by evaluating your relationship to work. Then apply specific strategies to help you strike a healthier balance.

Married to your work? Consider the cost

It can be tempting to rack up hours at work, especially if you're trying to earn a promotion or manage an ever-increasing workload. Sometimes overtime may even be required. If you're spending most of your time working, though, your home life will take a hit. Consider the consequences of poor work-life balance:

- **Fatigue.** When you're tired, your ability to work productively and think clearly may suffer — which could take a toll on your professional reputation or lead to dangerous or costly mistakes.
- **Lost time with friends and loved ones.** If you're working too much, you may miss important family events or milestones. This can leave you feeling left out and may harm relationships with your loved ones. It's also difficult to nurture friendships if you're always working.
- **Increased expectations.** If you regularly work extra hours, you may be given more responsibility. This may lead to only more concerns and challenges.

Strike a better work-life balance

As long as you're working, juggling the demands of career and personal life will probably be an ongoing challenge. Use these ideas to help you find the work-life balance that's best for you:

- **Track your time.** Track everything you do for one week, including work-related and personal activities. Decide what's necessary and what satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy or can't handle — or share your concerns and possible solutions with your employer or others.
- **Take advantage of your options.** Ask your employer about flex hours, a compressed workweek, job sharing, telecommuting or other scheduling flexibility. The more control you have over your hours, the less stressed you're likely to be.

- **Learn to say no.** Whether it's a co-worker asking you to spearhead an extra project or your child's teacher asking you to manage the class play, remember that it's OK to respectfully say no. When you quit doing the things you do only out of guilt or a false sense of obligation, you'll make more room in your life for the activities that are meaningful to you and bring you joy.
- **Leave work at work.** With the technology to connect to anyone at any time from virtually anywhere, there may be no boundary between work and home — unless you create it. Make a conscious decision to separate work time from personal time. When you're with your family, for instance, turn off your cell phone and put away your laptop computer.
- **Manage your time.** Organize household tasks efficiently, such as running errands in batches or doing a load of laundry every day, rather than saving it all for your day off. Put family events on a weekly family calendar and keep a daily to-do list. Do what needs to be done and let the rest go. Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully. Take notes if necessary.
- **Bolster your support system.** At work, join forces with co-workers who can cover for you — and vice versa — when family conflicts arise. At home, enlist trusted friends and loved ones to pitch in with child care or household responsibilities when you need to work overtime or travel.
- **Nurture yourself.** Eat healthy foods, include physical activity in your daily routine and get enough sleep. Set aside time each day for an activity that you enjoy, such as practicing yoga or reading. Better yet, discover activities you can do with your partner, family or friends — such as hiking, dancing or taking cooking classes.

Sharing your Growing Faith with Long Time Friends

Summary

How do you share your blossoming faith with old friends who "knew you when..."? Do you slide back into the old routine when you're with them or do you proudly proclaim your faith? What if they challenge you? Are you equipped to answer them in a way that will encourage them to consider the faith without repelling them from the Church?

Objective

You can feel your faith growing. You even enjoy discussing faith in the right company such as Church functions, Father's Team, conversations with people who you know agree with you, and maybe even in arguments with people who are clearly opposed to your beliefs and very easy to disagree with. But how do you integrate faith into your friendships? How about with friends or family who have left the Catholic Church? Growing faith can create a feeling of contradiction when you are placed in situations and with people that used to be familiar and comfortable. Now you may find that some of those situations do not support your faith and what you have grown to believe. Discerning how to use the gifts your faith has brought and how to integrate this into your relationships can be challenging. The objective of this topic is to uncover some useful ways share your faith and draw your friends closer to God.

Bible Readings

1. Mat.4:19

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men

2. Mk.16:15

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel

3. Jn.15:16

Ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit (See also Mat.24:14)

4. Isa.6:8

Whom shall I send? Here am I; send me

5. Lk.9:2

(Jesus) sent them to preach...the Kingdom of God

6. Jn.20:21

As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 905

Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, "that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life." For lay people, "this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world."

2. Paragraph 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."

Small Group Questions

1. Have people noticed a change in you? Have you had the courage to tell them about your faith? About father's team, etc.

Recommended Resources

2. http://shop.mycatholicfaith.org/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=122
3. <http://www.stpatparish.org/evangelization/practicalways.pdf>
4. <http://www.aquinasandmore.com/catholic-books/How-Not-To-Share-Your-Faith/sku/1830/affiliate/catholicpage4375/t/3>

Accountability

1. Tell at least 2 friends about Father's team.

Author(s)

Chris Runte & Tony Heekin

Stages of Fatherhood: Changes of the 8's – Age 0-8, 8-16, 16-24

Summary

We recognize stages of marriage; here we will examine the stages of Fatherhood. From birth to 8 years old – you are the most important man in your child's life, from 9-16 your relationship will wane and the mom may play the dominant role (especially with girls), from 17-24 – you will wonder where the kids went. Join us to understand how to cope with these stages.

Objective

Our objective in this discussion is to better recognize and deal with the various stages of lives that our children are going through so we can better respond as a parent/father to help them develop and to give us a chance, as fathers, to enhance and preserve our relationship with our children.

Parenting an infant/toddler

- “The challenge for first-time dads is learning how to be patient and to be a server. Infants and toddlers feel like their world revolves around them and it does — they need to be taken care of and can't do things on their own.”
- Prioritize. People tell you a baby will change your life but until it actually happens to you, it's hard to comprehend the time and investment but also the joy.
- Keep your sense of humor. A dad who laughs when his son wakes him up 50 times a night, accidentally sprays him in face with urine, and poops in the tub will be a happier dad.
- Being an involved dad means changing diapers, feeding and disciplining from the beginning. That kind of dad will also remain more involved when his child is a teen.
- Support mom. She's overwhelmed. Make time for each other.
- Play with your child. Dads tend to be less verbal and more hands-on, and research suggests that's important for children.
- Take an interest in whatever your child is interested in: If you have a daughter who loves to dress up, do some make-believe with her, have a tea party.
- Read to your child starting at a very young age. Cuddle when you read: Touch is huge in terms of attachment — hug, kiss, hold hands.

Parenting school-age kids

- “These are formative years, the time when a child develops trust issues, social interaction, overall personality. The challenge is to be consistent, provide security, establish routines. Older dads regret they didn't spend enough time with their children. Fathers mistakenly feel that their most important task as a father is to work and earn money.” Kids will ask 500,000 questions before they are 15 years old. That's a lot of opportunities to teach about life.
- Spend time alone with your kids.
- Laugh with your kids. Enjoy the child within yourself.
- Teach independence, confidence, competition and self-reliance.

Stages of Fatherhood: Changes of the 8's – Age 0-8, 8-16, 16-24

- Teach an appreciation for the outdoors and respect for nature.
- Keep promises. Dads are role-models for strength and accountability in the family.
- Never use sarcasm and ridicule to discipline. Be fair and consistent.
- Use words and tone of voice wisely. Teach children to respect you, not fear you.
- Be consistent. Don't laugh at bad behavior and then punish the same behavior later.
- Role model love. Love the children's mother and demonstrate it. Children raised in loving environments fare better in all aspects of life.

Parenting Teens

- "There are tremendous pressures on teens that were not there in the previous generations. At times the adolescent seems to have it all together and then five minutes later does something impulsive and unbelievably childish. The teenage years are a time when children are practicing how to be an adult. Remember that their friends are their world."
- One of the foremost challenges for fathers is to keep pace with a changing society that increasingly blends traditional parental roles of provider and nurturer. A father can offer his girls the opportunity to learn that men can treat women with respect/dignity. He can show his sons that he can be an athlete, businessman, scientist who is also a feeling person.
- Listen more than talk, and try to listen to their friends too.
- Talk to them about their goals and encourage them to live their dreams.
- If you are not good at something for which they need help, help them find someone who is.
- Attend some if not all of their events — especially if they are performing or playing a sport.
- Have one-on-one time with each of your children even if it only 10 minutes a couple of times per week. Play and laugh as well as have the difficult conversations.

Parenting an adult child

- "Fathers often forget that their offspring actually is an adult. Parents tend to lapse into old patterns that renew the parent-child dichotomy rather than enlisting the adult-to-adult transactions that are so empowering. This is exacerbated by the fact that the child also forgets that he/she is an adult. It is a very common dynamic that adult children, when in the presence of their parents, actually regress to a former stage of development."
- Remember that most adult children do not need parenting per se. They need to be in the presence of mature adults who can be wisdom figures. Remember that your child is a budding individual who will learn from trial and error. Do not expect your 20-year-old adult child to carry the knowledge and wisdom of your 50-year-old self.
- Remember the choices we may think of as "mistakes" are really part of the learning curve. Help your offspring accept this and accept their choices (which may carry harsh consequences) as learning opportunities.
- Listen to your adult children and have compassion for what they are undergoing. Try to remember what it was like for you at whatever stage of their life they are in before jumping in with advice-giving.

- Create some clear boundaries with yourself so you can be emotionally supporting without feeling you must rescue your children from the lessons they may be in the middle of learning. This will be most empowering for your children, and this will require great patience on your part.
- Learn to let go of the outcome. If you are involved in your adult child's life in such a way that you try to orchestrate any outcome, you are probably guilty of projecting your own wants/needs/desires onto your children. Although it seems loving, it may circumvent their independence and personal journey. Each of us must find our own way.
- Many adults are returning "home" as they are unable to find work or otherwise are unable to fully support themselves or their families. In such situations many parents have legitimate and pressing questions on how to "be" with their adult kids. In these situations it is helpful for communication about expectations be forthcoming — clear yet flexible.
- If you get stuck in wanting to "fix" things for your children, try this: Take a quiet breath and then ask in a loving and inquisitive tone: What are you going to do? This pre-empts the idea that the parent is responsible for finding a way out of the quagmire. (Note that this works in other relationships as well.)

Bible Readings

1. Deuteronomy 11:19 ESV
You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
2. Colossians 3:20 ESV
Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2214
The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood; this is the foundation of the honor owed to parents. The respect of children, whether minors or adults, for their father and mother is nourished by the natural affection born of the bond uniting them. It is required by God's commandment.

Small Group Questions

1. Where are your children in the stage of their life/your relationship?
2. Have you considered what you can do to leverage today's lesson to improve your relationship with your child?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.daytondailynews.com/lifestyle/negotiating-the-stages-of-fatherhood-772163.html>

Accountability

1. This would be a good week to talk to your spouse about this lesson – what is your plan?

Author

Rich Delcore

Pornography – The Drug of the New Millennium

Summary

Imagine a drug so powerful it can destroy a family simply by distorting a man's perception of his wife. Picture an addiction so lethal it has the potential to render an entire generation incapable of forming lasting marriages - Pornography, the drug of the new millennium.

Objective

The Objective is present the church's position on pornography as stated in the Catechism. This position is backed-up by modern scientific studies, which says that it is enslaving people similar to drugs and ruining marriages.

Bible Readings

1. Mathew 5: 27-29

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna.

2. Wisdom 15:1-6

But thou, our God, art kind and true, patient, and ruling all things in mercy. For even if we sin we are thine, knowing thy power; but we will not sin, because we know that we are accounted thine. For to know thee is complete righteousness, and to know thy power is the root of immortality. For neither has the evil intent of human art misled us, nor the fruitless toil of painters, a figure stained with varied colors, whose appearance arouses yearning in fools, so that they desire the lifeless form of a dead image. Lovers of evil things and fit for such objects of hope are those who either make or desire or worship them.

3. Mathew 5:28

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2354

Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials

2. Paragraph 2396

Among the sins gravely contrary to chastity are masturbation, fornication, pornography, and homosexual practices.

3. Paragraph 2211

The political community has a duty to honor the family, to assist it, and to ensure especially: ...- the protection of security and health, especially with respect to dangers like drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.

4. Paragraph 2525

Christian purity requires a *purification of the social climate*. It requires of the communications media that their presentations show concern for respect and restraint. Purity of heart brings freedom from widespread eroticism and avoids entertainment inclined to voyeurism and illusion.

Small Group Questions

1. Do you read books or magazines or watch movies or visit websites that you would not tell your wife about? How about your holy mother in Heaven?
2. What happens when “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” follows you home?
3. Is pornography an issue with you?
4. Have you ever overcome a battle against pornography; if yes, how did you deal with it?

Accountability

1. Rid your home and computer of any pornographic material.
2. Pray a Rosary and/or Chaplet of Divine Mercy for yourself and/or others battling pornography.

Author(s)

Michael Copfer

Included Resources:

1. “Getting Serious About Pornography”, National Review Online, 3/31/2010:

<http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/229439/getting-serious-about-pornography/anonymous>

- An estimated 40 million people use this drug on a regular basis.
- Neurological data suggest its effects on the brain are strikingly similar to those of synthetic drugs
- Two authorities on the neurochemistry of addiction, Harvey Milkman and Stanley Sunderwirth, claim it is the ability of this drug to influence all three pleasure systems in the brain — arousal, satiation, and fantasy — that makes it “the *pièce de résistance* among the addictions.”
- According to Dr. Victor Cline, a nationally renowned clinical psychologist who specializes in sexual addiction, pornography addiction is a process that undergoes **four phases**:

(1) First, addiction, resulting from early and repeated exposure accompanied by masturbation.

(2) Second, escalation, during which the addict requires more frequent porn exposure to achieve the same “highs” and may learn to prefer porn to sexual intercourse.

(3) Third, desensitization, during which the addict views as normal what was once considered repulsive or immoral.

(4) And finally, the acting-out phase, during which the addict runs an increased risk of making the leap from screen to real life.

- A 2004 study published in *Social Science Quarterly* found that Internet users who had had an extramarital affair were 3.18 times more likely to have used online porn than Internet users who had not had an affair.
- A 2002 meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, during which surveyed lawyers claimed that “an obsessive interest in Internet pornography” was a significant factor in 56 percent of their divorce cases the prior year.

- Porn use creates the impression that aberrant sexual practices are more common than they really are, and that promiscuous behavior is normal.
 - Susan Fiske, professor of psychology at Princeton University, used MRI scans to analyze the brain activity of men viewing pornography. She found that after viewing porn, men looked at women more as objects than as human beings.
2. “The Weight of Smut”, Mary Eberstadt, First Things, June/July 2010
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/05/the-weight-of-smut>
- “sexual obesity”: the widespread gorging on pornographic imagery
 - The term *sexual obesity* comes from Mary Ann Layden, a psychiatrist who runs the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the University of Pennsylvania. She sees the victims of Internet-pornography consumption in her practice, day in and day out.
 - Results: Young people who have been exposed to pornography are:
 - more likely to have multiple lifetime sexual partners,
 - more likely to have had more than one sexual partner in the last three months,
 - more likely to have used alcohol or other substances at their last sexual encounter,
 - more likely to have scored higher on a “sexual permissiveness” test
 - more likely to have tried risky forms of sex
 - more likely to engage in forced sex
 - more likely to be sexual offenders.
 - In 2004, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University reported that 65 percent of boys ages 16 and 17 reported having friends who regularly download Internet pornography
 - Economists Kirk Doran and Joseph Price are examining data from the General Social Survey (GSS) to assess the negative impact of pornography on other aspects of marriage. They report that, among individuals who have ever been married, those who say they’ve seen an X-rated movie in the last year are 25 percent more likely to be divorced and 13 percent less likely to identify themselves as “very happy” with life in general.
 - See article for more information
3. “Pornography’s Impact on Marriage & The Family”, by Jill Manning M.S., Presented to Subcommittee US Senate 11/9/2005
<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Testimony/Pornographys-Impact-on-Marriage-amp-The-Family>

Since the advent of the Internet, the pornography industry has profited from an unprecedented proximity to the home, work and school environments. Consequently, couples, families, and individuals of *all* ages are being impacted by pornography in new and often devastating ways.

Although many parents work diligently to protect their family from sexually explicit material, research funded by Congress has shown Internet pornography to be “very intrusive.” Additionally, we know that a variety of fraudulent, illegal and unethical practices are used to attract new customers and eroticize attitudes that undermine public health and safety. This profit-driven assault jeopardizes the well-being of our youth and violates the privacy of those who wish not to be exposed.

Leading experts in the field of sexual addictions contend on-line sexual activity is “a hidden public health hazard exploding, in part because very few are recognizing it as such or taking it seriously.”

Research reveals many systemic effects of Internet pornography that are undermining an already vulnerable culture of marriage and family. Even more disturbing is the fact that the first Internet generations have not reached full-maturity, so the upper-limits of this impact have yet to be realized. Furthermore, the numerous negative effects research point to are extremely difficult, if not impossible, for individual citizens or families to combat on their own.

This testimony is not rooted in anecdotal accounts or personal views, but rather in findings from studies published in peer-reviewed research journals. [I have submitted a review of this research to the Committee](#), and request that it be included in the record.

The marital relationship is a logical point of impact to examine because it is the foundational family unit and a sexual union easily destabilized by sexual influences outside the marital contract. Moreover, research indicates the majority of Internet users are married and the majority seeking help for problematic sexual behavior online are married, heterosexual males. The research indicates pornography consumption is associated with the following six trends, among others:

1. Increased marital distress, and risk of separation and divorce,
2. Decreased marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction,
3. Infidelity
4. Increased appetite for more graphic types of pornography and sexual activity associated with abusive, illegal or unsafe practices,
5. Devaluation of monogamy, marriage and child rearing,
6. An increasing number of people struggling with compulsive and addictive sexual behavior.

These trends reflect a cluster of symptoms that undermine the foundation upon which successful marriages and families are established.

While the marital bond may be the most vulnerable relationship to Internet pornography, children and adolescents are the most vulnerable audience. When a child lives in a home where an adult is consuming pornography, he or she encounters the following four risks:

1. Decreased parental time and attention
2. Increased risk of encountering pornographic material
3. Increased risk of parental separation and divorce and
4. Increased risk of parental job loss and financial strain

When a child or adolescent is directly exposed the following effects have been documented:

1. Lasting negative or traumatic emotional responses,
2. Earlier onset of first sexual intercourse, thereby increasing the risk of STD's over the lifespan,
3. The belief that superior sexual satisfaction is attainable without having affection for one's partner, thereby reinforcing the commoditization of sex and the objectification of humans.
4. The belief that being married or having a family are unattractive prospects;
5. Increased risk for developing sexual compulsions and addictive behavior,
6. Increased risk of exposure to incorrect information about human sexuality long before a minor is able to contextualize this information in ways an adult brain could.
7. And, overestimating the prevalence of less common practices (e.g., group sex, bestiality, or sadomasochistic activity).

Because the United States is ranked among the top producers and consumers of pornography globally, the federal government has a unique opportunity to take a lead in addressing this issue and the related harm. This leadership could unfold in a variety of ways. For example, through:

- Educating the public about the risks of pornography consumption,
- Supporting research that examines aspects of Internet pornography currently unknown,

- Allocating resources to enforce laws already in place, and lastly,
- Legally implement technological solutions that separate Internet content, allowing consumers to choose the type of legal content they wish to have access to.

In closing, I am convinced Internet pornography is grooming young generations of Americans in such a way that their chances of enjoying healthy and enduring relationships are handicapped. I hope this committee will carefully consider measures to reduce the harm associated with Internet pornography.

For the full research submitted for the record:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/2010/pdf/ManningTST.pdf

4. “What’s Wrong with Pornography, by Ross S. Olson MD
http://www.rossolson.org/pornography/whats_wrong_with.html

How is pornography destructive? Sexual images are extremely persistent. Men who started with pornography as young boys often can remember in great detail the images that got them started and continue to be affected by them. But the major danger is that the intensity of the material tends to escalate because after a while the mild stuff is no longer as stimulating. The images become associated with masturbation and it is the nature of orgasmic activity that it produces a desire for repetition.

When sex is kept within the context of marriage, this habit-forming tendency helps cement the commitment and motivate a couple to work out the inevitable problems that go with human relationships. But sexual stimulation with pornography, because it is devoid of human interaction, is intensely selfish and becomes quickly jaded. Thus the fantasies need to become more explicit, more bizarre and more blended with violence to achieve the same level of excitement. Finally, images alone are not enough and the desire to act out the fantasies becomes powerful. Since the focus has been consistently on selfish pleasure and the pictures seen as objects, the transition is sometimes frighteningly easy.

So pornography makes monsters of susceptible people, mostly men who started as boys. Rapists, child molesters and serial killers uniformly are addicted to pornography. To say that some who use pornography do not reach this extreme is beside the point. For some, it "only" makes sexual fulfillment in marriage difficult if not impossible. This is because the patterns are so hard to change and the pornography user finds the mate inferior to his fantasies. There is a parallel here with alcohol. Some people do not have a problem with it, but their use may inadvertently lead others to use, abuse and ultimately be destroyed. With pornography, the danger is so dramatic, why play around with it?

Family Relationships

Summary

Do you have a family member who you haven't talked to in a long time? Perhaps a brother, sister, aunt or uncle that you just can't seem to get along with or that long standing grudge you don't even recall the cause of? How do we as fathers find the opportunity to reach out and show love for the people around us who make up our family?

Objective

Family is more than just your wife and children. You began with your parents and perhaps some siblings. Along the way you became close or at least associated with grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. Then you marry and pick up an even wider circle of family members. This ever expanding circle of family we gather along life's path can be difficult to manage, conflicts along the way are inevitable.

- How do we as fathers become role models for our children, and perhaps our extended family?
- Is there a damaged relationship you can try, AGAIN, to reach out to mend?
- Has someone moved away for work or school that might need a friendly contact?
- Are you able to be a voice of reason at family gatherings if conflict arises?
- When's the last time your family had a reunion besides just attending a funeral?
- As Christians how do we set a Christ-like example of how to deal with loved ones around us?

Bible Readings

1. 1 Timothy 5:1-8 (Pay attention to 8 the most

5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, **2** older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. **3** Honor widows who are truly widows. **4** But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. **5** She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, **6** but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. **7** Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. **8** But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

2. Isaiah 49 15-16

15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. **16** Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

3. Luke 12:13-21

13 **6** Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." **14** He replied to him, "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?" **15** Then he said to the crowd, "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." **16** Then he told them a parable. "There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. **17** He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?' **18** And he said, 'This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods **19** and I shall say to myself, 'Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!' **20** But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' **21** Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God." **7**

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2214

The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood; this is the foundation of the honor owed to parents. The respect of children, whether minors or adults, for their father and mother is nourished by the natural affection born of the bond uniting them. It is required by God's commandment.

2. Paragraph 2215

Respect for parents (filial piety) derives from gratitude toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom, and grace. "With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?"

3. Paragraph 2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a privileged community called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."

4. Paragraph 2208

The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you have family relationships that are in need of repair?
2. Do you have a family member that you have lost touch with because our lives are just too busy?
3. Who in your family, perhaps your wife, your sister or brother, sets the example of how to maintain a large and healthy family circle? What can you learn from them and how can you help or foster that example?
4. How many conflicts in the family are over money or possessions? See the reading above from Luke and discuss how possessions effect our relationships.
5. Is it possible that you treat your family members worse than you treat your friends?
6. Do you have family reunions? How large? How often? Who arranges that?

Recommended Resources

1. Family Feuds: Fixing the rift
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002242,00.html>
2. Repairing relationships: Family relationship challenge:
<http://www.parentsconnect.com/questions/family-relationships-boot-camp-repair-relationship.jhtml>
3. No One's Family Is Normal
<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthy-living/relationships/friends-family/inlaws-extended-family/normal-family>

Accountability

1. What family relationship can you set a goal to repair?

2. How can you begin to set the example of how keep family relationships and traditions core to your families core values?

Author(s)

Dan Lape

Reinventing Date Night

Summary

"Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies."

- Aristotle, Greek Philosopher (384 - 322 BC)

Simply spending quality time together is probably not enough to prevent a marriage relationship from getting stale. Keeping the butterflies of early romance from quickly fluttering away after marriage is a desire shared by both the husband and wife. So how do guys just like you, keep their marriages from slipping into familiar, predictable feelings of long-term attachment – Date Night!

Objective

The objective is for the Fathers Team member to find ways to keep injecting novelty into the relationship by focusing on “Date Night” with their wife.

As background, most studies of love and marriage show that the decline of romantic love over time is inevitable. However, marriage studies, real-world experiments and even brain-scan data, scientists & therapists can now offer long-married couples a simple prescription for rekindling the romantic love that brought them together in the first place. Rather than visiting the same familiar haunts and dining with the same old friends, couples need to tailor their date nights around new and different activities that they both enjoy.

Fun date night ideas are a great way to help blossom a marriage by doing things you both enjoy. There are so many places to go and things to do - so, go play! Fun date ideas are the best way to get closer as a couple. Your wife wants to see your creative, playful side and when you put your own thoughts and effort into it, you'll be surprised how well she will respond to your romantic date idea simply because the date idea came from you. And don't be shy, if you are aiming to surprise your wife, don't be afraid to ask her preferences so you can create fun date ideas that both of you will enjoy.

The activity can be as simple as trying a new restaurant together or something a little more unusual or thrilling — like taking a hot air balloon ride together or riding horseback through a vineyard, then having a secluded wine & cheese picnic.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Corinthians 7:4-5

The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

2. Proverbs 18:22

Reinventing Date Night

Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.

Small Group Questions

1. What is the best “date night” that you have had with your wife so far?
2. What was the novelty in the “date night” that excited her?
3. Review the list of 100 Great Date nights, which one will you try with your wife in the next week?

Accountability

1. Share your plans for the “first date” this week with your small team (from the 100 Great Date Nights list or other)
2. Share with your small team next week how the date night went, what was the novelty in it for you and your wife?
3. Plan out the next 10 date nights with your wife, and then go on the dates! Share with the small team after 90 days.

Included Resources

100 Fun Date Night Ideas & Activities

“mix and match” to make your date night a unique novel experience

1. Go get pampered or have massages together at a local day spa
2. Go schooner sailing at sunset
3. Take a Segway Tour through out a park
4. Reserve a spot on a yacht party cruise
5. Try your hand at indoor rock climbing
6. Go on a kayaking adventure tour - sight see from a kayak or canoe
7. Take an archery class together
8. Try skydiving, take lessons or try a tandem jump
9. Go on a harbor excursion - watch marine life or go whale or dolphin watching
10. Take a romantic horse-drawn carriage ride thru the city
11. Day adventure to any beautiful garden-park or arboretum, together
12. Enjoy a secluded beach and swim and/or enjoy the sun, together
13. Take a winery tour, or vineyard/winery tour on horseback if possible
14. Rent canoe, kayak or paddle boat and have a floating picnic on a lake
15. Go river rafting or inter tubing on a creek, river or lake
16. Go camping together
17. Become restaurant critics, find the most romantic restaurant by trying ones you haven't
18. Go to the zoo and/or aquarium
19. See a play at the local suburb theater or at the High School
20. Hang out at a high-class cocktail lounge or restaurant, request a song from a piano man
21. Book an experience activity such as driving a real race car together
22. Take a Hot Air Balloon ride
23. Go Para-sailing together

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24. Make your own wine, beer or root beer together
25. Take your dog(s) to the local dog park
26. Go fishing, or teach each other how to fish
27. Take a romantic walking tour of your city - pretend to be a tourist for a day
28. Spend the day with binoculars and a camera and go bird watching
29. Visit a U-Pick farm and pick fruit together, make sure you feed each other the samples!
30. Go Ice Skating together, and then warm up together!
31. Go to a baseball game, football game or Basketball game.
32. Tour new homes together
33. Learn to scuba dive together
34. Go on a haunted ghost tour together
35. See a local jazz band, concert, or orchestra in Cincinnati
36. Make it a romantic mission to ride a Ferris wheel together, kissing each other at the top!
37. Take a romantic afternoon walk or picnic at a park together
38. Go on a hiking trip together
39. Go to your local bookstore to pick out a surprise book for each other
40. Take turns reading a book to each other
41. Relive and go to the first place you ever went out together
42. Go shopping for new clothes, pick out clothes for each other
43. Go to a local gym to exercise together or to join together
44. Go tanning at a salon together and then go get pedicures
45. Spring time walk to pick wildflowers together
46. Go on an afternoon sightseeing drive and explore places you haven't seen before
47. Spend the morning going to local garage sales to go treasure hunting
48. Visit an old cemetery
49. A date to have ice-cream together, make sure you feed each other a few bites
50. Window shop at local antique shops
51. Go moonlight bowling
52. A date to a karaoke bar for some singing (or watch others sing)
53. A roller-blade or roller skating date
54. A date to take pictures of each other
55. Go to a supermarket to pick out a meal and then back home to cook it, together
56. A date to wash and wax your cars together, make sure you spray each other with the hose!
57. Spend an evening to write poems for each other
58. A date to roast marshmallows over a campfire or fire pit in the back yard
59. Park near the airport to watch planes take off - feel the thunder of the planes –dream of your next trip together
60. Go to a park and star watch together
61. Bake cookies, make popcorn and watch a scary movie at midnight
62. A date to wash each other's hair and then give back rubs to each other

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63. Have a shaving cream fight and pillow fight
64. Go dancing or take dancing lessons together
65. Take a scenic drive in a rented convertible, or your own sports car
66. Schedule a dinner cruise on a train or boat
67. Take a charter fishing trip or whale watching tour
68. Go skiing or hang out around the snow, at the lodge
69. Visit a town or city you've never been to
70. Play a round at a fancy golf course
71. Take a helicopter or airplane site seeing tour together
72. Go visit the art gallery or art museum together
73. Go to the beach and build a sand castle together
74. Rent a limo and drive nowhere in particular
75. Visit the planetarium or Museum Center
76. Play in the water at the Beach Water park
77. Learn a new game at a casino
78. Visit a wax museum or find the historical landmarks in your area
79. Play arcade games together or play games on your home console
80. Patio/deck picnic
81. Watch a meteor shower in the evening, with wine and snacks
82. Go on a ferry boat ride to nowhere in particular
83. Go to a classic car show
84. Play miniature golf
85. See a Broadway show together
86. Take a helicopter ride together
87. Go to a high school or college sports event
88. Go to a Roller Derby event
89. Visit a dog or horse race track, together
90. Play laser tag or paint ball tag
91. Go target shooting or go to a shooting range together
92. Make it a mission to ride as many roller coasters you can find
93. Go on a hay ride in the fall during the evening; remember to bring a blanket to snuggle under!
94. Watch the sunset. Just pick a scenic spot, grab a bottle of wine (or your favorite beverage) and enjoy!
95. Reminisce Together – Share journals, pictures, letters, home videos, etc.
96. Bake Dessert Together - cake decorating, banana split, sundae, berry or chocolate smoothies
97. Build a snowman or snowwomen together, then warm up with hot chocolate and a blanket
98. Ride go-carts or “bump m” cars at the carnival
99. Visit the pumpkin farm or Christmas Tree Farm and talk a long slow walk in the nearby woods
100. (Fill in your favorite Date Night Idea Here)

Reinventing Date Night

Respect (my wife and) your mother

Summary

As a child's independence is developed, mothers are often treated poorly by their offspring. This can be particularly difficult for moms. How do we, as fathers, act to support our wives during this time?

Objective

Each of us goes through a period in our teen years where we begin to establish our independence as an individual. This development of our independence often includes us abruptly distancing ourselves from those we have been very dependant on, most of all, our mothers. Talking back, ignoring, and ultimately condescension of our mothers provide a "safe test" of our ability to be independent, because mothers always "take us back." We, as husbands and fathers, need to stay involved in this mother-child relationship. We need to let our child know that before their mother was their mother, she was our girlfriend, then our bride. We need to create a family environment that lets the child know that we love and support their mother, and expect them to do the same. With our wives, we must delicately manage the child's growth and independence, while avoiding a breakdown in relationships.

Bible Readings

1. Sirach 3

Children, pay heed to a father's right; do so that you may live. For the LORD sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. He who honors his father atones for sins; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. He who honors his father is gladdened by children, and when he prays he is heard. He who reveres his father will live a long life; he obeys the LORD who brings comfort to his mother. He who fears the LORD honors his father, and serves his parents as rulers. In word and deed honor your father that his blessing may come upon you; For a father's blessing gives a family firm roots, but a mother's curse uproots the growing plant.

2. Luke 27-35

He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2217

As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. "Children should also obey the reasonable directions of their teachers and all to whom their parents have entrusted them. But if a child is convinced in conscience that it would be morally wrong to obey a particular order, he must not do so.

As they grow up, children should continue to respect their parents. They should anticipate their wishes, willingly seek their advice, and accept their just admonitions. Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them. This respect has its roots in the fear of God, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Small Group Questions

1. How do you deal with issues of “respect” in your family?
2. Have you discussed with your wife how you will handle disrespect from children?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/teaching-children-respect.html>
2. <http://www.drrobysilverman.com/2008/04/12/10-tips-on-teaching-respect-to-children-you-cant-get-it-if-you-dont-give-it/>
3. R-E-S-P-E-C-Tfind out what it means to me! Aretha Franklin

Accountability

1. Talk to your wife about how you are or will handle respect issues. One parent handing out punishment and then asking the other for support after the fact can be challenging.
2. Demonstrate to your children that you and your wife are a “team.”
3. Referring to your wife as your “girlfriend” or “bride” changes the perspective of children being disrespectful of your wife....try it.

Author(s)

Reid Rooney / Kevin McDonough

Included Resources

<http://www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/respect/>

Respect- How to teach it and how to show it

by Steve McChesney

One of the most important things you can teach your child is respect.

Keep in mind that respect is not the same as obedience. Children might obey because they are afraid. If they respect you, they will obey because they know you want what's best for them.

The best way to teach respect is to show respect. When a child experiences respect, they know what it feels like and begin to understand how important it is.

Keep in mind the saying “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Respect is an attitude. Being respectful helps a child succeed in life. If children don't have respect for peers, authority, or themselves, it's almost impossible for them to succeed.

A respectful child takes care of belongings and responsibilities, and a respectful child gets along with peers.

Schools teach children about respect, but parents have the most influence on how respectful children become. Until children show respect at home, it's unlikely they will show it anywhere else.

How can you show respect to your child?

Be honest – If you do something wrong, admit it and apologize.

Be positive – Don't embarrass, insult or make fun of your child. Compliment them.

Be Trusting – Let your child make choices and take responsibility.

Be fair – Listen to your child's side of the story before reaching a conclusion.

Be polite – Use “please” and “thank you”. Knock before entering your child's room.

Respect (my wife and) your mother

Be reliable – Keep promises. Show your child that you mean what you say.

Be a good listener – Give your child your full attention.

Children learn from everything we say and do. Make sure that you are modeling respectful behavior. Some of things you can do are:

Obey laws – Follow rules. Be caring – Show concern for people, animals and the environment.

Avoid poor role models – When you see examples of disrespect, discuss them. (more)

Changes to the Mass per the Roman Missal

Summary

Have you been “going through the motions” at Mass by repeating prayers and responses that you know by heart and have become automatic? Well, the Mass is changing. Why, and what are the changes? What is the Roman Missal? When will the changes take place? How will I know the new words to say during Mass and how does this “new translation” affect us? This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to experience the Mass in a much deeper way.

Objective

- Understand the background for the changes, what they are, and how they can help us get a deeper meaning out of Mass.
- Learn how the Mass now more closely follows the readings in the bible.
- Embrace this as an opportunity to teach our children what the Mass is all about:

Bible Readings

1. 2 Timothy 4:22
The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with all of you.
2. Philippians 4:23
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
3. Isaiah 6:3
One cried out to the other: “Holy, holy, holy* is the LORD of hosts! All the earth is filled with his glory!”
4. Isaiah 53:11-12
Because of his anguish he shall see the light; because of his knowledge he shall be content; My servant, the just one, shall justify the many, their iniquity he shall bear.

Therefore I will give him his portion among the many, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, Because he surrendered himself to death, was counted among the transgressors, Bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.
5. Matthew 8:8
The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.”
6. Luke 7:6-7
And Jesus went with them, but when he was only a short distance from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof.”

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 167

"I believe" (*Apostles' Creed*) is the faith of the Church professed personally by each believer, principally during Baptism. "We believe" (*Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*) is the faith of the Church confessed by the bishops assembled in council or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers. "I believe" is also the Church, our mother, responding to God by faith as she teaches us to say both "I believe" and "We believe".

2. Paragraph 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 Antoninus 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.

Small Group Questions

1. Where can I find out more about these changes?
2. How can I use this as an opportunity to enhance my experience in Mass?
3. In what ways can I teach my children about the meaning of these changes?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://old.usccb.org/romanmissal/> - various resources for the Roman Missal from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops
2. <http://www.loyolapress.com/roman-missal-changes-webinar.htm> - series of three videos on the changes.
3. <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/worship/the-new-roman-missal> - contains power point presentation, internet links, print and other resources.
4. <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/worship/the-new-roman-missal/print-resources/bulletin-inserts> - Bulletin Inserts
5. http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CT040910_romanmissal.pdf - Catholic Telegraph article on the changes
6. http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/frequently_asked_questions_cinti.pdf - answers to frequently asked questions

Accountability

1. Commit to spending time this week (30 minutes) this week to learn more about these changes.
2. Spend a few minutes before or after church talking with your kids about the Mass, its new prayers and responses.

Author(s)

John Tekulve and Michael Copfer

Included Resources

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati website has a wealth of resources and links

Booklet - "A Guide to The New Translation of The Mass" by Dr. Edward Sri, Ascension Press

CD – A Walk Through The New Mass Translation, Dr. Edward Sri, Lighthouse Catholic Media

The essence and structure of the Mass is not changing but many of the prayers and responses to liturgy have been newly translated to English from the Latin text. The Mass was originally celebrated in Latin but this changed with the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's when prayers and liturgy were translated into the vernacular (common) language of different countries. The official Latin text is contained in a book called the Roman Missal. This is what was translated. It was done quickly using a general meaning of the text rather than providing a more close word for word translation. The paraphrasing resulted in the loss of spiritual meanings and theoretical concepts that were not always as clear as they could be. In 2001, the Vatican called for a more precise translation which will be effective November 27th 2011, which is the first Sunday of Advent, and the beginning of the Church's new liturgical year.

Overall, the new language more fully conveys rich biblical images and allusions. The revised translation as a whole uses a more heightened style of English in order to express greater reverence and humility when praying to God in Mass. The style emphasizes God's goodness, power and glory so we understand that we are encountering the presence of him in the sacred liturgy of the Mass.

Some of the changes are as follows:

Priest's Greeting: "The Lord be with you". ***Our response will now be "And with your spirit"***

Readings above: 2 Timothy 4:22 and Philippians 4:23.

The new translation better reflects the Latin text of the biblical language. The old translation of this greeting gave the impression that our response was intended to be a personal greeting or reciprocal goodwill. There is much more to this response. When a man is ordained a priest, the Holy Spirit comes upon him in a unique way, enabling him to perform the sacred rites of the Mass and consecrate the Eucharist. By responding "And with your spirit" we acknowledge the Holy Spirit is working through the priest during the sacred liturgy. We are experiencing Jesus who is the head of the community gathered for Mass and it is his Spirit who is the primary actor in the liturgy, regardless of who the priest may be.

Nicene Creed: "We believe" is now "I believe".

The new translation unites us with the rest of the Catholic world in using the singular. After Vatican II, English was the only Western Language that translated the opening Latin word of the Creed (Credo) with the plural. The singular "I" makes the Creed more personal and challenges each individual to interiorize the faith. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, "I believe" expresses "the faith of the Church professed personally by each believer (no.167).

This is what we do when we renew our baptismal promises during the Easter season or when we attend a baptism. The priest asks if we believe in the various statements of faith in the Creed: "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty.....?" Do you believe in the Holy Spirit.....? Each individual answers saying "I do". It is fitting that we will regularly make a similar personal act of faith by using the singular "I believe" whenever the Creed is recited in the Mass.

The Sanctus:

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, God of power and might" is now "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts"

Reading above: Isaiah 6:3.

The opening line of the Sanctus is taken from the angels' worship of God in heaven. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of the angels praising God, crying out "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3). The word "hosts" here refers to the army of angels in heaven. When we recite "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts" in the Mass, therefore, we are joining the angels in heaven, and echoing their very words of worship.

This new translation more clearly underscores the infinite breadth of God's power. All things in heaven and on earth are under his dominion---including the angels.

Words of Institution

"For all" is now "For many".

Reading above: Isaiah 53:11-12.

The previous translation referred to Jesus' blood having redemptive value "for all". The new translation replaces this with "for many". This revision remains closer to Jesus' actual words in the Gospel (Matthew 26:28) and is also more harmonious with the Latin text.

Some have raised concerns that the words "for many" limits the universal scope of Jesus's saving mission and that he did not die for everyone----that he offered his blood on Calvary not "for all" but for a select group of people, "for many".

The new translation points to the reality that while Jesus died for all, not everyone chooses to accept this gift. Each individual must choose to welcome the gift of salvation and live according to that grace, so that they may be among "the many".

Jesus's language at the Last Supper about his blood being poured out "for many" recalls that there are the three times "the many" is mentioned in Isaiah 53:11-12. In this prophecy, Isaiah foretold that God would one day send his servant who would make himself "an offering for sin" bearing the sin of "many" and making "many" righteous.

Ecci Angus Dei

"Lord, I am not worthy to receive you" is now "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof".

Readings above: Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6-7

These new words reflect the humility and trust of the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant who is at his house, paralyzed and in distress. As a Gentile, outside of God's covenant, and a Roman officer in charge of soldiers who were oppressing God's people, this centurion humbly acknowledges, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof". He expresses a great faith that surpassed many others in the gospels and amazes even Jesus himself: he believes Jesus can heal from afar, simply by speaking his word. "But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed". Jesus praises the man for his faith.

At this moment in mass, like the centurion, we recognize our unworthiness to have Jesus come sacramentally under the "roof" of our souls in Holy Communion. But just at the centurion believed Jesus was able to heal his servant, we also trust that Jesus can heal us when we receive the Eucharist.

Do you believe in the saying: “You are who you hang out with”?

Summary

Many times we have good friends that may not be the best influence. How do we handle this type of situation in our daily lives? Is this an opportunity for us to reach out and lead by example? How do you approach a friend who may not be leading the best life and try to help them?

Objective

Many times we have good friends that may not be the best influence. How do we handle this type of situation in our daily lives? Is this an opportunity for us to reach out and lead by example? How do you approach a friend who may not be leading the best life and try to help them? Matthew Kelly says in *Rediscovering Catholicism* that, “a true friendship is when the other person encourages you to be all you can be, challenges you to become the-best-version-of-yourself, and vice versa (p. 134.) We want to be around people that help us get to heaven. We want to be around people that support our marriage and help us make the choices God would want us to make. If we have a friend that is not the best influence, often if we live by example, it may help the other person make better choices. If you are at a restaurant and your friend orders the grilled chicken with a salad, you are more apt to order something healthy rather than a big cheeseburger. Just as your friend might make better choices if he sees you being honest at work or you being loving to your wife. Matthew Kelly states that, “Goodness is contagious. The problem is so is evil” (p. 135.) If we surround ourselves around those who want to be better people, we will become better. However we need to choose our friends wisely because if we are surrounded by those who do not care how they act, it is very easy to go down that path. That is why, as Matthew Kelly’s father told him, “If you have five true friends in your lifetime, you will have lived a life infinitely blessed” (p. 133.)

Bible Readings

1. 1 Corinthians 15:33
Do not be led astray:
“Bad company corrupts good morals.”
2. Proverbs 18:24
Some friends bring ruin on us, but a true friend is more loyal than a brother.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1934-1938

1934 Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin.... All therefore enjoy an equal dignity. **1935** The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. **1937** These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular 'talents' share the benefits with those who need them... **1938** There exist also sinful inequalities that affect millions of men and women. These are in open contradiction of the Gospel: Their equal dignity as persons demands that we strive for fairer and more humane conditions...

Do you believe in the saying: “You are who you hang out with”?

Small Group Questions

1. Do you have any friends that do not help you become the-best-version-of-yourself?
2. If so, what do you do when you are around these friends?
3. Are you comfortable around these friends?

Recommended Resources

1. Rediscovering Catholicism By Matthew Kelly

Accountability

1. Take a look at some of your friends this week and think if they are making you a better person.

Author(s)

Mark Oliva

Our Lady of Guadalupe – The self-portrait and its message

Summary

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe hangs in our meeting room, but what did it say to the indigenous people of Mexico 500 years ago to convert 9 million to the catholic faith and what does it say to us today as it is still the most visited Marian Shrine in the world?

Objective

The Objective is become familiar with the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

- The apparition events involving Juan Diego
- The symbols of the Image
- The message to us today

Bible Readings

1. Revelation 12: 1-2

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.

2. John 19:26-27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

3. Luke 1:46-48

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 963

Since the Virgin Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit has been treated, it is fitting now to consider her place in the mystery of the Church. "The Virgin Mary . . . is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. . . . She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' . . . since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head." "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church."

2. Paragraph 2679

Mary is the perfect *Orans* (pray-er), a figure of the Church. When we pray to her, we are adhering with her to the plan of the Father, who sends his Son to save all men. Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' mother into our homes, for she has become the mother of all the living. We can pray with and to her. The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary and united with it in hope.

Small Group Questions

1. Do you consider Mary to be your mother?
2. What did the image say to you before today and what does it say to you now?
3. Have you ever made a pilgrimage to the site of a Marian apparition? If yes, what was the experience like?
4. Have you ever prayed for the intercession of the Virgin Mary?

5. What do you do in your life to honor the Virgin Mary?

Recommended Resources

1. Book: "Our Lady of Guadalupe Mother of the Civilization of Love", by Carl Anderson & MSGR. Eduardo Chavez
2. Recording of Catholic Answers Live show with Cardinal Raymond Burke about Our Lady of Guadalupe, which first aired on 12/8/2010 and is available to listen to for free at:
<http://www.catholic.com/radio/event.php?calendar=1&category=&event=6516&date=2010-12-08>

Accountability

1. Reflect on the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, how can she help you grow closer to her son?
2. Take some time this weekend to discuss Our Lady of Guadalupe with you wife and kids.

Author(s)

Michael Copfer

Included Resources:

The following notes taken from the book: "Our Lady of Guadalupe Mother of the Civilization of Love", by Carl Anderson & MSGR. Eduardo Chavez

HISTORY

- 1519-21: Hernan Cortes lands in Mexico and conquers the Aztec Empire
- Aztecs used human sacrifice to sustain the Aztec gods (sun & moon) and maintain cosmic harmony
- After the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Christian missionaries came to the New World
- 1529: Evangelization efforts to the indigenous people were failing both due to the corruption and mistreatment from some of the Spaniards toward the indigenous people and the friar missionaries' inability to evangelize due to ignorance of the Indian language and culture. Friar Sahagun likened it to a doctor trying to cure a patient without knowing the illness. Friar Zumarraga wrote in a letter to Charles V, the king of Spain, "**If God does not provide the remedy from His Hand, the land is about to be completely lost.**"
- 1531: a series of natural events including earthquakes, Halley's comet and a solar eclipse lead the Indians to believe that the world is about to end
- After the Apparitions and Image: A missionary wrote, "**The Indians, submerged in a profound darkness, still loved and serves false little gods, clay figurines and images of our enemy the devil, in spite of having heard about the faith. But when they heard that the Holy Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ had appeared, and since they saw and admired her most perfect Image, which has no human art, their eyes were opened as if suddenly day had dawned for them.**"

JUAN DIEGO

- Was a native of the area of Mexico City at the height of the Aztec Empire, his Indian name was Cuauhtlatoatzin meaning "eagle that speaks"
- He was a middle-class commoner who owned property through inheritance

- 1524 Juan Diego at 50 yrs old was baptized along with his wife by a Franciscan missionary, making them among the early converts to the Christian Faith
- Juan Diego's wife died five years after they were baptized, leaving Juan Diego with just his uncle, Juan Bernardino also a convert to Christianity
- Every Saturday and Sunday Juan Diego awoke at dawn and walked nine miles to attend Mass and catechesis (instruction in the faith), his route took him by Tepeyac hill

FIRST APPARITION

- Saturday December 9, 1531, Juan Diego was on his way to catechesis and going by Tepeyac hill when he heard beautiful music coming from the top of the hill
- Then the music stopped and he heard a woman's voice calling his name
- Upon reaching the top of the hill, he found a beautiful woman wearing clothes that "Shone like the sun"
- She said to him, "I am the ever-perfect holy Mary, who has the honor to be the mother of the true God by whom we all live, the Creator of people, the Lord of the near and far, the Lord of heaven and earth." I want very much that they build my sacred little house here, in which I will show Him, I will exalt Him upon making Him manifest, I will give Him to all people in all my personal love, Him that is my compassionate gaze, Him that is my help, Him that is my salvation. Because truly I am your compassionate Mother, yours and that of all the people that live together in this land, and also of all the other various lineages of men, those who love me, those who cry to me, those who seek me, those who trust in me."
- She asked him to give this message Friar Juan de Zumarrage, the bishop who was head of the Church in Mexico City
- **Importance of this message:**
 - **Makes clear the Virgin Mary's universal role as mother and her desire to bring all people closer to God through her loving intercession**
 - **The request of a church to be built is significant because to the indigenous people the temple was at the center of society and the request for a new temple marked the beginning of a new civilization**
- Juan Diego went right away to bishop's house. But the bishop was skeptical of an apparition to a recently converted Indian and told him that he would listen to his story at another time

SECOND APPARITION

- After being dismissed by the bishop, Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac hill and requested that the Virgin should give the mission to someone more important than himself
- He said, "So I beg you...to have one of the nobles who are held in esteem, one who is known, respected, honored, have him carry on, take your venerable breath, your venerable word, so that he will be believed. Because I am really just a man from the country, I am the porter's rope, I am a back-frame, just a tail, a wing; I myself need to be led, carried on someone's back...My Little Girl, my Littlest Daughter, my Lady, my Girl, please excuse me: I will afflict your face, your heart: I will fall into your anger, into your displeasure, my Lady Mistress."
- The Virgin responded, "Listen, my youngest son, know for sure that I have no lack of servants messengers to whom I can give the task of carrying my breath, my word, so that they carry out my will. But it is necessary that you, personally, go and plead, that by your intercession my wish, my will, become a reality. And I beg you, my youngest son, and I strictly order you to go again tomorrow to see the bishop. And in my name, make him know, make him hear my wish, my will, so that he will bring into being, build my sacred house

that I ask of him. And carefully tell him again how I, personally, the ever Virgin Holy Mary, I, who am the Mother of God, sent you as my messenger.”

- The next day, Juan Diego visited the bishop who questioned Juan Diego and then requested evidence that would confirm the truth of the story

THIRD APPARITION

- Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac hill and told the Virgin of the bishop’s request for a sign
- She told him to return the next day to receive the sign

FOURTH APPARITION

- The next day, Juan Diego’s uncle , Juan Bernardino, was very ill and instead of going to Tepeyac hill, Juan Diego went to get a doctor for his uncle
- On December 12, 1531, Juan Bernardino asked Juan Diego to bring him a priest for his confession and to prepare him for death
- Juan Diego put on his tilma (a cloak-like garment) as it was cold and went to get a priest, but remembering his promise to the Virgin, he avoided his usual path as he did not want to be delayed in getting the priest for his uncle
- However, the Virgin came down from the hill and said to Juan Diego, “My youngest son, what’s going on? Where are you going? Where are you headed?
- Juan Diego told her that his uncle was dying and that he needed to take care of him. He said, “Afterwards I will return here again to go carry your venerable breath, your venerable word, Lady, my little girl. Forgive me, be patient with me a little longer, because I am not deceiving you with this...tomorrow without fail I will come in all haste.”
- The Virgin responded, “Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest son, that what frightened you, what afflicted you, is nothing; do not let it disturb your face, your heart; do not fear this sickness nor any other sickness, nor any sharp and hurtful thing. Am I not here, I who have the honor to be your Mother? Are you not in my shadow and under my protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need something more?
- She tells him that his uncle will recover from his illness
- Juan Diego trusted the Virgin completely and again asked for a sign to take to the bishop as proof
- She instructed him to go to the top of Tepeyac hill and cut flowers and bring them back to her to arrange in his tilma
- Juan Diego was amazed to find flowers of the sweetest scent during the winter on this rocky hill that typically only grew thistles and cacti
- While arranging the flowers in his tilma the Virgin said, “My youngest son, these different kinds of flowers are the proof, the sign that you will take to the bishop. You will tell him for me that in them he is to see my wish and that therefore he is to carry out my wish, my will; and you, you who are my messenger, in you I place my absolute trust.”
- Juan Diego then goes to the bishop’s house with the sign (the flowers) in his tilma. Upon finally getting to see the bishop, Juan Diego kneels before him and unfolds his tilma letting the flowers fall to the floor, which reveal the image of the Virgin Mary upon the tilma’s rough surface
- Those present knelt down overwhelmed with emotion. The bishop also knelt in tears, praying for the Virgin’s forgiveness for not having done her request

- The following day Juan Diego took the bishop to see where the chapel was to be built, construction began immediately

TILMA

- In the Indian culture the tilma was a sign of social status. Peasant's had plain tilmas, while nobles had colorful tilmas
- The tilma also represented: protection, nourishment, matrimony and consecration
- By placing her image on Juan Diego's tilma, the Virgin gave a new dignity to the common person and especially to the Indians

APPARITION TO JUAN BERNARDINO (JUAN DIEGO'S UNCLE)

- After fulfilling his duty Juan Diego returned to his uncle, to find him completely healed
- As Juan Diego explained to his uncle where he had been, his uncle told him that he already knew because the Virgin came to him, healed him and told him everything that his nephew was doing for her
- She also told the uncle her name: **"the Perfect Virgin Holy Mary of Guadalupe"**
- By disclosing her full name to the uncle it gives a second witness to the apparition and it shows his role in the family and relationship as a community elder
- The name "Guadalupe" chosen by her reflects her mission as the one that carries or brings the living water, Jesus Christ. Guadalupe was a river that ran through Extremadura, Spain. It is of Arabic origin and means "river of black gravel"

THE IMAGE – A Mystery for Science

- Juan Diego's tilma is made of agave fibers (cactus cloth), which are highly corruptible and should suffer from normal decomposition (typically would last only 30-40 years), but it is still intact today
- Miraculous preservation: for the first 116 years it was displayed with no type of covering; replica tilmas made of similar material have been placed in the same area as the original and have not held up to the environmental characteristics of the humidity and saltpeter found on Tepeyac hill, within a short period the replicas discolor and fall to pieces
- Nov. 14, 1921 a bomb was placed under the image and exploded, the result was that it ruined the altar, candelabra, and bronze crucifix atop the altar and shattered windows in neighboring homes within a one-kilometer radius but only inches away the tilma under a glass covering remained unharmed.
- In 1785 nitric acid used to clean the frame was spilled, enough to destroy the whole surface; however, only a dull mark is visible
- Both art specialists and chemists have studied the image on the tilma to determine how the image came to be on the tilma. The colors permeate the fabric all the way through and are visible in the back. The art experts determined, "It is humanly impossible that any artist could paint and work something so beautiful, clean and well-formed on a fabric which is as rough as is the tilma." They could not even determine if it is tempera or oil paint because it appears to be both. Likewise, the chemists concluded, "Our limited intelligence cannot account for it."
- In 1977, the tilma was examined using infrared photography and digital enhancement techniques. Unlike any painting, the tilma shows no sketching or any sign of outline drawn to permit an artist to produce a painting. Further, the very method used to create the image is still unknown. The image is inexplicable in its longevity and method of production.

THE IMAGE – SYMBOLS

Our Lady of Guadalupe – The self-portrait and its message

- Belt much higher than the waist indicating she is pregnant. Not only is she pregnant, but she is pregnant with God himself as indicated by the Jasmine flower (four petals) on her belly, which is the Indian's symbol for God and only appears in this one place on her tunic.
- The Virgin surrounded by fog/clouds is a sign of something supernatural to the Indians
- The angel beneath her feet is a sign of renewal for the Indian civilization. As it is both bald but with the countenance of a child, therefore, evoking both wisdom and youthful. The wings are that of an eagle symbolic of the conveyor of the Aztecs' sacrificial offerings. Thus the eagle-angel is transporting in his hands the new sacrifice, Christ present in the Virgin's womb.
- The pattern of the stars on her mantle are the constellations that appeared above Mexico City on the morning of Dec. 12, 1531, the day the image appeared on the tilma.
- The rich blue-green color of the mantle was an imperial color for the Aztecs, typically only worn by the emperor.
- By eclipsing the sun and standing atop the moon, she shows that she has governance of both, which were gods that the Indians had been worshiping with human sacrifice. Also, the date of the image (Dec. 12, 1531) was the winter solstice, when the sun conquers the darkness and the days become longer.
- Even as her imperial-colored clothing and cosmic surroundings indicate that she is a heavenly queen, her posture indicates that there is someone greater than she, someone to whom she humbly prays. Not only her hands indicate that she is praying, and her eyes are downcast as a sign of respect but also her stance, which has one bent knee and her weight on the other foot, which to the Indians was a sign of a dance, their highest form of prayer.
- Her skin is neither white like the Spaniards nor dark like the Indians, but is mestizo, a combination of the two. She is therefore identifying herself with the people of the New World, as both a mix of European and Indian ancestry.
- The bare cross on the brooch is similar to that of the missionaries and not only identifies her son but also acknowledges the Indians' sufferings, both due to plagues and mistreatment at the hands of some of the Spanish officials and settlers.

WHAT IT MEANS TODAY

Pope John Paul II (Ecclesia in America), "The appearance of Mary to native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531 had a decisive effect on evangelization. Its influence greatly overflows the boundaries of Mexico, spreading to the whole continent...[which] has recognized in the mestizo face of the Virgin of Tepeyac, "in Blessed Mary of Guadalupe, an impressive example of a perfectly enculturated evangelization." Therefore, JP II said that Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated in the Western Hemisphere as "**Queen of all America**" and that the December 12th feast day be celebrated not only in Mexico but throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is more than an event; she is a person, "Patroness of all America and Star of the first and new evangelization", her continuing witness to Christ continues to aid the men and women of the Western Hemisphere to a greater encounter with Christ.

WHAT HAVE THE POPES SAID CONCERNING Our Lady of Guadalupe

1576, Pope Gregory XIII extends indulgences and blessings to the chapel at Tepeyac

1667, Pope Clement IX institutes the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12

1754, Pope Benedict XIV declares our Lady of Guadalupe patroness of New Spain, saying, "God has not done anything like this for any other nation."

1900, Pope Leo XII proclaims that the offices and Masses of Our Lady of Guadalupe are to be celebrated in perpetuity

1910, Pope Pius X declares Our Lady of Guadalupe patroness of Latin America

1935, Pope Pius XI names Our Lady of Guadalupe patroness of the Philippines

Our Lady of Guadalupe – The self-portrait and its message

1946, Pope Pius XII declares Our Lady of Guadalupe Patroness of the Americas

1999, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe as Patroness of the whole American continent

2002, July 31, Juan Diego is canonized by Pope John Paul II at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, becoming the first Mexican indigenous saint

The Seven Gifts Holy Spirit

Summary

What are the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Do you have them? Have you asked for them? Are you prepared to receive them?

Objective

The Objective is become familiar with the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit and to be open and prepared to receive them.

"Only one thing is important -- eternal salvation. Only one thing, therefore, is to be feared—sin. Sin is the result of ignorance, weakness, and indifference. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Light, of Strength, and of Love. With His sevenfold gifts, He enlightens the mind, strengthens the will, and inflames the heart with love of God. To ensure our salvation we ought to invoke the Divine Spirit daily, for "The Spirit helpeth our infirmity. We know not what we should pray for as we ought. But the Spirit Himself asketh for us." (From the Novena to the Holy Spirit)

After being enlightened or receiving the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that you asked for, you become an Apostle of the Holy Spirit by proceeding to carry out what you now presume you are to do. You will know you are doing His will because you will feel His presence in your heart and you will be filled with his rewards: love, joy, peace or any other of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. (From Listening to the Holy Spirit by George E. Schullhoff A.H.S.)

Bible Readings

1. Isaiah Chapter 11: 1-3

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

2. John 14:15-17, 25-26

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.

I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name— he will teach you everything and remind you of all that (I) told you.

3. 2 Timothy 1:3

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

4. 1 Corinthians 6:19

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

5. Wisdom 1:4

Because into a soul that plots evil wisdom enters not, nor dwells she in a body under debt of sin.

6. Romans 8:9-14

But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body

is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you. Consequently, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1830

"The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit."

2. Paragraph 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."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you feel connected to the Holy Spirit?
2. Have you ever asked the Holy Spirit for his Seven Gifts?
3. Which of the Gifts do you feel that you have in abundance and which are you lacking?
4. Has the Holy Spirit ever inspired you to do anything? Explain.

Recommended Resources

1. Novena to the Holy Spirit for the Seven Gifts:
<http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/pentecost/seven.htm>
2. Book: "Be a Man", by Father Larry Richards, Chapter 4 "Be a Man Who Lives in the Holy Spirit"

Accountability

1. Prepare yourself to receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, make a sincere and complete confession.
2. Pray to the Holy Spirit to receive his Seven Gifts.
3. Reflect on the Seven Gifts and ask God to help you use them in your life.
4. Take a different Gift each of the next seven days; focus on that Gift for that day and ask God for that Gift.

Author(s)

Michael Copfer

Included Resources:

1. Presenting group may wish to incorporate the following prayer by St. Augustine into their pray:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen

2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit enable us to live a holy Christian life. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are:

The Seven Gifts Holy Spirit

1. Wisdom:

- That I may despise the perishable things of this world and aspire only after the things that are eternal (Desire for the things of God, and to direct our whole life and all our actions to His honor and glory)
- It is the gift of Wisdom that strengthens our faith, fortifies hope, perfects charity, and promotes the practice of virtue in the highest degree
- Wisdom is the most perfect of the gifts; it enables you to know how to use all of His gifts in their proper proportions

2. Understanding (Light of Divine Truth):

- Enable us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith (truths of our holy religion); it is by Understanding that we learn to appreciate and relish them
- It enables us to penetrate the inner meaning of revealed truths and through them to be quickened to newness of life.
- Our faith ceases to be sterile and inactive, but inspires a mode of life that bears eloquent testimony to the faith that is in us; we begin to "walk worthy of God in all things pleasing, and increasing in the knowledge of God"

3. Counsel (Right Judgement, Supernatural Common Sense):

- That I may ever choose the surest way of pleasing God and gaining heaven
- Endows the soul with supernatural prudence, enabling it to judge promptly and rightly what must be done, especially in difficult circumstances; warning us of the deceits of the devil, and of the dangers to salvation
- Counsel applies the principles furnished by Knowledge and Understanding to the innumerable concrete cases that confront us in the course of our daily duty as parents, teachers, public servants, and Christian citizens. Counsel is supernatural common sense, a priceless treasure in the quest of salvation
- Enables you to know how to listen and to act upon His promptings and His inspiration

4. Fortitude (Courage):

- Strengthens us to do the will of God in all things; that we may bear our cross with Him and that we may overcome with courage all the obstacles that oppose our salvation
- Fortitude imparts to the will an impulse and energy which move it to undertake without hesitancy the most arduous tasks, to face dangers, to trample under foot human respect, and to endure without complaint the slow martyrdom of even lifelong tribulation
- Gives you strength to do what you must do

5. Knowledge:

- That I may know God and know myself and grow perfect in the science of the Saints
- Enables the soul to evaluate created things at their true worth--in their relation to God (It unmask the pretense of creatures, reveals their emptiness, and points out their only true purpose as instruments in the service of God)
- It shows us the loving care of God even in adversity, and directs us to glorify Him in every circumstance of life (Guided by its light, we put first things first, and prize the friendship of God beyond all else)
- Enable us to discover the will of God in all things
- Enables you to see as God sees, to the extent that He wants you to see at a particular moment

6. Piety (Reverence):

- That I may find the service of God sweet and amiable (allows us to find the practice of his religion, not a burdensome duty, but a delightful service - Where there is love, there is no labor)

- He who is filled with the gift of Piety Love God as a Father, and obey Him because we love Him
- Enables you to love being in the presence of God
- It inspires us to love and respect for His sake persons and things consecrated to Him, as well as those who are vested with His authority, His Blessed Mother and the Saints, the Church and its visible Head, our parents and superiors, our country and its rulers

7. Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe):

- That I may be filled with a loving reverence towards God and may dread in any way to displease Him
- Sovereign respect for God, and makes us dread nothing so much as to offend Him by sin
- It is a fear that arises, not from the thought of hell, but from sentiments of reverence and filial submission to our heavenly Father
- Enables you to love the Lord so much you fear not doing His will

3. The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit By Frank X. Blisard

<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2006/0612uan.asp>

It is difficult to name another Catholic doctrine of as hallowed antiquity as the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that is subject to such benign neglect. Like most Catholics born around 1950, I learned their names by rote: "*wis-dom, un-derstanding, coun-sel, fort-itude, know-ledge, pie-ety, and fear of the Lord!*" Sadly, though, it was all my classmates and I ever learned, at least formally, about these mysterious powers that were to descend upon us at our confirmation. Once Confirmation Day had come and gone, we were chagrined to find that we had not become the all-wise, all-knowing, unconquerable *milites Christi* (soldiers of Christ) that our pre-Vatican II catechesis had promised.

The Problem

Ironically, post-Vatican II catechesis has proven even less capable of instilling in young Catholics a lively sense of what the seven gifts are all about. At least the previous approach had the advantage of conjuring up the lurid prospect of a martyr's bloody death at the hands of godless atheists. But, alas, such militant pedagogy went out the window in the aftermath of the Council. But a stream of reports in recent decades on declining interest in the faith among new *confirmandi* suggests that the changes are not having their desired effect. Not that there were no bugs in the pre-Vatican II catechetical machine—there were plenty—but such superficial tinkering did not even begin to address them.

A recent article in *Theological Studies* by Rev. Charles E. Bouchard, O.P., president of the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri ("Recovering the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Moral Theology," Sept. 2002), identifies some specific weaknesses in traditional Catholic catechesis on the seven gifts:

- Neglect of the close connection between the seven gifts and the cardinal and theological virtues (faith, hope, charity/love, prudence, justice, fortitude/courage, and temperance), which St. Thomas Aquinas himself had emphasized in his treatment of the subject
- A tendency to relegate the seven gifts to the esoteric realm of ascetical/mystical spirituality rather than the practical, down-to-earth realm of moral theology, which Aquinas had indicated was their proper sphere
- A form of spiritual elitism whereby the fuller study of the theology of the gifts was reserved to priests and religious, who alone, it was presumed—unlike the unlettered masses—had the requisite learning and spirituality to appreciate and assimilate it
- Neglect of the scriptural basis of the theology of the gifts, particularly Isaiah 11, where the gifts were originally identified and applied prophetically to Christ

The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* had already addressed some of these issues (such as the importance of the virtues and the relationship between the gifts and "the moral life") but avoided defining the individual gifts or even treating them in any detail—a mere six paragraphs (1285–1287,

1830–1831, and 1845), as compared with forty on the virtues (1803–1829, 1832–1844). Perhaps that is why the catechetical textbooks that have appeared in the wake of the new *Catechism* present such a confusing array of definitions of the gifts. These definitions tend to be imprecise rehashings of the traditional Thomistic definitions or totally ad hoc definitions drawn from the author's personal experience or imagination. In light of these developments, it is helpful to review the Church's traditional explanation of the seven gifts.

The Traditional Explanation

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are, according to Catholic Tradition, heroic character traits that Jesus Christ alone possesses in their plenitude but that he freely shares with the members of his mystical body (i.e., his Church). These traits are infused into every Christian as a permanent endowment at his baptism, nurtured by the practice of the seven virtues, and sealed in the sacrament of confirmation. They are also known as the sanctifying gifts of the Spirit, because they serve the purpose of rendering their recipients docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their lives, helping them to grow in holiness and making them fit for heaven.

The nature of the seven gifts has been debated by theologians since the mid-second century, but the standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

- **Wisdom** is both the knowledge of and judgment about "divine things" and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth (I/I.1.6; I/II.69.3; II/II.8.6; II/II.45.1–5).
- **Understanding** is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation—in effect, the ability to "see" God (I/I.12.5; I/II.69.2; II/II.8.1–3).
- **Counsel** allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation (II/II.52.1).
- **Fortitude** denotes a firmness of mind in doing good and in avoiding evil, particularly when it is difficult or dangerous to do so, and the confidence to overcome all obstacles, even deadly ones, by virtue of the assurance of everlasting life (I/II.61.3; II/II.123.2; II/II.139.1).
- **Knowledge** is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as to never wander from the straight path of justice (II/II.9.3).
- **Piety** is, principally, revering God with filial affection, paying worship and duty to God, paying due duty to all men on account of their relationship to God, and honoring the saints and not contradicting Scripture. The Latin word *pietas* denotes the reverence that we give to our father and to our country; since God is the Father of all, the worship of God is also called piety (I/II.68.4; II/II.121.1).
- **Fear of God** is, in this context, "filial" or chaste fear whereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from him—as opposed to "servile" fear, whereby we fear punishment (I/II.67.4; II/II.19.9).

These gifts, according to Aquinas, are "habits," "instincts," or "dispositions" provided by God as supernatural helps to man in the process of his "perfection." They enable man to transcend the limitations of human reason and human nature and participate in the very life of God, as Christ promised (John 14:23). Aquinas insisted that they are necessary for man's salvation, which he cannot achieve on his own. They serve to "perfect" the four cardinal or moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). The virtue of charity is the key that unlocks the potential power of the seven gifts, which can (and will) lie dormant in the soul after baptism unless so acted upon.

Because "grace builds upon nature" (ST I/I.2.3), the seven gifts work synergistically with the seven virtues and also with the twelve fruits of the Spirit and the eight beatitudes. The emergence of the gifts is fostered by the practice of the virtues, which in turn are perfected by the exercise of the gifts. The proper exercise of the gifts, in turn, produce the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (Gal. 5:22–23). The goal of this cooperation among virtues, gifts, and fruits is the attainment of the eight-fold state of beatitude described by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–10).

The Spiritual Arsenal

The Seven Gifts Holy Spirit

Rather than perpetuating either a strictly Thomistic approach or an approach based on contemporary, culturally conditioned definitions, I propose a third way of understanding the seven gifts, one that goes back to the biblical source material.

The first—and only—place in the entire Bible where these seven special qualities are listed together is Isaiah 11:1–3, in a famous Messianic prophecy.

Virtually every commentator on the seven gifts for the past two millennia has identified this passage as the source of the teaching, yet none have noted how integral these seven concepts were to the ancient Israelite "Wisdom" tradition, which is reflected in such Old Testament books as Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Psalms, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon, as well as certain strands of the prophetic books, including Isaiah. This material focuses on how to navigate the ethical demands of daily life (economics, love and marriage, rearing children, interpersonal relationships, the use and abuse of power) rather than the historical, prophetic, or mythical/metaphysical themes usually associated with the Old Testament. It does not contradict these other aspects of revelation but complements them by providing a glimpse into how Israel's covenant with Yahweh is lived out in all its nitty-gritty detail.

It is from this world of practical, down-to-earth, everyday concerns rather than the realm of ascetical or mystical experience that the seven gifts emerged, and the context of Isaiah 11 reinforces this frame of reference. The balance of Isaiah describes in loving detail the aggressiveness with which the "shoot of Jesse" will establish his "peaceable kingdom" upon the earth:

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Is. 11:3–4, 9)

Establishing this kingdom entails thought, planning, work, struggle, courage, endurance, perseverance, humility—that is, getting one's hands dirty. This earthbound perspective is a profitable one from which to view the role the seven gifts play in the life of mature (or maturing) Christians.

There is a strain within Catholicism, as within Christianity in general, that focuses on the afterlife to the exclusion—and detriment—of this world, as if detachment from temporal things were alone a guarantee of eternal life. One of the correctives to this kind of thinking issued by Vatican II was the recovery of the biblical emphasis on the kingdom of God as a concrete reality that not only transcends the created order but also transforms it (*Dei Verbum* 17; *Lumen Gentium* 5; *Gaudium et Spes* 39).

The seven gifts are indispensable resources in the struggle to establish the kingdom and are, in a sense, a byproduct of actively engaging in spiritual warfare. If a person does not bother to equip himself properly for battle, he should not be surprised to find himself defenseless when the battle is brought to his doorstep. If my classmates and I never "acquired" the "mysterious powers" we anticipated, perhaps it is because we never took up arms in the struggle to advance the kingdom of God!

The seven gifts are an endowment to which every baptized Christian can lay claim from his earliest childhood. They are our patrimony. These gifts, given in the sacraments for us to develop through experience, are indispensable to the successful conduct of the Christian way of life. **They do not appear spontaneously and out of nowhere but emerge gradually as the fruit of virtuous living.** Nor are they withdrawn by the Spirit once they are no longer needed, for they are perpetually needed as long as we are fighting the good fight.

The seven gifts are designed to be used in the world for the purpose of transforming that world for Christ. Isaiah 11 vividly portrays what these gifts are to be used for: to do what one is called to do in one's own time and place to advance the kingdom of God. The specific, personal details of that call do not come into focus until one has realized his very limited, ungodlike place in the scheme of things (fear of the Lord), accepted one's role as a member of God's family (piety), and acquired the habit of following the Father's specific directions for living a godly life (knowledge). This familiarity

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with God breeds the strength and courage needed to confront the evil that one inevitably encounters in one's life (fortitude) and the cunning to nimbly shift one's strategies to match—even anticipate—the many machinations of the Enemy (counsel). The more one engages in such "spiritual warfare," the more one perceives how such skirmishes fit into the big picture that is God's master plan for establishing his reign in this fallen world (understanding) and the more confident, skillful, and successful one becomes in the conduct of his particular vocation (wisdom).

Soldiers of Christ

These remarks are aimed primarily at adult cradle Catholics who, like me, were inadequately catechized (at least with respect to the seven gifts). Because of the ongoing controversy in the Church at large over the proper age for reception of the sacrament of confirmation, the malaise of inadequate catechesis is likely to continue afflicting the faithful. The lack of attention to the synergistic relationship between the virtues and the gifts seems to be the main culprit in the failure to develop the gifts among the *confirmandi*. Catechesis that is aimed only at the acquisition of knowledge or merely at promoting "random acts of kindness" without a solidly evangelical organizing principle simply will not cut it with this (or any other) generation of young people. Centering prayer, journaling, guided meditation, or any of the host of other pseudo-pedagogical tricks popular in many current catechetical programs cannot compete with the seductions of the culture of death.

The path to a mature appropriation of the spiritual arsenal represented by the seven gifts needs to be trod as early as possible, and the seven virtues can serve today, as they have for most of the Church's history, as excellent guides along that path. Perhaps it is time to resurrect the traditional image of the baptized as "soldiers of Christ," a phrase that has been anathema for Catholic catechetical materials for decades. Despite the fact that the post-Vatican II *zeitgeist* has militated against the notion of "militancy" in all things religious, this stance has been shown to be misguided—by an honest assessment of what Sacred Scripture has to say about it and by world events in our own lifetime. The toppling of the Soviet Union, for example, would not have happened without the nonviolent militancy of John Paul II in the pursuit of a legitimate goal. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are our spiritual weaponry for the spiritual warfare of everyday life.

No Regrets - 10 Ways to Make Time for Your Children

Summary

Live every day if it were your last! How do you as a Father balance your faith, family and work in this hurried world, every day? Learn how Father's just like you are living a daily life of no regrets: making more memories with their family, deepening their faith and coming home from work on time!

Objective

Help the Fathers to understand "How to Live a life of no regrets with your family" by learning how to spend more time with their children and family. It is suggested for the presenting small group, to focus the larger group time by sharing your team's personal "live a life of no regrets" experiences/examples on how you each have made a "step change" in your life to spend more time with family and your children.

Bible Readings

1. Psalm 112
"His children will be mighty in the land"
2. Romans 8:28
"We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2223
"Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you regularly come home on time from work to your family and children?
2. Are your children's birthdays, recitals, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar?
3. Do you schedule breakfast dates with your daughter/son?

Recommended Resources

1. Robert Rogers - <http://www.mightyintheland.com>
2. Mary Beth Bonacci - Catholic Herald - Living Life with "no regrets"
http://www.catholicherald.com/stories/Living-with-no-regrets,12859?content_source=&category_id=13&search_filter=&event_mode=&event_ts_from=&list_type=&order_by=&order_sort=&content_class=&sub_type=stories&town_id=

Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to define "what is quality time with your family?"
2. Have you allowed any person or circumstance at work to rob you of your joy? Why?
3. Have you done your 100% best with your family, faith and job this week?

Author(s)

Reid Rooney / Kevin McDonough

Included Resources

Robert Rogers: 10 ways to live a life with no regrets with your family.

1. Sign-up for some organized activity together-chess club, a sports league, church groups, and so on as your free time activity that way, you can use the structure of the activity to help you spend time with your child.
2. Put birthdays, a recital, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar. Tell co-workers that you wouldn't miss those events for the world, and ask them to help remind you.
3. Create regular rituals to connect with your kids with phone calls from the office, special "daddy" time when you walk in the door, or other weekly events that keep you in touch.
4. Discuss your priorities with your boss. Be candid with him or her about times when you need to flex your schedule for family events. Make it clear that you are dedicated to doing your best at work, but that family is also very important to you. Suggest your own "win-win" solutions or ask for his ideas to help reach a workable balance.
5. Create a "Next Year's Vacation" planning session with your children by having them share with your pictures/places of where they want to go and how they want to spend time with Dad on vacation!
6. Create a family devotional time. This is a time set aside during a time where all members of the family are required to be there. Then you as a father take the lead in sharing important things with your family. Read passages in Holy Scripture and pray together; share thoughts on certain historical events (Memorial Day) and what they should mean to us; talk about current events; peer pressure the kids are facing or how to look forward to an uncertain future with confidence.
7. As the Father, make the weekend Saturday or Sunday breakfast and have your kids help out as appropriate. Talk as you all prepare the meal about what was their "favorite thing" that happened in their life during the week.
8. Car Time. When traveling to the next sporting or activity event, instead of listening to the radio, try spending time with your kids by discussing with them: 1) What was the best part of today?; 2) What was your favorite thing that happened to you this week; 3) Tell me about something really cool that you saw today/this week?
9. Have a Breakfast time with Daddy with your children individually. No agenda's just go out to breakfast and spend time with your child 1 on 1. Do you know their favorite song, favorite teacher, who they think is the coolest kid @ school, who are the coolest parents, etc?
10. Support your company's "Take your children to work day". If your company does not have it, consider starting one. Many Cincinnati based companies like P&G, Kroger, and Macy's have established "Take your children to work" programs.

10 tips to make more time with your Children

Parents and their children are spending less time interacting with each other. As a result, many children are getting less personal love and attention than their parents did. American Demographics reported that parents today spend roughly 40 percent less time with their children than did parents a generation ago. To help families stay connected, below is a list of helpful family time tips. Keep in mind, quantity and quality time is important when choosing activities. So build memories around exciting events by keeping your family time creative and enjoyable. Print out the following tips as daily reminders.

1. Eat together & listen to each other

Most children today don't know the meaning of a family dinnertime. Yet the communication and unity built during this setting is integral to a healthy family life. Sharing a meal together allows the opportunity to talk about each other's lives. This is a time for parents to listen, as well as to give advice and encouragement. Attentive listening conveys a message that a person is really interested in another. It also imparts a sense of worth and helps develop trust. Therefore, listening is a critical link in successful parenting.

2. Read often

It's important for parents to read to their children. The latest research indicates that reading to your children cultivates an interest for knowledge and stimulates language development. It also increases their attention spans and helps them become more curious. Look for books that your child would enjoy reading. After reading, ask questions about the content.

3. Do chores together

Part of what goes on in the home is the development of teamwork. Functional family life depends on the contribution of everyone. Assigning chores is the most productive way of teaching responsibility and accountability to your children. Doing chores with your child will help foster good communication skills.

4. Help with schoolwork

A great way to spend quality time with children and light a fire of learning is to help children with their schoolwork. A parent's eagerness to help will cause a child to become more interested in school thus improving his or her grades. Regular trips to the library for school projects are an inexpensive and enjoyable way to spend time with children. Helping should begin with an understanding that children are responsible for homework. Parents are there to help their child get organized and to encourage them when they get stuck.

5. Start a hobby or project

Choose a fun activity that your child is interested in. Activities like cooking, crafts, fishing or biking will make great hobbies that can open the door to exciting family time. Once a child learns a new recipe or is able to cast a lure accurately, let him or her take the lead with your supervision.

6. Play games

New technology has made video games more prevalent. As a result, many children are spending long hours in front of the TV playing computer programs. Parents should find creative ways to spark an interest in family-oriented contests such as board games or card games. This will give parents additional time to talk and nurture their relationship.

7. Plan a family outing

Sometimes getting out of the house is important. Hop in the family car and go for a drive. Prepare a picnic lunch and visit a local park. Take time to play catch or ride a bike. A stroll in the woods will help parents interact with their children. Also, a visit to the zoo or museum will spark a child's enthusiasm and lead to lengthy discussions.

8. Encourage athletic activities

It is vital for children to exercise. Sports not only strengthen the body, but also build character and determination. Whether it's a father pitching a baseball to a son or a mother and daughter nature walking, finding time for athletic events is important for a child's emotional and physical development. This is a great opportunity for a family to interact.

9. Create a Family Time calendar

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Since many parents have hectic schedules, time with children often becomes a low priority whether intended or not. Post a calendar on the refrigerator and have parents and children pencil in special events. Knowing when you're going to meet may also help you think of creative activities. Commit to keeping this schedule free from interruptions.

10. Pray together & attend a house of worship

Nothing is more special than taking a few minutes each day to pray with a child before bedtime. By explaining the purpose behind prayer, children will learn the importance of faith as the foundation for the family. Also, when parents go to religious services, they instill in their children a reverence for God.

Understanding and Living God's Will

Summary

Christ taught us that knowing God's will and living in obedience to that will is the key to it all! God is the potter; we are the clay. God keeps us spinning on His potter's wheel, shaping and reshaping us as He bathes our lives in tears to make us more Christ-like so He can use us for His will. Surrender daily. Keep your clay moist through daily prayer - prayer that's in accordance to His will.

Objective:

Our job, our purpose is to understand and live in God's will and not be selective when times get tough.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 7:21

Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

2. Matthew 12:50

For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother.

3. Romans 12:2

Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

Catechism Readings

III. "THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"

1. Paragraph 2822

Our Father "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He "is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish." His commandment is "that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses his entire will.

2. Paragraph 2825

"Although he was a Son, [Jesus] learned obedience through what he suffered." How much more reason have we sinful creatures to learn obedience - we who in him have become children of adoption. We ask our Father to unite our will to his Son's, in order to fulfill his will, his plan of salvation for the life of the world. We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father.

In committing ourselves to [Christ], we can become one spirit with him, and thereby accomplish his will, in such wise that it will be perfect on earth as it is in heaven.

Consider how Jesus Christ teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He commands each of the faithful who prays to do so universally, for the whole world. For he did not say "thy will be done in me or in us," but "on earth," the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer differ from heaven.

3. Paragraph 2826

By prayer we can discern "what is the will of God" and obtain the endurance to do it. Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing "the will of my Father in heaven."

4. Paragraph 2827

"If anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him." Such is the power of the Church's prayer in the name of her Lord, above all in the Eucharist. Her prayer is also a communion of intercession with the all-holy Mother of God and all the saints who have been pleasing to the Lord because they willed his will alone:

It would not be inconsistent with the truth to understand the words, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," to mean: "in the Church as in our Lord Jesus Christ himself"; or "in the Bride who has been betrothed, just as in the Bridegroom who has accomplished the will of the Father."

Small Group Questions

1. Think about a situation you have been in lately where you did not live God's will. Discuss that situation and what caused you to make the choice you made.
2. What action can you take the next time so the outcome is different?
3. At this point in your life what level of commitment do you have to living God's will and not your will? Discuss ways you can improve upon making the right choice.

Recommended Resources

1. Sermon 19b 2009: *Living in God's Will* Day by Day
<http://www.stdavidchurch.org/worshipmusic/files/file1/Sermon%20091309%20WFA.pdf>
2. Book: *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community* (Catholic Edition) [Hardcover] by [Albert L. Winseman](#)
3. Book: *Finding God's Will for You* [Paperback] by [St. Francis de Sales](#) (Author)

Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start thinking of various ways we can let go of some of our selfish ways as we strive to live closer to God's will for our life.
2. Offer some thoughts to the small group or simply contemplate in your mind and heart how you can improve and become a better version of yourself.
3. Consider an action you will take this week to better understand God's will and commit to it. Report to the small group your observations and progress during the next meeting.

Author(s)

Graham Galloway (Previous Author: Steve Green)

Included Resources

A Living Sacrifice to God

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual* act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:1-2

LETTER: "The less self-willed we are, the easier it will be to us to follow God's will."

By [St. Francis de Sales](#)

We must recollect that there is no vocation without its wearinesses, its bitternesses, and its trials; and moreover (except in the case of those who are wholly resigned to the will of God,) each one would willingly change his condition with that of others. Those who are Ministers, would fain be otherwise. They who are married, would they were not. They who are not, would they were. From whence proceeds this general

discontentedness, if it be not a certain rebellion against constraint, and an evil spirit in us that makes each one think another's condition better than his own?

But it is all one; and whosoever is not entirely resigned, but keeps on turning this way and that, never will find peace. When a person has a fever, he finds no place comfortable; he has not remained in one bed a quarter of an hour, before he wishes to be in another. It is not the bed which is in fault, but the fever, which torments him everywhere. And so a person who has not the fever of self-will, is contented everywhere and in all things, provided God be glorified. He cares not in what capacity God employs him, provided he can do therein His Divine will.

But this is not all. We must not only do the will of God, but to be really devout, we must do it cheerfully, nay, joyfully. If I were not a Bishop, perhaps, knowing what I now do, I might wish not to be one. But being one, not only am I obliged to do all that this difficult vocation requires, but I must do it joyfully, and make it agreeable to myself to do it. This is what St. Paul means when he says, "Let every man in the vocation in which he is called, therein abide with God."¹

We cannot bear the crosses of others, but each one must bear his own; and that we may each bear our own, our Lord would that each should renounce himself; that is to say, his own will. "I wish this or that" I should be better here or there." These are temptations. Our Lord knows best what is best for each one of us; let us do what He wills, and remain where He has placed us.

But you have asked me to give you a few practical rules for your guidance. Besides all I have told you above, you should, First, meditate every day, either in the morning or before dinner or supper, and especially on the Life and Death of our Lord, and you can make use of any book that may assist you. Your meditation should never last above half-an-hour; at the end of each always add a consideration of the obedience which our Lord exercised towards God His Father: for you will see that all He did was done in obedience to the will of God; and considering this will rouse you more earnestly to strive to learn His will yourself. Secondly, before you do or prepare to do any of those duties of your calling which are apt to irritate you, think of the saints of old, who joyfully endured great and grievous things,—some suffering martyrdom, some dishonor in this world; some binding up ulcers and fearful sores; some banishing themselves into the desert; some working among slaves in the galleys: and each and all to do something pleasing in the sight of God. And what are we called upon to do, approaching to such trials as these?

Thirdly, Often think that the real value of whatever we do, is proportioned by the conformity with which we do it to the will of God. If in merely eating or drinking I do it *because* it is the will of God that I should, I am doing what is more agreeable to Him, than if I were to do what should even cost me my life, without any such Divine intention.

Fourthly, I would advise you often during the day, beseech God that He would inspire you with a real love of your vocation, and that you should say, like St. Paul, when he was converted, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"² Wouldest Thou that I should serve Thee in the lowest office in Thy house? I will reckon myself here, too blest. Provided that I serve Thee, I care not in what capacity." And coming more particularly to what is vexing you, say, "Wouldest Thou that I should do such-and-such a thing? Alas! O Lord, though I am not worthy, willingly will I do it:" and by these means you may greatly humble yourself; and oh, what a treasure you will obtain! Far, far greater, doubtless, than you can ever estimate!

Fifthly, I would wish that you should consider how many saints have been in your position of life and vocation, and how they all accommodated themselves to it with great meekness and resignation; as many in the Old Testament as in the New,—Sara, and Rebecca, and Elizabeth, and the holy Anna, and St. Paul, and hundreds of others; and let their example encourage you. We must love what God loves; and if He loves our vocation, let us love it also; and let us not amuse ourselves, by placing ourselves in the position of others. Let us diligently do our business. For each his own cross is not too much. Gently mingle the office of Martha with that of Mary, diligently doing the duties of your calling, often recollecting yourself, and placing yourself in spirit at the foot of the Cross, and saying, "My Lord, whether I run, or whether I stand still, or whatever I do, I am Thine, and Thou art mine. Thou art my first Love, my Spouse, and all that I do, it is for Thee, whatsoever it be."

Further, every evening examine yourself, and throughout the day constantly raise ejaculatory prayers to God. I recommend, for your reading, the "Spiritual Combat." Communicate, if possible, every week, and regularly attend the services of the Church on Sundays and Festivals. Remember also what I have often told you,—be just to yourself in the devoted life you are leading; I mean, let others, and especially those of your own family, see its blessed effects in yourself, and be led to honor it accordingly. We must always be careful

not to make our devotion annoying to others. What we cannot do without annoyance, especially to those placed over us, we should leave undone: and believe me this spiritual self-denial and privation, so far from being displeasing to God, will be accepted by Him as such, and turn to your own profit. Deny yourself willingly; and in proportion as you are hindered from doing the good you desire, strive so much the more zealously to do what you do not desire. Perhaps it is difficult for you to resign yourself patiently and gladly to these privations, but in doing so, you will gain for yourself real benefit. In all commit your cares and trials, and contradictions, and whatever befalls you to God, comforting yourself in the thought, that He blesses those who are holy, or those who are striving to become so. Keep your heart ready to bear every sort of cross and disappointment with resignation, for the sake of Him Who has borne so much for us: and may He fill thy heart and be thy guide through life!

Accepting Children with Special Needs

Summary

Fathers all react differently when they learn about a child with special needs. We, as protectors and providers, can learn about the tolerance, acceptance and greater love that happens every day in our community and, sometimes, in our own family.

Objective

From <http://www.mrdad.com/qa/schoolage/special-needs.htm>

Conservatively speaking, around 15 percent of preschool and school-age children in the US have one or more "chronic conditions." These could be anything from asthma and autism to cancer and cerebral palsy.

That basically means that any given Friday morning, approximately 7 or more dads in attendance are included in this statistic. In other words, either our own family is affected; or we know one that is.

These families have extra layers of stress: mentally, physically, emotionally & financially. As fathers, we want to act as a pillar of strength for the rest of our family by fulfilling our duties as protector and provider.

Having a child with a chronic condition-whether it's a physical or mental one-puts a lot of stress on the entire family. Fathers and mothers have very different ways of reacting to this stress. Mothers typically worry more about the emotional strain of caring for a child and how the child will do socially. Fathers are concerned with more practical things, such as how to talk about the issue with family and friends, how the child will function in school, whether he'll eventually become self-sufficient. Many dads also experience a heightened sense of responsibility and protectiveness.

Although mothers are generally more involved in day-to-day caring of kids with chronic conditions, fathers are affected just as deeply by the emotional strain and often have an especially hard time coping. Part of the problem is a series of vicious circles:

Some of dads' biggest worries have to do with finances: can they afford to pay for treatments, tutors, and special medical attention, is their insurance coverage adequate, and so on. To combat those worries, dads may spend more time at work. That makes them feel better because they're easing their financial concerns. Plus, for many men, their jobs are a source of satisfaction, a place where they feel in control. But the more time they spend at work, the less available they are to spend with their children and the less they're able to be involved in treatment plans and meetings with professionals. As a result, they don't get information first-hand and feel out of the loop. It's a tough merry-go-round to get off of.

Being around children with disabilities can be a great teaching moment for our children. Learning about tolerance and acceptance are natural topics. However, gratefulness and humility are easy to interject, as well.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Corinthians 12:22, 23

Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor

2. Matthew 19:13-14

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

3. Matthew 25:42-46

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.'

Accepting Children with Special Needs

Small Group Questions

1. How has your family or a family you know faced a “chronic” condition with a child?
2. Do you feel like need help or could offer help?
3. Are you getting (or fighting for) all the resources your child needs?

Recommended Resources

1. www.fathersnetwork.org

Accountability

1. With respect to your children’s health and care, are you and your wife a team on the same mission?
2. Reach out to a family in need.

Author(s)

Anthony Your, Reid Rooney

Included Resources

1. Teaching Your Child about Peers with Special Needs

<http://www.care.com/special-needs-teaching-your-child-about-peers-with-special-needs-p1017-q598.html>

Disabilities cover a wide range. Some are obvious -- such as a child with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair or a child with a visual impairment who uses a cane to navigate when walking. Other disabilities may be more "hidden" -- for example, children who have learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorder.

Chances are that at some point your child will have a classmate with a disability. Just as you guided your very young child when he or she began to befriend others, you can encourage your child to learn about and be a friend to children who have disabilities.

Basic ideas to share with your child

- No two people are the same -- some differences are just more noticeable.
- A disability is only one characteristic of a person. People have many facets: likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges.
- Children with disabilities are like all children in that they want friends, respect and to be included.
- Children can be born disabled or become disabled from an accident or illness. You can't "catch" a disability from someone else.
- Just because someone has a physical disability (when a part or parts of the body do not work well) does not mean they necessarily have a cognitive (or thinking) disability.
- Children with disabilities can do many of the things your child does, but it might take them longer. They may need assistance or adaptive equipment to help them.

Try to use clear, respectful language when talking about someone with disabilities. For a younger child, keep explanations simple, such as, "She uses a wheelchair because a part of her body does not work as well as it could."

Reinforce with your child that name calling -- even if meant as a joke -- is always unacceptable as it hurts people's feelings.

2. CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

<http://www.mrdad.com/qa/schoolage/special-needs.htm> (continued from “Objective”)

Accepting Children with Special Needs

Not surprisingly, conflict, tension, and even divorce are more common in families with a disabled child. But fortunately, there are some ways of reducing the strain.

- Join a support group. Researchers have found that men who get involved with other fathers who are facing the same issues (in a guy-only environment) feel less sadness, fatigue, pessimism, guilt, and stress, and have more feelings of satisfaction and success, fewer problems, and better decision-making abilities than dads who don't join groups. These benefits will rub off on your relationship with your partner as well.
- Explore every possible resource for help. If your friends are able to step in, that'll help. But also check with your local school district to see what kinds of resources they have. In addition, About.com (specialchildren.about.com) has a good collection of resources, and Exceptional Parent magazine (eparent.com) provides info, support, and resources for parents and families of children with disabilities. Also, be sure to check out The Fathers Network (fathersnetwork.org), a site specifically devoted to helping fathers of children with disabilities.
- Play and communicate with your child. Researchers at the University of Florida did a study where they taught dads to use everyday activities like building blocks, puppets, cars and trucks, and bubbles to connect with their autistic children. But there was a twist. The fathers were instructed to follow the child's lead, wait for the child's response before continuing, and not give into the temptation to direct the play. The results were wonderful. "Fathers were more likely to initiate play in an animated way and responded more to their children during playtime," said Jennifer Elder, the lead researcher. "Children also became more vocal and were more than twice as likely to initiate play with their fathers. With the proper training at an early age, we feel that these techniques can help autistic children be more socially interactive and pick up language more easily."

One particularly interesting result that the researchers hadn't expected was that a lot of the fathers trained the mothers and siblings to do the same thing. Elder and her colleagues had done similar studies training mothers and have very much the same successes. The only difference was that mothers weren't as likely to teach the dads what they'd learned.

3. Fathering Special Needs Children

<http://fatherwork.byu.edu/specialNeeds.htm>

FatherWork with special-needs children should and can be as wonderful and varied as special-needs kids themselves are. Fathers of special-needs children are ordinary men doing both ordinary and extraordinary things since parents of special-needs kids do the same things other parents do but usually have added burdens (and, often, added joys). Fatherwork with special-needs kids can be like the Special Olympics. Fathers can coach children to develop skills and confidence, provide opportunities for accomplishment, give encouragement and supportive cheering along the way, and present them with rewards for effort and accomplishment.

Every special-needs child deserves a father that runs and jumps with her through the challenges of life, one that enthusiastically hugs him at the end of each little success, one that hangs medals on his neck with pride and love in his eyes, and one that, through his constant encouragement and love, places a continual stream of flowers in her hands. Your child (and all special-needs children) needs the coaching, cheering, encouraging, and assisting that you uniquely can give.

Apologetics – Defending the Catholic Faith

Summary

Have you ever been asked “why are you a Catholic”? Did you pause or feel incomplete in your response? Learn how Apologetics is not only a way to present a rational basis to help you defend your Christian faith, but an invitation to you to learn your faith more deeply so that you feel moved to share your faith.

Objective

We are constantly bombarded with the messages that religion is for the stone ages and not for the modern culture, that it has no grounds in reality and cannot be proven. Use this session to explore what Apologetics is and how every Catholic should be familiar with it. Discuss what the bible commands us about defending the faith, and investigate who among attending Fathers has recently experienced a new level of understanding his faith, read an exceptional book about your faith, or experienced a challenge of our faith.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Peter 3:15-16

15 “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, 16 but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.”

2. Romans 1:19-23

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

3. Philippians 1:7

7 “you who are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.”

4. Psalms 119

46 “I will speak openly of your decrees without fear even before kings.”

5. Mathew 10:16-20

16 “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. 17 But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. 19 When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. 20 For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

6. Luke 12:8-9

8 “I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.”

7. John 6:67-69

67 Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

8. Mathew 16:18

18 "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 849

The missionary mandate. "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men": "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age."

2. Paragraph 856

"The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel. Believers can profit from this dialogue by learning to appreciate better "those elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God." They proclaim the Good News to those who do not know it, in order to consolidate, complete, and raise up the truth and the goodness that God has distributed among men and nations, and to purify them from error and evil "for the glory of God, the confusion of the demon, and the happiness of man."

3. Paragraphs 905

Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, "that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life." For lay people, "this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world. This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in apostolate; the true apostle in on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers...or to the faithful."

Small Group Questions

1. Why are you a Catholic? Born a Catholic but not sure you have the bedrock to defend the faith?
2. What is it about the Catholic faith that makes you feel special, go to church on Sunday, and teach it to your children?
3. Are there any ways that your team might be able to improve your knowledge of the Catholic faith so you could defend it?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.catholicapologetics.org/>
2. "A Pocket Guide to Catholic Apologetics" By Patrick Madrid, published by Our Sunday Visitor
3. "Top Ten Reasons It's Great to be Catholic" Posted on Catechism on Call:
<http://catechismoncall.wordpress.com/2008/11/23/top-ten-reasons-its-great-to-be-catholic/>

Accountability

1. Take an action to increase your knowledge of your faith this week and church teaching.
 - a. Listen to "Catholic Answers Live" on Sacred Heart Radio from 6:00-8:00pm M-Fr
 - b. Watch "Why be Catholic" by Tim Staples on YouTube
 - c. Look up other religions and how they are different from the Catholic faith.
2. Increase your knowledge and pray for the ability to share and defend your faith.
3. Consider starting an Apologetics group in Fathers Team with study material like:
<http://www.catholicapologetics.org/>

Author(s)

Dan Lape, attempting to update original material by Michael Copfer

Included Resources

1. Dealing with ... **"Strangers at Your Door"** By Albrt J. Nevins, M.M., published by Our Sunday Visitor

What is Apologetics and why do we should we be familiar with it?

"Apologetics is that branch of theology devoted to the defense (through reason) of the origin, authority and teachings of the Church. Apologetics is not to be regarded as a purely defensive measure. It should indicate a readiness to share one's faith with another. Vatican II saw the whole church in mission, and the Code of Canon Law reminds each Catholic that his or her basic vocation is a missionary one. Apologetics is not to be made combatively but in a way that allows our own missionary vocation free rein. Faith, like love, cannot be forced. It must be won by truth and charity."

"Apologetics must be a familiar science for the believer in order to confirm his or her own beliefs, and by doing so to be able to present those beliefs to others, not in a watered-down version to approximate the level of the unbeliever, but as an uncompromising presentation of the teachings of Jesus "

2. <http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=5041>

Why become a Catholic from Catholic Answers Forum:

Question . A friend recently asked me, what applicable difference would it make if one were a devout Catholic or a devout Protestant? Suppose that 2 people were either of these. In application, both spend their lives living for Christ but they have different understandings of this. For one, the Christian life is centered around the Eucharist and for the other the Christian life is centered around the Scriptures. But in application, neither one is better than the other. Both are getting to heaven.

My question is: What significant difference is there between a devout and faithful Catholic and Protestant? The Catholic Church does not teach that devout Protestants are going to hell but rather that Christ's faithful too (regardless of denomination) can go to heaven.

Answer 1. If it were possible to say that someone who is "devout" will remain so forever, then I would agree with your friend's sentiment. We know, however, that people are constantly tested and constantly fall short. Christianity is more than just an end result, it is a day to day practice and faith that *leads* to an end. The Protestant has a much bigger battle ahead of them because they don't have the grace of the Sacraments bolstering their faith, and they don't have the same level of protection from error because they lack the Magisterium. On another level, Catholics are simply that much more able to appreciate God's Kingdom while they live because the Church is the earthly manifestation of that Kingdom.

It's like asking why the marked and cleared path up the mountain is better than the rocky, winding one. If you are strong enough to make it to the top the painful way, and the top is your only consideration, then I suppose it wouldn't make a difference. If, however, you wanted your less able companions to join you, and you wanted to have a pleasant journey as well as reach the peak, then the trail is FAR superior to the untraveled, unmarked path.

Why make things harder for yourself if you don't have to?

Answer 2. I completely agree with this statement (in A1). The fact is that the Catholic Church has sacraments which the Protestant churches do not. These sacraments are a way of receiving an outpouring of God's grace. I explain it like this to my daughter (age 7): It is much like eating a well balanced diet, exercising, and taking vitamins. Some people do this while others do not. Those that do not can have more problems during their lifetime - maybe even die at younger ages. But those that do have a better chance of a healthier life. Obviously, vitamins are nowhere near the benefits of God's grace but you get the idea.

3. **Eight Good Reasons for Being Catholic** by Richard Rohr, O.F.M., and Joseph Martos

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0888.asp>

Many of us who are older and who grew up in the Church before the Second Vatican Council never seriously faced the question, "Why be Catholic?" Not being Catholic was almost unthinkable for us, as unthinkable as not being American.

Yet today, many people are in fact asking the question, "Why be Catholic?" They ask that question when their parish liturgy becomes intolerably boring, when they disagree with the pope or bishops on social

issues, when they divorce and remarry and are told that they can't receive Communion. Often the question is, "Why *remain* Catholic?"

Following Vatican II, Catholics rightly rethought the narrow approach they had taken with the belief that outside the Church there is no salvation. They broadened the idea of salvation so that it could embrace God's love for all Christians, and indeed all persons of good faith.

If good people of other religious persuasions can be saved, then why be—or remain—Catholic?

The answer is Catholicism's rich 2,000-year tradition of living the gospel. And this tradition is a "wisdom tradition." Unlike some of the younger Churches which sprang up after the Protestant Reformation and often splintered into further divisions, Catholicism has maintained unity and diversity over the course of 20 centuries. It embraces the wisdom of the ancient world, the Middle Ages and modern times.

We can summarize the wisdom of the Catholic tradition under eight headings. Each of these values represents not only a challenge but also a good reason for being Catholic.

1. An optimistic view of creation

There is an old poem that reads: "Wherever the Catholic sun does shine, There's music, laughter and good red wine. At least, I've always found it so: *Benedicamus Domino!*"

The last line is Latin for "Let us bless the Lord!" And this poem captures a very basic Catholic sensibility: that creation is good. It represents God's wisdom as God looked out on the world just after its creation and pronounced it "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

From time to time some Christians have not believed in the full goodness of creation. Early Gnostics and other "super-spiritual" groups felt that the material world was bad—but they were regarded as heretics by the majority of the Christians. In the Middle Ages some monks thought that sex was sinful—but the Church replied by affirming the sacramentality of marriage. A few centuries ago Catholic puritans (called Jansenists) condemned all worldliness and sensuality—but the Church officially rejected their teaching.

Many of us who come from northern European backgrounds (especially Irish and German) inherited this Jansenistic negativity anyway. Priests, nuns and others who shaped attitudes often portrayed sexual misconduct as the worst possible sin. As Americans we also adopted a good deal of puritanism from our Protestant neighbors. Our immigrant grandparents didn't want to appear less moral than the people around them!

The older and larger Catholic tradition, however, has Mediterranean roots. Palestinians and Greeks, Italians and French, Spanish and Portuguese have generally been more comfortable with their bodies than northern Europeans. Peasants and poor people—most "Catholic countries" even today are poor—have always been among those who best appreciate the good things that nature has to offer. Food and drink, sex and children are the simple but most basic pleasures that life can give us. They are, after all, gifts from God intended for our enjoyment when wisely used.

This is why Catholicism is fundamentally sacramental. A sacrament is a sign of God's goodness to us. Catholic wisdom says that the world and everything in it is a gift from God and a sign of God. The seven sacraments we celebrate in church use water and oil, bread and wine, and human touch as signs of God's graciousness. Catholics see God shining through all of creation, and so they use the gifts of creation in their most important rituals. Thus Catholics are very comfortable bringing sculpture, painting, stained-glass windows, music, drama and other elements of the created world into their worship.

2. A universal vision

The original meaning of the word *catholic* is "universal." The Church was first called catholic in ancient times after the entire Roman Empire had been converted to Christianity. The first universal Church council met in Nicaea in the year 325, and in similar councils the world's bishops formulated the Church's catholic faith. The summary of that worldwide faith is the Nicene Creed, which we say at Mass every Sunday.

The Catholic Church still has a worldwide faith, and the Church's vision is still universal. Pope John Paul II travels every year to meet Catholics around the world. The Pope's vision and the Church's vision stretch beyond national boundaries. Wherever the pope goes he is greeted by Catholics—our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The Catholic Church is not a national Church. It is one of the few truly international institutions in the world today. The Catholic Church is also a multicultural Church. It is not just European and American but also

Latino and African and Asian. People of every race and culture embrace the Catholic faith and are embraced by the universal Church.

Because the Church is universal, it calls us to a universal vision. As the world gets smaller every year, we need to regard everyone in it as our neighbor. Our faith is already larger than most of us realize, challenging our narrowness and preparing us for global citizenship. The pastoral letters of the U.S. bishops on peacemaking and on economic justice seek to promote this global outlook.

If we are truly Catholic, we must look at the world and all people in it from God's perspective, and not from a nationalistic or ethnocentric point of view. The Catholic vision, when fully lived, reflects God's concern for the entire human family.

3. A holistic outlook

The Church has always been concerned with holiness. At times in the past people have equated holiness with becoming a plaster saint, aloof from others and abstracted from life. Today we realize that holiness is wholeness. And if we look at the Catholic past, we see that this wholeness has always been the ideal.

Catholicism has never said you need to be a secluded monk or a cloistered nun to be holy. When we look at the Church's calendar of saints, we see fishermen and farmers, husbands and wives, rich and poor, soldiers and scholars, even kings and queens honored there. Everyone is called to achieve his/her fullest potential, to be a truly whole and holy person.

This holistic spirituality is very rewarding, but it is also very demanding. Catholic holiness is not a Jesus-and-me attitude. It's not enough to go to Church on Sunday and leave the rest of your life unchanged. True holiness requires a conversion of the whole person, a transformation of the total personality, a concern for bodily as well as spiritual health, and a balance between prayer and action. This may require a conversion of our lifestyle, no matter where we live or what we do for a living.

4. Personal growth

The Catholic vision of human potential begins with conversion—a conversion that is ongoing. It sees life as a process of continuous conversion and growth. There is no one moment when a Catholic claims to be "saved," as fundamentalists do. The stories of the saints show that they continuously strove for holiness. Even the Catholic devotion known as the Stations of the Cross suggests that the Christian life is a process, a journey that goes through stages, introducing us to different challenges, pitfalls and personalities along the way. Those who persevere in fidelity and trust enter more deeply into God's life.

Fortunately, our salvation and our happiness do not depend on us alone. God is with us and lovingly takes the initiative in offering us salvation and calling us to holiness. This is the meaning of grace. Grace is God's invitation and power reaching into us. But we have to open ourselves to God in order to be filled with the Spirit. We have to cooperate with grace.

Curiously, our cooperation is not so much a "doing" as a "not doing." The wisdom of the saints is that they stopped long enough to listen to God in their hearts and let God tell them how to be truly happy. Growth in the Spirit, growth in spiritual perfection (as we used to call it), is the same as growing in Christ. It means surrendering our own shortsightedness about what we can be and entering into the process of becoming like Christ.

Paradoxically, personal fulfillment means abandoning ourselves and putting others first. In the Catholic tradition, ultimate satisfaction is promised to those who give up their desire for self-satisfaction. This is part of the meaning of crucifixion. The cross leads to resurrection, to new life. When we let go of ourselves, our lives become filled with grace. The lives of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope John XXIII and Mother Teresa of Calcutta radiate a grace that people of all religious traditions admire.

5. Social transformation

Society has been transformed again and again by Christianity. Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's Kingdom, and the Church has tried again and again to make the Kingdom real. The Church has always been concerned for human betterment.

In ancient Rome the Church protested against gladiator fights and other forms of killing for sport. In the Middle Ages, prophetic voices in the Church were raised to defend the peasants against the tyranny of the nobles. Monasteries were the first hospitals for the sick and the first hotels for weary pilgrims. The Church has always cared for widows and orphans. It has fought against slavery, against the dehumanization of

factory workers and against the exploitation of migrant laborers. In the 1960's Catholics marched for civil rights, and today they march for the right to life in its many forms as well as for many other social causes.

This concern for the poor and the underprivileged springs directly from the Catholic understanding of holistic growth and universal salvation. God wants everyone to reach full potential as a human being created in God's image. This means first having basic human needs met and then growing to full maturity in Christ through meeting the needs of others. The gospel is a message to be shared at every level of human life, and the good news is that God's power is available to redeem the world.

Accepting the Catholic vision means never accepting things the way they are. People are always hurting and suffering oppression. People are always needing to be healed and set free. But to stop much of the pain and hurt, society itself has to be transformed. Being Catholic means standing with those social reformers who have always wanted to change the world, making it more like God's Kingdom.

6. A communal spirit

To a great extent, we in America have lost the Catholic sense of community. Our large parishes are often very impersonal; at Sunday Mass most people feel more like an anonymous audience than a faith community.

The reason for this is that we Catholics have bought into the American myths of rugged individualism and middle-class success. We believe that we have to make it on our own and that, if we are successful, we should have our own separate houses, our own private cars, and all the appliances to live comfortably by ourselves.

This individualism and self-centeredness is disastrous for community. It is not the ideal taught us by our Catholic tradition. The Christian way of living is communitarian. Early Christians were so connected to one another that St. Paul called each community a "body of Christ." When the Church grew larger, some Spirit-led Christians left the cities to live together in the countryside. They worked and prayed together in what were then called monasteries. Today we might call them Christian communes.

Monasteries were centers of Christian living all around Europe in the Middle Ages. In time, community-minded Christians discovered other ways of joining their lives together even in cities. Usually these communities focused on some apostolic work such as caring for the sick, the homeless or the uneducated. That's the origin of today's religious orders.

The peculiarly Catholic gift to the Church is community. Protestantism broke away from the tradition of monasteries and religious orders. This is not to say religious orders are the only way of achieving a communal spirit within the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Indeed, in many cases, Catholics can learn much from the degree of "fellowship" achieved in numerous Protestant communions. However, Catholic theology—if not always our practice—challenges us to see the Church as community.

Today, when many of our traditional orders have grown to institutional proportions, Catholics are searching for new forms of communal life. Many in religious orders are moving into smaller, more personal living arrangements. Prayer groups, spiritual movements and base communities are all attempts to revive this Catholic charism in a modern setting. In our individualistic society, there is a felt need for this gift of community.

7. A profound sense of history

The Catholic Church has been around for a long time—nearly 20 centuries. That's four or five times the age of the oldest Protestant denominations, and 10 times as old as the United States. Belonging to a Church with that sort of history gives us a unique historical perspective. At least, it should!

Too often we as Americans live in the immediacy of the present. We forget that most of the problems we face today as individuals and as a society have been addressed by the Church for centuries and centuries. How quickly we forget that the English once were our enemies, as were the Germans and the Japanese even more recently. How quickly we forget the conversion of Russia some 1,000 years ago, and that the majority of people who live under communism are Christians. When we forget that most people who would be killed by our nuclear attack are our sisters and brothers in Christ, it is easy to picture them as our enemies. Yet our history shows that those who were once considered enemies can become friends.

In its 2,000 years, the Church has lived under kings and emperors, in democracies and dictatorships, under capitalism and communism. The Catholic perspective on history shows that we do not have to fear any

political or economic system. The gospel can be lived in any place, at any time, under any conditions. Our strong sense of roots and continuity with a rich Catholic past is certainly a value to be cherished.

8. A respect for human knowledge

After philosophy (which dates back to pre-Christian times) the oldest intellectual discipline in the world is theology. Catholicism has never been a matter of blind faith. One of the earliest definitions of theology is "faith seeking understanding." The Catholic ideal is to respect reason and promote understanding.

When barbarian tribes swept across Europe and caused the fall of the Roman Empire, monks carefully copied fragile manuscripts so that ancient science would not be lost. Even in the "Dark Ages" that bred the anti-intellectualism of the Inquisition, Christian scholars were founding schools which eventually became the great universities of Europe. Despite the obtuseness of the Church officials who condemned Galileo, modern science grew out of the efforts of Christians to understand the universe that God created.

St. Augustine tried to understand all of history from the perspective of Catholic faith. St. Thomas Aquinas studied all medieval science before writing his great *Summa Theologica*, a four-volume "summary" of theology. Other Catholic scholars advanced medicine, law, astronomy and biology. Catholics believe that if they are firmly grounded in their faith, they do not have to feel threatened by any scientific knowledge. Teilhard de Chardin integrated evolution into his Christian understanding of the cosmos.

This openness to human knowledge is not true of all Christians today. Some fundamentalists close their eyes against the evidence for evolution. Others insist so strongly on the truth of the Bible that they have little respect for what psychology and sociology can teach us. Some Catholics fall into this same trap regarding Church dogmas. But the broader Catholic wisdom is that all truth comes from God, whether it is revealed or discovered.

Our heritage points to Christ

To be truly Catholic therefore means to enter into the Catholic wisdom tradition. It means appreciating all of creation and looking at the world from a universal perspective. It means adopting a holistic outlook that encourages personal growth and social transformation. It means building community and learning from history. It means not being afraid to ask questions about faith, about the Church, or about the world in which we live.

Yet all this heritage is pointless unless it also points us to Christ, and to living the gospel. The reason for accepting the Catholic tradition is to learn better from our rich past how to live our faith more deeply today.

Finding a Spiritual Advisor

Summary

A Catholic without a spiritual director is like an Olympic athlete without a coach.

To be a Catholic means that you are in a race for heaven. It means you're trying to become a saint, not just to squeak through the pearly gates.

The race to heaven isn't a jog in the park; it's an Olympic marathon. If we are to finish this race, we need stamina and skill - which is where the coach comes in.

Any athlete serious about his game will seek out the best coach he can find. And any Catholic serious about holiness would also do well to think about finding a spiritual director.

- Catholic.net

Objective

The objective of this topic is to assist in finding the right spiritual advisor. Everyone is different. You want the right advisor that fits your needs.

Remember, it is up to you to choose your spiritual director wisely. Some advisors may go too easy on you. Some may be too rigid.

Bible Readings

1. Proverbs 11, 14

"Where there is no wise guidance, the nation falls, but in the multitude of counselors there is victory."

2. Proverbs 20, 18

"Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war!"

3. Proverbs 24, 6

"for by wise guidance you wage your war; and victory is in many advisors."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you have a spiritual advisor? If so, tell others in the group how it has benefitted you.
2. Have you ever thought of getting a spiritual advisor?

Recommended Resources

1. http://www.sdiworld.org/find_a_spiritual_director.html
2. <http://rcspiritualdirection.com/blog/topical-series-and-resources-on-the-spiritual-life/spiritual-direction>
3. <http://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/>
4. <http://catholic.net/index.php?option=dedestaca&id=5558>

Accountability

If you think having a spiritual advisor will help you, use the resources provided to get you started!

Author(s)

Tony Heekin

Included Resources

1. How do I find a spiritual director?

<http://rcspiritualdirection.com/blog/topical-series-and-resources-on-the-spiritual-life/spiritual-direction#ixzz1Vy2e5Qrp>

Finding a spiritual director is a very personal and spiritual quest. We suggest a person seeking a spiritual director contact at least two spiritual directors to interview, if appropriate. Here are some ways to find spiritual directors to interview:

Search the [Seek and Find Guide](#).

Call area theology schools, institutes and retreat centers and ask if they have a list of spiritual directors.

Ask an ordained minister or rabbi or vowed religious for names of spiritual directors they recommend.

Attend a FREE SDI Teleconference to learn tips about how to seek and find a spiritual director. [Click for upcoming teleconference dates and to RSVP.](#)

Here are the kinds of questions that you might consider asking yourself when finding a spiritual directors to interview:

What is your experience with working with a spiritual director? Is this a first experience of spiritual direction? What brings you to spiritual direction at this time in your life?

Would you like to meet with a male or female?

What spiritual affiliation or denomination would be most helpful for you?

What time of day would best serve you for meetings?

The desire and search for the “right fit” is an important part of the process.

Spiritual Directors International publishes Guidelines for Ethical Conduct (in English and Spanish), which provides a framework for a healthy spiritual direction relationship. You may want to ask your prospective spiritual directors about their formation and training, on-going education, if they are in supervision for their ministry and if they abide by the Guidelines for Ethical Conduct. Ask the prospective spiritual directors if they have ever been denied liability insurance due to sexual misconduct or have been barred from membership in a professional association due to ethics violations.

Remember, it is up to you to choose your spiritual director wisely. Let them know what draws you to spiritual direction in this time in your life and notice how comfortable it is for you to tell your faith story. Listen carefully for the way the spirit is guiding you in your selection process.

Each person seeking a spiritual director needs to take reasonable steps to verify the competency of any potential spiritual director. As a ministry in many nations and many faiths, spiritual direction does not have a centralized certifying body that verifies qualifications of spiritual directors since each faith tradition handles spiritual directors differently.

Spiritual Directors International does not endorse or recommend particular spiritual directors. We are not a certifying body, but rather a global learning community that supports spiritual directors in their ministry with educational programs, publications and contemplative practices.

Spiritual Directors International recommends you ask each person you interview to become your spiritual director questions such as:

What enrichment, spiritual formation, and theological education do you have in spiritual direction?

What is your personal experience tending your own prayer, meditation and contemplative life?

Finding a Spiritual Advisor

What is your experience as a spiritual director? How many years? In what environments? What are you most interested in spiritually?

How do you continue your education and supervision for your spiritual direction ministry?

What ethical guidelines do you abide by, such as those published by Spiritual Directors International? Have you ever been accused or convicted of misconduct?

What type of engagement agreement will we establish to clarify roles and responsibilities in our spiritual direction relationship, such as samples provided to members of Spiritual Directors International?

- Spiritual Direction

Finding, Selecting, and Initiating a Spiritual Direction Relationship

[How do I find and select a spiritual director?](#)

[How do I determine if a spiritual director is faithful to the Church?](#)

[Finding a spiritual director – watch out for confused sheep](#)

[Faithful priests are too busy... what do I do? How can I find a spiritual director?](#)

[Concern about seeking out and approaching a spiritual director – Part I – Facing the challenge](#)

[Concern about seeking out and approaching a spiritual director – Part II – Getting the first meeting set up](#)

[Is it normal to feel apprehension about the spiritual direction process?](#)

The Spiritual Direction Process and Expectations

[What are the key characteristics of good spiritual direction?](#)

[How should I prepare for a meeting with my spiritual director?](#)

[Spiritual Direction Orientation – it takes time and patience](#)

[Spiritual direction reading plan](#)

[What is a program of life and why is it important to my spiritual growth and spiritual direction?](#)

Other Spiritual Direction Perspective

[Why would a saint need spiritual direction – Do I really need one?](#)

[No spiritual director in sight – how can I continue to grow in the mean time?](#)

[Can I be my own spiritual director? Still no spiritual director... what do I do in the mean time?](#)

[Skype and remote spiritual direction – is this ok?](#)

[I am new to spiritual direction and need some perspective...](#)

[Why would a priest take time for me?](#)

[Pope Benedict recommends spiritual direction](#)

2. Ten Reasons to Have a Spiritual Director

<http://catholic.net/index.php?option=dedestaca&id=5558>

A Catholic without a spiritual director is like an Olympic athlete without a coach.

by Mary Houser, Consecrated woman | Source: Mater Ecclesiae College

A Catholic without a spiritual director is like an Olympic athlete without a coach.

To be a Catholic means that you are in a race for heaven. It means you're trying to become a saint, not just to squeak through the pearly gates.

The race to heaven isn't a jog in the park; it's an Olympic marathon. If we are to finish this race, we need stamina and skill - which is where the coach comes in.

Any athlete serious about his game will seek out the best coach he can find. And any Catholic serious about holiness would also do well to think about finding a spiritual director.

Here are a few reasons why.

1. Show yourself you care. If you care enough about a particular sport to have a coach, why not find one for the much more important game of life? Going to the effort of finding a spiritual director and having spiritual direction will help you remember not to leave your spiritual life on the back burner.

2. Ask the saints: it's recommended for holiness. No one says you can't get to heaven without one - but the saints agree: having a spiritual director makes it easier to reach holiness.

3. It's how God works. Take one example: St. Paul. He gets knocked off his horse - and God tells him to wait until Ananias tells him what he should do. God likes to speak to us through other people. He worked this way all though the Bible and the Church's history. He does now too.

4. You're not a one-man show. Don't pretend you can become holy on your own. Show God you rely on his help by allowing him to speak to you through someone else.

5. Constancy. It's easy to forget a New Year's resolution tucked away in a drawer somewhere. It's easy to remember a resolution you talked to someone else about and are reminded of every now and then. Sometimes you need someone else to hold you accountable.

6. You can't even see the end of your nose. It's hard to focus on something too close to us (like our noses). Sometimes you're too close to yourself to be an objective judge of your actions, relationships, and plans. Since a spiritual director isn't you, they're able to see things more objectively and help you see that way too. With prayer and the help of the Holy Spirit, they help you discern what God's will for you is in the daily circumstances of our life now.

7. Encouragement. Living a holy life isn't easy. A spiritual director encourages you on this path and helps you keep going. A kind, understanding word can mean the world when you feel like giving up.

8. Expertise. A good spiritual guide will have some experience in prayer and spiritual life. He or she will be able to give you helpful advice. And the more they get to know you, the more they can tailor their advice to your particular situation and needs.

9. Peace. There's a unique peace that comes from spiritual direction. Opening your soul to your spiritual director, being known and loved for who you are, and hearing God speak to you through him or her will fill your soul with the confidence and security that only the love of God can bring.

10. Prayer support. Don't underestimate the power of prayer! Having your spiritual director's prayers backing you up will help you on your path much more than you'll ever know!

Stages of Marriage

Summary

This week's topic should help every man understand where he and his spouse are in their 'stage' of marriage. Deacon Dave Shea will reprise this discussion to help the men of Father's team get the most out of their marriage.

Objective

This topic will help all the Father's – no matter what stage of marriage they are in, Newly Married, Middle Years or Later Years) understand the issues and opportunities that we face as men in our marriages. Each stage brings new challenges and Dave will help us recognize our stage and then be able to talk with our spouses about how to make the most out of our marriages.

Newly Married

- The first five years can be exhilarating as couples experience new "firsts" together- their first Christmas as a married couple, first dinner party for the in-laws, even their first joint tax return. At the same time, the early years require personal adjustment, which is stressful on the relationship.
- Sometimes it's poor choice of partner. Couples who entered enthusiastically- but blindly- into marriage soon see their spouse's shadow side when there's no longer a need to keep up a good front. They realize that they married a person who doesn't share the remote, likes to chatter in the morning or, worse yet, doesn't share their values.
- Others fall prey to the stresses of early marriage. Some of these stresses might be age-related. Young couples may not have developed the emotional maturity, coping and communication skills, or financial savvy to navigate the many decisions thrust upon them early in their marriage. Hanging in and learning the art of negotiating can resolve these issues, but it takes maturity and patience.
- Help is available if the couple has the wisdom and humility to seek it. The most important thing to remember is that most of the early stressful adjustments in marriage are normal. Beyond leaving the toilet seat up or down, what are the important issues that need to be negotiated?
- According to research done by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University (2000) the top three issues for couples during the first five years of marriage are time, sex, and money:

Middle Years

- For most couples, parenting is the most distinctive feature of this stage. It may be compared to the middle years of childhood (ages 5-12), which is sometimes called the latency stage. Although the child continues to grow, this growth tends to be steady and without significant turmoil.
- Some couples-the "sandwich" generation-find themselves taking care of children plus aging parents. Meanwhile, their marriage and personal needs may be pushed into the background, unless a crisis erupts. Couples in the middle stage of marriage often must renegotiate household, financial, and

parenting tasks. The stress of these multiple adjustments helps explain why the marriage satisfaction rate drops significantly for parents with young children.

- While rearing children can unite parents in a common venture, it also changes the marriage irreversibly. There is more to argue about and less time for conversation, play and sexual intimacy.
- During the teen years, parents generally find that they need more emotional than physical energy. Parents stress out over how strict or lenient they should be with their teens. Parents begin to lose control over their teens, but they still bear the responsibility of parenting without the rewards of children who look up to them as if they walked on water. Marital dissatisfaction decreases significantly for most couples during the teen years.
- Couples who do not have children have their own issues to deal with. They may want children and have been dealing with infertility. If many of their friends have children they may feel left out. They may be so consumed with career or extended family obligations that their marriage relationship has become stale.

Later Years

- The later years includes the blissful “empty-nest” season of a marriage that can feel like a second honeymoon. Many couples welcome their new freedom,” while others have a hard time letting go. Sometimes a couple who happily thought they were in the empty-nest stage are faced with a boomerang young adult who again needs their care, presence, home, and perhaps babysitting services. The later years can also bring major health issues and the gradual loss of abilities.
- Second marriage couples enter the later years of their lives but it’s the early years of their marriage. Men and women who marry after a divorce or death of a spouse, or after waiting for the right person, experience in their later years some of the same adjustments of young marrieds.
- Issues of diminishing health, grief over peers dying, and significant blocks of togetherness time are common. Thus, the wife who married her husband “for better or for worse, but not for lunch together!” becomes a poignant cliché.
- How do couples re-negotiate their relationship to take into account their new freedom, increased time together, possibly decreased income, and fading health and energy? Some do it with grace because over the years they’ve learned the marital dance of flexibility and tolerance. Some complain a lot, about life, each other, about the weather.
- Some may want to complain but know that’s not very endearing. Yet they struggle with letting go of the old patterns and roles of their life together. For these couples, the desire to let go with grace may be enough motivation to:
 - Attend a marriage enrichment program geared especially to older couples
 - Explore new hobbies and interests together
 - Volunteer with their church, community, or other good causes that would benefit from their experience
 - Deepen their spirituality to help them deal with the losses and limitations of later life
 - Forgive others’ faults and drop long-held grudges

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:22-25

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. 24Therefore as the church is

subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 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 (cf. CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1).

Small Group Questions

1. Look at the stages of marriage described in the lesson – where are you and your spouse?
2. What are you doing to get the most out of the stage of marriage today?

Recommended Resources

1. Stages of Marriage – Catholic conference of Bishops
<http://foryourmarriage.org/everymarriage/stages-of-marriage/>
2. Five Stages of Marriage - <http://www.songtime.com/sbc/sbcfivestagesofmarriage.htm>

Accountability

1. When you go home today – initiate a discussion with your wife about what stage of marriage you are in and how you are dealing with the issues associated with that phase.

Author

Rich Delcore

Eucharistic Adoration

Summary

Lifestyle hectic? Kids, work, meetings, sports, school – it all adds up. How do you take a break, clear your head, and focus on what really centers your life? Learn how Eucharistic Adoration provides you the opportunity to get closer to your Lord and savior and focus on the things that really matter in life.

Objective

We Catholics as Christians hold many beliefs in common with the other Christian religions and that's a wonderful bond that promotes peace, tolerance, and understanding. However we Catholics are different in that we take Jesus Christ at His word. We believe that Jesus gave His own body and blood in the special sacrament we call the Holy Eucharist. Why do we believe this? Not because some theologians say so, or even because the Church says so. We believe this because Jesus Christ says so, and we believe him. Jesus said "This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is my blood, which will be shed for you. Do this in memory of Me."

The objective of this session is to explore the unique belief that Catholic's have regarding the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. What makes this special for us? How can we make Eucharistic Adoration a bigger part of our relationship with Christ through understanding, worship, and perhaps quiet time with him through the parish Eucharistic Adoration opportunity?

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 26:26-28

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, ¹⁶and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.

2. Mark 14:22-24

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed ⁸for many.

3. Luke 22:19-20

Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.

The above three Gospel passages record the Institution of the Holy Eucharist by Christ Himself at the Last Supper. Take note that He does not say "This resembles my body" or "This is symbolic of my body". He says "This is my body." His words in the passage below from the Gospel of John confirm this.

4. John 6:53-58

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."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1374

"The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the EUCHARIST above all the sacraments as 'the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.' [St. Thomas Aquinas, STh III, 73, 3c.] In the most blessed sacrament of the EUCHARIST 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.' [Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.] 'This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.' [Paul VI, MF 39.]"

2. Paragraph 1384

"The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the EUCHARIST: 'Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.' [Jn 6:53.]"

Small Group Questions

1. How does the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist effect your ability to feel a deeper relationship with God?
2. Do you understand the differences between the Catholic faith and beliefs versus other Christian religions like the Protestant, Methodist, or Baptist faiths? What is it that makes us unique?
3. How can you promote a greater understanding of the beliefs of the Catholic faith with your family? Your friends? The people that you meet.
4. Have you ever done Eucharistic Adoration as a practice? What did you feel? Are you still doing it?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://ihom.org/GETINVOLVED/Ministries/PerpetualEucharisticAdoration.aspx> - IHM's Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration web page.
2. <http://ihom.org/GETINVOLVED/Ministries/PerpetualEucharisticAdoration/Contacts/Adorers.aspx> - IHM's Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration schedule of Adorers.
3. <http://blog.archny.org/?p=1363> – Blog by Archbishop Dolan on Eucharistic Adoration value
4. <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/pea/holyhour.html> - How to pray the hour.
5. <http://pope2008.typepad.com/weblog/2008/05/how-to-pray-a-h.html> - More prescriptive how to pray the hour.
6. <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/pea/prayers.html> - Eucharistic Adoration Prayers.
7. <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/pea/a2.html> - much more included below from here.
8. <http://www.medjugorje.org/adore.htm> - has many things about Eucharistic Adoration.

Accountability

1. Discuss with your family the gift of the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist that we have.
2. Focus on the Eucharistic prayer with special attention this week and feel the power of this part of the mass.

3. Consider filling a slot on the IHoM Eucharistic Adoration calendar. Could you do it as a team of Fathers?

Author(s)

Dan Lape

Included Resources

<http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/pea/whyadore.htm>

It's still good for us Catholics to know what beliefs we hold to in common with other Christians, but now, it has become more urgent that we Catholics know how we are *different*; to recognize the treasures of faith that we have; treasures rejected or abandoned by other Christians. Today, we will concentrate on the principal Catholic belief that makes us Catholics different – different from the great majority of other Christians. That, of course, is our belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

We Catholics are different because we take Jesus Christ at His word. We believe that Jesus gave us His own body and blood in the special sacrament we call the Holy Eucharist. We Catholics actually believe that Jesus is really present in this sacrament! For us Catholics, the Holy Eucharist is not just a symbol. It is not just a memory. It is not just a promise. It is really Jesus Christ. The Holy Eucharist is not some 'thing'. It is some 'one'. It is Jesus, our Lord and our God. This is what we mean by the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This is why we call the Holy Eucharist "the Blessed Sacrament".

All the sacraments are blessed! All the sacraments give us the grace of Jesus but this sacrament gives us Jesus himself. This is what we Catholics believe.

Why do we believe this? Not because some theologians say so, not even because the Church says so. We believe this for only one reason, because Jesus Christ says so, and we believe Him.

Many who try to follow Jesus do not believe this, as we Catholics do. This fact should not surprise us any. Jesus had the same problem with some of His own disciples. When Jesus first told His own followers that He would give His body and blood as food and drink as spiritual nourishment for the soul, many of His followers – His disciples – would not accept that. They could not believe Him, so they left Him. Jesus did not try to call them back. He didn't say, "Now, wait a minute! You misunderstood me! I was only talking symbolically". No! He let them go. If they could not believe Him, they could not be His disciples. It was that simple.

Then Jesus asked His apostles if they wanted to leave Him too. He was ready to let His apostles go also. We know that Peter, speaking for the group said, "Lord, to whom should we go? We know that you only, have the words of eternal life".

The apostles took Jesus at His word, and we do too.

This sacrament of the Holy Eucharist comes to us through the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist, the sacrifice of the Mass. This is evident because the Mass is the renewal of Jesus' death on the cross. In this sacrifice He gave up His human life, His physical body and blood, for our salvation. It was at the Last Supper that Jesus instituted the sacrament and sacrifice.

It was the night before He died. Jesus knew that He soon had to leave His friends. Friends He loved so much. He wanted to leave them something to remember Him by, but He did much better than that, He left Himself.

At the Last Supper, Jesus was looking ahead to the next day when He would die on the cross. This is why He said, "This is my body, which will be given up for you. This is my blood, which will be shed for you". Then He commanded "Do this in memory of me". We fulfill that command every day. As Jesus at the Last Supper was looking *ahead* to Calvary, so we in the sacrifice of the Mass, look *back* to Calvary.

This is why St. Paul could say: "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord". It's the same sacrifice on the cross and in the Mass – the same sacrifice.

Jesus chose this very special way to remain here with us. It was not just an empty promise when Jesus said, "I will be with you all days, even to the end of the world". He meant that! Jesus remains here with us today in the Mass as our Savior, in Holy Communion, as our spiritual food and in our tabernacle as our friend.

Jesus died on the cross to give us this sacrament of His presence among us. This is the sacrament of Jesus' love for us.

A personal testimonial on the value of Eucharistic Adoration from a parishioner:

Back in 1997, I had a strong inspiration from the Holy Spirit to attend mass during the week. I did some research and started calling around to see who had a noon mass that was close to where I worked. I was led to Old St Mary's church downtown. I started going to Noon mass every day at Old St. Mary during my lunch hour. Fr. Al Lauer was a very devout and holy priest who said mass there. His message was always very strong, and straight forward. In his homilies he urged us to practice holiness, and to visit the sacrament of confession often. After about a year of attending his daily mass, we had several conversations after mass. He mentioned he was starting Eucharistic adoration everyday downtown in the evening.

I agreed to commit to Eucharistic adoration every Wednesday evening from 6 to 7. I found this to be a very peaceful and quiet time to reflect on my life, to pray, and strengthen my relationship with God. At times my job tends to be very hectic, and adoration seemed to lift up my spirit no matter what the situation. This also gave me a chance to improve my relationship with God.

Since attending adoration it gave me a chance to pray for all members of my family, relatives, friends, workmates, and anyone who needed to be prayed for. About 8 years ago, I was asked to devote an hour for IHM also. I am blessed to be able to offer Eucharistic adoration twice a week.

I feel I have received many blessings, and answers to prayers since I've started adoration. Sometimes my prayers are not always answered the way I want, but I know that God gives me what I need, not what I want. I have learned over the years that I must follow God's will, not my own will. I feel very blessed to be a part of adoration. I highly recommend you visit the blessed Sacrament whenever you have the chance, and maybe even commit for an hour. I promise if you spend an hour with the Lord every week, after prayerful discernment, Jesus will help you to understand His will for you.

Here is one quote of many by Mother Teresa of Calcutta on Eucharistic devotion:

" Every holy hour deepens our union with Him and bears much fruit. "

A second personal testimonial on the value of Eucharistic Adoration from a parishioner:

With the renovations made and the new Chapel so visible on Beechmont, I would often think to say a prayer as I drove by on my many trips to and from McNick. On one such trip, I had picked up our boys from an afterschool activity, it was late in the evening, homework still needed to be completed and they were not in a good mood. I don't know what came over me (well, maybe I do) but I swerved over and pulled into IHM's parking lot. My sons looked at me in astonishment. What are you doing, we still have homework, it's late, etc. I said we needed an attitude adjustment and were going to spend a few minutes in the chapel with Jesus. What peace we found there. After a short time, not wanting to keep them up too late, I motioned that we could leave. Now, to my surprise, one of the boys was motioning back that he wasn't ready yet.

That was one of my earliest experiences with adoration. I became an infrequent visitor. There were always excuses and never enough time. In the fall of 2007, Jeff and I decided to make a commitment to adore once a week together. There was a need for Friday at 5:00 p.m. and we decided to give it a try. The time commitment has been a lot easier to keep than anticipated. It has become a peaceful start to our weekend. That one hour with Jesus has helped us to refocus our lives each week. It has made it easier for us to continually put our lives in God's hands and to trust His direction – His will. It's a great thing to share that hour with Jesus and with each other. When I first brought up the subject of committed adoration to Jeff his thought was what am I going to think or talk about for an hour with God. He finds himself reflecting about self, spouse, children (living and past), parents (living and past), saying the Rosary and before you know it the hour is up. We always find ourselves thanking God for the 60 minutes with Him one on one. It's a great time to get out of the daily fast paced life and sit in a reflective environment where you have no one to impress but the Creator who knows you best.

The week after Easter, 2008, we drove our 19 year old son to New York for a co-op job. He would be living on his own, many hours from home, not knowing anyone for three months. We were scared to say the least. While there I looked up the local Catholic Church (Immaculate Heart of Mary!) and we drove there for a visit. I entered the chapel with all my fear and I felt it literally lift away. I realized that the Jesus I visited in our chapel was here for my son too. What peace! At that moment I knew he would be okay.

What a blessing we found in that Chapel and what a blessing we find in our Chapel. Our continued commitment to adoration has opened a constant dialog with God. He is with us every step of our lives. What a wonderful thing to not only know that but to feel it in our hearts.

<http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/pea/define.htm> - Definitions of different parts of Eucharistic Adoration to promote a better foundation and history.

Monstrance (emblem)

A symbol of the Blessed Sacrament since the monstrance is the sacred vessel which contains the consecrated Host when exposed or carried in procession. It is a well-known emblem of St. Clare, who is reported to have repulsed unbelievers who assaulted her convent of nuns by presenting to their gaze Christ in the monstrance. St. Peter Julian Eymard, founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, is symbolized carrying the monstrance and blessing the people with it. St. Thomas Aquinas has the monstrance among his many emblems as the author of the famous hymns *Lauda Sion* and *Pange Lingua*, written to honor the Eucharistic Lord. St. John Neumann, who first established the forty hours' devotion in America, and St. Paschal Baylon, patron of Eucharistic Congresses, are both represented in art with the monstrance. (Etym. Latin *monstrans* from *monstrare*, to show, point out, indicate.) See also *OSTENSORIUM*.

Ostensorium

A monstrance, a metal vessel usually gold- or silver-plated with a transparent section in which the Sacred Host is placed in its lunette when exposed for adoration or carried in procession. It varies in shape and ornamentation, popular models being tower-shaped or round; a metal circlet surrounded with rays or bars resting on a stem rising from a heavy base, many ornamented with jewels. The ostensorium in the Cathedral of Toledo took more than a hundred years to make and is reputed to be of gold brought by Columbus from America.

Perpetual Adoration

Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, either reserved in the tabernacle or exposed in a monstrance, continued by successive worshipers day and night without intermission. The practice of perpetual adoration of God by psalm and prayer has been maintained by monks and nuns since early Christian times, e.g., by the *akoimetoï* in the East, and the monastery of Agaunum, founded by King Sigismund of Burgundy in A.D. 522. Similar practices were current elsewhere before the ninth century. It was in France that perpetual adoration of the Eucharist began. Mother Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament pioneered the custom on request of P  re Picotte. The Benedictine convent, founded for this purpose, opened on March 25, 1654. Since then many religious communities have made perpetual Eucharistic adoration either the main or an essential part of their rule of life. Confraternities of the faithful have also been organized to practice the devotion, along with the religious or, in some cases, in their parish churches.

Tabernacle

A cupboard or boxlike receptacle for the exclusive reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. In early Christian times the sacred species was reserved in the home because of possible persecution. Later dove-shaped tabernacles were suspended by chains before the altar. Nowadays tabernacles may be round or rectangular and made of wood, stone, or metal. They are covered with a veil and lined with precious metal or silk, with a corporal beneath the ciboria or other sacred vessels. According to the directive of the Holy See, since the Second Vatican Council, tabernacles are always solid and inviolable and located in the middle of the main altar or on a side altar, but always in a truly prominent place (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, May 25, 1967, II, C).

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Summary

Some wonder how to reconcile the evil and suffering in the world with a God who is all-powerful and all-good. God really does care... He loves us. He did not have to, but He proved it when He became one of us and took on our pain and suffering and sin. His death on the cross for you and for me is the greatest act of love ever performed. And it does not end there. But why? Why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? Why does God permit suffering?

Objective:

To be called to suffering in this life is to be called into the mystery of Christ's Passion and to cooperate in the redemption of mankind.

Bible Readings

1. Romans 5:3-5

³ Not only so, but we^[a] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

2. Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

3. Romans 8:28

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

4. Colossians 3:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

5. 1 Corinthians 10:13

No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 310

But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world "in a state of journeying" towards its ultimate perfection. In God's plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also *physical evil* as long as creation has not reached perfection.

2. Paragraph 311

Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has *moral evil*, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it:

For almighty God. . . , because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.

3. Paragraph 312

In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: "It was not you", said Joseph to his brothers, "who sent me here, but God. . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that "abounded all the more", brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good.

4. Paragraph 313

"We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him."¹⁸⁰ The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth:

St. Catherine of Siena said to "those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them":

"Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind."¹⁸¹

St. Thomas More, shortly before his martyrdom, consoled his daughter: "Nothing can come but that that God wills. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best."¹⁸²

Dame Julian of Norwich: "Here I was taught by the grace of God that I should steadfastly keep me in the faith. . . and that at the same time I should take my stand on and earnestly believe in what our Lord shewed in this time - that 'all manner [of] thing shall be well.'"¹⁸³

5. Paragraph 314

We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of its history. But the ways of his providence are often unknown to us. Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God "face to face",¹⁸⁴ will we fully know the ways by which - even through the dramas of evil and sin - God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest¹⁸⁵ for which he created heaven and earth.

Small Group Questions

1. Think about a situation where you or a loved one experienced pain and suffering. Looking back, was there even the slightest scenario in which some sort of good came about out as a result?
2. In what ways can you view suffering as a means in which God can work toward his plan or glory?

3. Has God ever used pain and suffering in your life to get your attention? What was he attempting to get across to you?

Recommended Resources

1. Article: Why Does God Allow Suffering?
<http://www.integratedcatholiclife.org/2011/07/bickerstaff-why-does-god-allow-suffering/>
2. Book: "Why Suffer" by Mary Ann Budnik.
<http://www.scepterpublishers.org/product/index.php?FULL=312>
3. Why Does God Let Us Suffer? (A Catholic Perspective) Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan
<http://www.users.qwest.net/~dkturner/why9.html>
4. Book: *"The Problem of Pain"*, C.S. Lewis
5. Book: *"Grief Observed"*, C.S. Lewis
6. *Salvifici Doloris* [On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering], Pope John Paul II
7. Book: *"Making Sense our of Suffering"*, P. Kreeft

Accountability

1. Think about some ways in which a pain or hardship you are currently suffering could be used to help God fulfill some sort of purpose for good.
2. Think of any past situation in which you may have blamed God for your suffering. How does God's allowing of free will and evil in the world fit into this picture?
3. This week, consider prayerfully asking God to reveal to you ways in which you can view suffering as a means of glorifying Him. Share any thoughts or experiences during your next small group meeting.

Author(s)

Graham Galloway

Included Resources

I offer you, Lord, my thoughts: to be fixed on you;
My words: to have you for their theme;
My actions: to reflect my love for you;
My sufferings: to be endured for your greater glory.

I want to do what you ask of me:
In the way you ask,
For as long as you ask,
Because you ask it.

Lord, enlighten my understanding,
Strengthen my will,
Purify my heart,
and make me holy.

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Teach me to realize that this world is passing,
That my true future is the happiness of heaven,
That life on earth is short,
And the life to come eternal.

- from The Universal Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Why Does God Allow Suffering? - Karl Erickson

The unfolding tragedy in Japan is surely prompting many to ask hard questions such as why does a good God permit the evil of suffering? While I can't do more than scratch the surface of such a deep question, we can certainly say what the answer is not. After every natural disaster resulting in tragic loss of life, some misguided people--e.g. Hillsboro Baptist Church--always insist that the earthquake, tsunami, etc. was a direct punishment from God. Sometimes, I think this serves as a personal coping mechanism, a way to make sense out of destructive chaos. In the case of the aforementioned church, though, I suspect that the motivation is darker in nature.

It's a misleading and dangerous line of reasoning to pursue, however. Since we read in [James 1:13](#) that God is not tempted by evil, nor does He tempt us, it would be impossible for Him to be the source of such suffering. This is simply an example of what the CCC calls "physical evil" as opposed to "moral evil". The world is a complicated machine in which God does not constantly insert His hand when something is about to break and cause harm. He permits nature to run its course. To do otherwise, would be heaven, and we're not there yet (except in Mass, as Scott Hahn might say).

Here's a small part of what the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) offers on the three different dimensions of evil. (I'm not sure I've ever actually heard of "metaphysical evil" before. It's also not mentioned once in the entire [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#).)

With regard to the nature of evil, it should be observed that evil is of three kinds — physical, moral, and metaphysical. Physical evil includes all that causes harm to man, whether by bodily injury, by thwarting his natural desires, or by preventing the full development of his powers, either in the order of nature directly, or through the various social conditions under which mankind naturally exists. Physical evils directly due to nature are sickness, accident, death, etc. Poverty, oppression, and some forms of disease are instances of evil arising from imperfect social organization. Mental suffering, such as anxiety, disappointment, and remorse, and the limitation of intelligence which prevents humans beings from attaining to the full comprehension of their environment, are congenital forms of evil each vary in character and degree according to natural disposition and social circumstances.

Are all types of pain and suffering, then, because of the Fall of Man? The simple answer is Yes. The choice of Adam and Eve, already created in the image of God, to disobey their Creator in a tragically misguided attempt to be "like God," led to evil being allowed to enter the world, permanently changing every facet and dimension of our lives. With the barrier of sin now present between us and our Heavenly Father, however, God never gave up on mankind, but He continually sought to give us the means to seek and receive redemption and freedom from the sin. While the sin weakens us, the suffering may build spiritual strength and endurance.

The simple answer to Why does God allow suffering? is really impossible until we first have a solid understanding of the nature of sin and evil. Once that is understood, we can say that suffering allows us to become the people God created us to be, refined by fire as it were. As previously mentioned, God allows our broken world to run its course. When my grandmother lay dying in a coma some years ago in a small hospital room overlooking the brilliant fall tapestry of the Yakima Valley below, I remarked to my grandfather "that it wasn't ever supposed to be this way." By that statement, I was trying to say that God had other plans for us--even though his omniscient nature was fully aware that we would fail. If there was no free will, we could not truly say that we could independently love God; we would be automatons, machines. Likewise, suffering may also be tied to this free will. We are held accountable for our bad choices and decisions--sin being the worst.

*Along our journey, it's important to remember that every person we meet within our hectic daily schedules is someone for whom Christ's blood was spilled, and, therefore, a fellow member or potential member, of the Body of Christ. As C.S. Lewis reminds us in *The Weight of Glory*, there aren't "ordinary people." We all have everlasting souls. We are familiar perhaps with the idea of redemptive suffering, offering our pains and struggles up to God. If we can apply this kind of internal reverence to our daily lives, we are offering these routine activities up to Christ. In this way, we are also acknowledging that we our identity is greater than what our daily life may trick us to believe. That is, our identity should not necessarily be tied so closely to our work or vocation. We are more than what we do from 8-5; our jobs should not define us. When we understand this, we are transforming the mundane to the eternal as we strive to live Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 10:31: "whatever you do, do for the glory of God."*

*Not only may suffering lead us to a closer union with Christ, but God can bring good out of the evils we face. In conclusion, here is a passage from Saint Thomas Aquinas' masterpiece *Summa Theologica*. It's also followed by a short quote from C.S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*.*

I answer that, It must be said that every evil in some way has a cause. For evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing. But that anything fail from its natural and due disposition can come only from some cause drawing it out of its proper

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disposition. For a heavy thing is not moved upwards except by some impelling force; nor does an agent fail in its action except from some impediment... (Saint Thomas)

Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made perfect through suffering is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design. (C.S. Lewis)

HOW SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN RESPOND TO PERSONAL SUFFERING?

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

[2 Corinthians 12:9a](#)

Have you have been waging a battle against forces that threaten you and your family? You need to be assured that the Savior who loves you and who died that you might live with Him throughout all eternity will give you the strength of faith to endure your ordeal of suffering. You must claim the promise our Lord made to us through His Apostle Paul that He will not give you more than you can bear, *"None of the trials which have come upon you is more than a human being can stand. You can trust that God will not let you be put to the test beyond your strength, but with any trial will also provide a way out by enabling you to put up with it."* [[1 Corinthians 10:13](#)]. As you experience your trials I urge you to unite your suffering, both emotionally and physically, with the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ and to take courage from the words of our late Pope who wrote that *"God is always on the side of suffering"* [*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II, page 66]. God the Son's love and mercy are demonstrated by the fact that He freely chose to suffer as the means of His plan of redemption for the salvation of mankind, as from the cross He spoke the words of [Psalms 22:1](#), *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,"* the words of all those who suffer in this life. Those very words are the proof that He chose to unite our suffering to His! What greater demonstration could there be to the depth and sincerity of His love for us? He loved us in His suffering to the end of His life to His last breath as the Apostle John testifies in [John 13:1](#), *"having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end."*

Why would a just and loving God allow suffering? When God created man to *"know, love, and serve"* Him, God desired a purity of love which cannot be exercised without the human freedom to choose to love or not to love [cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church # [1604](#)]. With this freedom of choice to love God expressed in obedience of faith or not to love expressed in our disobedience comes the possibility of sin, and with the possibility of sin comes the resulting suffering which can lead to sickness, mental anguish, pain and even death. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of the willful turning away from God and His infinite love, but God did allow for the possibility of sin and the resulting evil so that the greatest of human good, genuine love, could be manifested in mankind. The negative result of that freedom of choice is sadly, sin and suffering.

In the Old Testament Book of Job God exposes us to the incomprehensibility of suffering in that even the good and the innocent must endure suffering in this life as a result of sin in the world. The full depth of the injustice of and gravity of the suffering of the innocent is fully revealed in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth when God unites Himself to the suffering of man. There is no more complete answer as to why a just God allows the innocent to suffer than the answer that is offered up to humanity in the saving work of Jesus Christ. In addressing the question of human suffering in the document *Salvifici Doloris* [1984], Pope John Paul II writes *"Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else he says: 'Follow me! Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my cross!'"* [*Salvifici Doloris*, 26]. In Jesus the Messiah, the dimension of the suffering of the innocent is revealed to be a redemptive suffering, a suffering transformed and redeemed through the cross of Christ. Reflecting on this mystery John Paul II wrote, *"Christ has opened His suffering to*

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man... Man, discovering through faith the redemptive suffering of Christ, also discovers in it his own sufferings; he rediscovers them through faith, enriched with a new content and meaning" [Salvifici Doloris, 20].

To be called to suffering in this life is to be called into the mystery of Christ's Passion and to cooperate in the redemption of mankind. The Catechism of the Catholic Church assures us in article [307](#) that we can all become collaborators with God's plan of salvation "...to human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of 'subduing' the earth and having dominion over it ([Genesis 1:26-28](#)). God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbors. Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings. They then fully become 'God's fellow workers' and co-workers for his kingdom ([1 Corinthians 3:9](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:2](#); [Colossians 4:11](#))."

We can become collaborators with God's plan of salvation when we unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Christ and offer up our prayers for the salvation of our neighbors, our communities, and the world. Our suffering offered up to Christ places us at the pivot point of the history of man at the side of the suffering Jesus who gave Himself up, Body and Blood, pain and tears for the salvation of the world. Our suffering also places us in a unique proximity to His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, our example of the model Christian, who also as prophesized [[Luke 2:33-35](#)], suffered united with her son and Savior. The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses this unique opportunity to participate in Christ's sacrifice by uniting our suffering to His in article [618](#), "The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the 'one mediator between God and men' ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)).' But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, 'the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery' is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to 'take up [their] cross and follow [him]' ([Matthew 16:24](#)), for 'Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps.' ([1 Peter 2:21](#)). In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering [see [Luke 2:35](#)].

Pope John Paul II defined human suffering as "a great test not only of physical strength but also spiritual strength" [Crossing the Threshold of Hope, page 25]. Saint Paul understood this testing and the necessity to unite suffering to the suffering of Christ for the sake of the redemption of man when he wrote to the Christians at Colossus "It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to **make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His body, the Church, of which I was made a servant with the responsibility towards you that God gave to me**" [[Colossians 1:24](#)]. Paul is not saying that Jesus' suffering was insufficient. His suffering was wholly and completely sufficient, instead Paul is keenly aware that as the battle against sin continues and the resulting suffering from sin continues that when a Christian offers up his personal suffering united with Jesus' suffering that this mystical union works toward the continual call to salvation in the world. The Son of God willingly suffered to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth – the Catholic Church, and anyone who continues in Christ's work and takes up the cross of our Lord must share in the suffering of that cross. In our suffering for the Kingdom we must unite our suffering to Christ's suffering and in that struggle some of us will be called to deep physical suffering while others to emotional suffering and persecution for the sake of the Kingdom, for "Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven." ~Saint Rose of Lima

Therefore, suffering is not in vain. There is the promise of an eternal reward for faithful endurance in submitting to the will of God as well as the opportunity to cooperate in God's plan of salvation. In [2 Corinthians 1:5](#) Paul writes "For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the encouragement we receive through Christ. So if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to your encouragement and your salvation; if we receive encouragement, this is to gain for you the encouragement which evokes you to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as we do. So our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that you share the encouragement we receive, no less than the sufferings we bear." This is the Pascal mystery: in our suffering we behold the risen and glorified Christ as we take our part in the New Creation and as we are hounded and wounded by the sufferings that are still our link to the old creation which is still held by the last threads of sin, suffering and death. Our suffering united with Christ and our prayers not only can work toward the salvation of those in whom we come in contact when we share His message of salvation in love in the midst of our suffering, but our sufferings united to Christ can also free us

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from the accountability and deserved penance of past confessed sins as well as strengthen our faith and the depth of our imaging Christ in our daily lives. All suffering united to Christ's sufferings counts to the good for us and for our fellow man. In [Philippians 1:20](#) Paul also writes, *"...all in accordance with my most confident hope and trust that I shall never have to admit defeat, but with complete fearlessness I shall go on, so that now, as always, Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would be a positive gain..."* But what we must never do in our suffering is to despair. Despair is a sin for in despair we no longer acknowledge confidence in God's love and His plan for our lives as the best plan and the right plan.

Through our rebirth into the family of God through the Sacrament of Baptism and through the most Holy Eucharist, in which the believer receives Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity a Christian is so mystically united into the divine life of Christ that the whole of the believer's life including his sufferings and death, are mystically united to Christ living in him and being glorified in him [see [Romans 14:8](#); [1 Corinthians 6:20](#)]. Our earthly suffering allows us a special intimacy with our Savior in those hours when His love for us was most visible. We must embrace our suffering when He calls us to suffering as though we were embracing Him and have the courage to repeat the words of St. Paul in his suffering: *"I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong"* [[2 Corinthians 12:9b-10](#)]. May our loving and merciful God bless you and keep you in the arms of the Savior who loved you to the end.

Four ways to Encounter Jesus in the Mass

Objective

Pay more attention during mass and learn to encounter Jesus

1. In the community
2. In His Word
3. Through the Priest
4. Through the Eucharist

When we learn how to “be on the lookout for Jesus Christ at Mass; when the Mass is no longer just a ritual that repeats the same old thing every time, but becomes an event through which we encounter Jesus Christ, then it will be anything but boring.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Cor. 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which 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 of 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 Lord’s death until he comes”

2. Matthew. 5:23–24

Assemble on the Lord’s day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice.

3. Luke 22:19

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’.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1382

The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. But the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us.

2. Paragraph 1378

Worship of the Eucharist.

Four ways to Encounter Jesus in the Mass

In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. "The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession.

Small Group Questions

1. What effort do you put in to understanding what is going on during Mass? You only get out of it what you put in.
2. Do you challenge your family to participate and be attentive during Mass?

Recommended Resources

1. The Mass: Four Encounters with Jesus That Will Change Your Life, Dr. Tom Curran
2. "The Holy Mass- The Testimony of Catalina" – Document is on the Father's Team website
3. "The Lamb's Supper – Scott Hahn

Accountability

1. Next time you attend Mass actively try to encounter Jesus through your fellow parishioners, in the readings, through the priest's homily and through the Eucharist.

Author(s)

Tony Heekin

Disciplining Your Children: Love in Action

Summary

Did you know the experts (American Mental Health Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians) have established guidelines regarding child discipline? Their recommendations are a good place to start our discussion of “Is there a ‘best’ way to correct children’s behavior?” Please join us as we travel from “Old School” to New Age” to explore options to make us more effective and aware parents.

Objective

Discipline is the process of teaching your child acceptable versus non-acceptable behavior (follow the rules). Discipline may involve punishment (time-out) or more importantly, rewards. Effective techniques aren’t about physical punishments. Most of the time they are more about treating children like adults, making them understand the gravity of the situation, and leading by example. The AAFP recommends several ways of shaping behavior: 1. positive reinforcement (focus on good behavior) 2. redirecting 3. verbal instruction/explanation 4. time-outs 5. re-explain expectations until compliance 6. grounding and 7. withholding privileges. Their charts indicate at what age these strategies work and when they are non productive (see Dr. Phil.com).

The American Mental Health Association says that being authoritative is the best parenting style. This parent sets clear expectations and consequences and is affectionate toward his or her child. The authoritative parent allows for flexibility and collaborative problem solving with the child when dealing with behavioral challenges. Corporal punishment is not recommended because there is no proof it works and has several negative consequences. Tips they recommend are:

1. Guide your discipline techniques to fit well with your child's temperament.
2. Communicate your discipline plan
3. Be respectful of your child
4. Be consistent
5. When it’s done its done (for both parent and child)
6. Understand what is appropriate for your child’s development
7. Look for the why behind behaviors. This doesn’t excuse behavior, but it can help prevent reoccurrence
8. Admit your mistakes
9. Realize some days will be challenges. If the situation becomes dangerous or intolerable, seek professional help (see webmd.com)

No discussion would be complete without considering the concept of positive discipline. This approach does not use any form of punishment. It is about loving guidance as opposed to threats and punishment. It is based on minimizing the child's frustrations and misbehavior rather than giving punishments. The foundation of this style of discipline is encouraging children to feel good about themselves and building the parent's relationship with the child so the child wants to please the parent. To achieve this, children

need some time with parents every day that they can enjoy and feel good about. Children recognize a parent's love through the time spent with them. Discipline and teaching work best within such positive relationships. Other important aspects are reasonable and age-appropriate expectations, feeding healthy foods and providing enough rest, giving clear instructions which may need to be repeated, looking for the causes of any misbehavior and making adjustments, and building routines. Children are helped by knowing what is happening in their lives. Having some predictability about their day without necessarily being regimental will help reduce frustration and misbehavior.

Some parents feel that positive parenting and non-punitive discipline is too permissive and will lead to unruly and disrespectful children. They also argue that there is no recourse for parents of misbehaving children to effectively control their misbehavior. Deliberate misbehavior, they say, must be firmly punished to prevent its recurrence.

Proponents of non-punitive discipline argue that children who misbehave often do it not out of malice, but out of ignorance, boredom or frustration, and simply need to be taught, listened to, or redirected. They argue that a close and loving relationship is vital and if there is such a relationship, the child will want to please the parent and will better accept rules and listen to reason. They also feel that punishments and smacks weaken the relationship which will lead to more problem behavior.

Bible Readings

1. Hebrews 12 7-11

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

2. Ephesians 6 4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Catechism Readings

1. Section 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

Small Group Questions

1. Is there anything you can take home and use for child discipline in your family?
2. Is child discipline a life long obligation? How does it mix with unconditional love of a child?

3. Corporal punishment is outlawed in 24 countries (Europe and Latin America) but is legal in all 50 States of the Union. Are there situations when it is necessary?
4. Is positive discipline a possibility with a large family? Is it unrealistic?

Recommended Resources

All resources were found by internet searching

1. Dr.Phil.com/advice/parenting
 - a. Many related links listed on site (AAFP Guidelines Charts)
2. <http://www.angelfire.com/hi3/catholichomeschool/parent.html>
 - a. Catholic Parenting Website
3. www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/discipline-tactics
 - a. AMHA Guidelines
4. www.come-over.to/fasstar/kersey.htm
 - a. The do's and don'ts of child discipline
5. www.wikipedia.org/childdiscipline
 - a. History and Positive Discipline Description
6. <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=136>
 - a. Five Principles of Discipline

Accountability

1. Are you willing to briefly tell your small group partners one thing you did differently regarding child discipline next week? What were the results?
2. Did you discuss with your wife how you will handle discipline for the children?

Author(s)

Kevin McDonough / Reid Rooney

Theology of the Body

Summary

God has a plan for you as a man, husband and father? Do you know what it is and are you living it? You are invited this coming Friday morning to hear Deacon Russ Feldkamp discuss John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

Objective

The Objective is become familiar with Theology of the Body and why it is important to us as men, husbands and fathers.

Theology of the Body is the topic of a series of 129 [lectures](#) given by [Pope John Paul II](#) during his Wednesday [audiences](#) in the [Pope Paul VI](#) Hall between September 1979 and November 1984. It was the first major teaching of his pontificate. The complete addresses were later compiled and expanded upon in many of John Paul's encyclicals, letters, and exhortations.

Bible Readings

1. Genesis 1:27-28

God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.

2. Genesis 2:18, 23-25

The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.

3. Mark 10:6-9

But (Jesus said to them) from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother (and be joined to his wife), and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."

4. Tobit 8:4-8

When the girl's parents left the bedroom and closed the door behind them, Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife, "My love, get up. Let us pray and beg our Lord to have mercy on us and to grant us deliverance." She got up, and they started to pray and beg that deliverance might be theirs. He began with these words: "Blessed are you, O God of our fathers; praised be your name forever and ever. Let the heavens and all your creation praise you forever. You made Adam and you gave him his wife Eve to be his help and support; and from these two the human race descended. You said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a partner like himself.' Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine not because of lust, but for a noble purpose. Call down your mercy on me and on her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age." They said together, "Amen, amen,"

5. Psalm 51:12

A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 387

"Only the light of divine Revelation clarifies the reality of sin and particularly of the sin committed at mankind's origins. Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure, etc. Only in the knowledge of God's plan for man can we grasp that sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another."

2. Paragraph 221

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

Small Group Questions

1. What have you learned about Theology of the Body?
2. Are you living according to God's plan? Are you and your wife together living according to God's plan?
3. Is God challenging you with this teaching? Explain.

Recommended Resources

1. Theology of the Body Institute: <http://www.tobinstitute.org/>
2. General Audience By Pope John Paul II on Theology of the Body from 9/5/79 to 11/28/84
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2tbind.htm>
3. Book: "Theology of the Body some thoughts and reflections", by Karen Doyle

Accountability

1. Take some time to Reflect on today's discussion and how God is calling you as a man, husband and father.
2. Have a date night with your wife and discuss the ideas of Theology of the Body with her.

Author(s)

Michael Copfer

Included Resources:

Presentation by Deacon Russ Feldkamp

Supporting Your Parish

Objective

Is your parish a place you look forward to visiting or just a place to go to Sunday mass? The parish is our religious home base. A place where we feel welcome and in the presence of God and people who share our faith and views. How do we support this most important organization and all of the good it does in faith ministries, outreach, education? Are there ways we might not think about that we could make a difference in the parish or someone's life through our time, talents and treasure?

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

2. John 13:12-15

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.^b If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."ⁱ

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 898

"By reason of their special vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will...It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer."

2. Paragraph 2179

"A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop."¹¹⁵ It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love: You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.¹¹⁶

Small Group Questions

1. Talk in your small group about those in the group who are active in a ministry and why they do it, what they get out of it. Recall that even being the small team lead in Fathers Team is supporting a ministry of the parish.

2. How can you take what you receive from Fathers Team out into the greater parish? How can you get involved with small steps in supporting the parish?
3. If you are already active, is there something calling you further? Is there something new you can try, meet new people, and find new ways to be a part of the bigger picture?

Recommended Resources

1. List of Ministries at IHoM
<http://www.ihom.org/GETINVOLVED/Ministries/ListofMinistries/tabid/90/Default.aspx>

Author(s)

John Fahrmeier (updated from 2009 Syllabus)

Getting Through Spiritual Dry Spells

Summary

Ever feel like you are just going through the motions. Like you are going to church because you know it's right, but it just isn't making that special connection. How do you work your way out of it? What can you focus on to bring you back to a rewarding relationship with God and the church?

Objective

It seems like a lot of people go through spiritual dry spells. People sometimes feel apathetic about their relationship with God and/or feel like God's voice is silent during a difficult time. The objective is to provide some practical tips for getting through times of spiritual dryness.

Bible Readings

1. Hebrews 11:6
And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
2. Job 30:20
"I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me.
3. Matthew 8:26
He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2088

The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. There are various ways of sinning against faith:

Voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief. Involuntary doubt refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated doubt can lead to spiritual blindness.
2. Paragraph 162

Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith." To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith; it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church.

Small Group Questions

1. What do you do when you are going through a spiritual dry spell?
2. Is there some activity, sacrament or inspirational book that helps you get back on track with your spiritual journey?

Recommended Resources

1. Any links to online resource or referenced books
2. Best ways to: <http://www.example.com/howto>

Accountability

1. Ask yourself – is there anything I am doing to block God’s voice? Take time to reflect on what you have been doing lately.
2. Have you been praying, receiving the sacraments, etc.?
3. Are you filling your life with other distractions?

Author(s)

Tony Heekin

Included Resources

1. From <http://www.conversiondiary.com/2009/07/9-tips-for-spiritual-dry-spells.html>

1. Make sure you're not doing anything to block out God's voice
 - Is there specific sin in your life that is blocking you relationship with God?
 - Are you holding a grudge against someone?
2. Keep praying (no, seriously, keep praying)
 - Mix up your prayer life a bit. Add the rosary if you are not currently saying it. Pray with your spouse.
 - A spiritual dry spell is not the time to start subtracting spiritual practices that you once felt called to do.
3. Receive the sacraments
 - Increase the frequency with which you receive the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession. As with prayer, it's tempting to slack off on going to Mass or Confession if it doesn't lead to an emotional experience, but the sacraments are channels of grace regardless of how we feel when we receive them.
4. Read inspiring spiritual books
 - Mother Teresa's Secret Fire
 - In the Shadow of His Wings
 - Come Be My Light
 - He Leadeth Me
 - Finding God's Will for You
 - 10 Prayers God Always Says Yes To
5. Make sure there's not a physical cause
 - Though we always have free will to turn to God no matter what the circumstances (as I was recently reminded), I've found that if I'm staying up too late, constantly eating junk food, not exercising, pushing myself too hard, etc., I'm far more tempted to turn away from God than when I'm feeling good physically -- and this alone can lead to spiritual dry spells.
6. Make sure you're recharging your batteries
 - This is similar to the above, but it's so important yet so often overlooked that I think it's worth addressing as a separate point. It is critically important to understand how you recharge your batteries, i.e. knowing what activities give you energy vs. what activities drain your energy.

7. Find a spiritual director

-Spiritual directors can help you work through questions like, "Am I doing something to block out God's voice?", "What could be the purpose for God's silence in my life right now?", "How can I keep praying when I feel so unmotivated?", etc.

8. Consider counseling

-If you think you might have serious unresolved issues in your life that are impacting your relationship with God, you may want to consider finding a Christian counselor to help you gain peace in those areas of your life.

9. Research the Christian understanding of spiritual dry spells

-If you've done all of the above and nothing is better, it may simply be that God is withholding spiritual consolation from you for a reason.

Talking and Listening to God

Summary

Talking to God is important. However listening to God is imperative. Do we only know how to talk to God and ask or tell Him what to do or are we trying equally as hard to listen to what God wants from us?

Objective

The really sad thing about not talking and listening to God, is that you miss a golden opportunity to draw closer to God, to get to know him better, and to let him know that you realize that you want and need his help. When you fail to talk and listen to God, you greatly limit God's ability to accomplish the things that he wants to do in your life. When you don't communicate with God you miss the Godly advice given at James 4:8, "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you". Instead, when you don't talk or listen to God you pretty much tell him that you don't need him, that you can do things on your own, that his advice and his concern are not needed, that you are very capable of going through your life under your own power and doing it your own way.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Samuel 3:9
'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'
2. Proverbs 12:15
The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.
3. James 1:19-20
My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Catechism Readings

1. Catechism 308

The truth that God is at work in all the actions of his creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Far from diminishing the creature's dignity, this truth enhances it. Drawn from nothingness by God's power, wisdom and goodness, it can do nothing if it is cut off from its origin, for "without a Creator the creature vanishes." Still less can a creature attain its ultimate end without the help of God's grace.

Small Group Questions

1. Think about a situation you have been in lately and note if you have stopped to listen for God or if you are simply choosing what you think is best to do?
2. After the discussion above share your thoughts on the possibility you may not like what God wants you to do.
3. At this point in your life how do you shut God out of your life in terms of how you may listen to God?
4. Do you put God on a time table and if you don't get the answer you want you simply shut God Down?

Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start thinking of various ways we can let God guide our lives. Take steps to ask God what God wants you to do – NO MATTER WHAT
2. Commit to one action you will make to talk and/or listen to God and share your experience next week.

Recommended Resources

1. **Listening and Talking to God**
<http://robertwells.tripod.com/listeningtogod.html>
2. [How to Listen to What God Wants from Me ... - Catholic Online](http://www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=1185)
www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=1185

Book: How to Listen When God Is Speaking: A Guide for Modern-Day Catholics [Paperback]

[Mitch Pacwa](#)

Author(s)

Graham Galloway

Steve Green (Previous Author)

Included Resources

By Fr. Jonas Abib
Founder Cancao Nova
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The important thing is always to practice listening to God. You do not listen to Him with your ear but with your heart.

Listening to God is embracing God's inspirations in your heart. God's answers us in your heart, in our deepest inmost core where He dwells. If you want an answer from God, look for it deep inside yourself. You should learn to plunge into the temple of your heart and look for your answers there.

It is something that cannot be done externally, amidst noise and lots of activity; it is something that cannot be done in your head. We often try to decide things in our mind, know everything in our conscious mind. Though what we really need is to plunge into our hearts and search for an answer in deep prayer.

We all know the benefits of prayer, especially prayer in tongues, followed by deep silence. In fact, what you experience is not a real silence, an empty silence: on the contrary, it is a silence of plenitude, a pleasant silence, a silence through which you plunge into your own self.

It is something like plunging into the depths of your own spiritual oceans in a sea-probe, going deep down inside yourself and entering that place inside you where God dwells. That is the place where God gives you the seeds for the answers of everything you ask Him.

It is a question of learning how to listen to God.

You listen to Him not with your ears but with the wisdom He inspires you in the recesses of your praying heart.

<http://robertwells.tripod.com/listeningtogod.html>

TALKING AND LISTENING TO GOD (Partial)

Talking to God

We talk to God in order to constantly build and strengthen our relationship with him, to get to know him better, to learn what he expects of us, what we can expect from him, and to find out how we can best accomplish the things that he wants us to do. We also talk to God in order to seek his advice and help, to show him that we recognize his existence and awesome power, and of course to show him that we have trust and confidence in him.

And talking to God should be the same as if you were talking to your best friend. You should tell him your thoughts, desires, hurts, and problems, as well as giving him your thanks and praise. Talking to God not only tells God that you have knowledge of him but that you also have faith in him. Talking to God also tells him that you have a desire for his presence in your life and that you need him and are dependent on him. It also shows God and that you want to be obedient to him. He wants to hear these things from you. He already knows what they are but he wants you to tell them to him. He wants you to make the effort to talk to him and not to take him for granted.

If you really want to communicate and talk to God, if you want to become close to him, if you want to begin to grow strong spiritually, and if you want to begin a glorious and meaningful relationship with him, then do two things.

1) Talk to God daily, in a normal everyday type of conversation. Remember that God can read your mind and that he is constantly observing your inner most thoughts at all times, so he knows what is going on in your heart and your mind far better than you do. So your conversations with God do not have to be vocal and you can mentally talk to God anytime you want. God gave us little taste of his ability to search the hearts of men and read their minds back in **Jeremiah 17:10** when he said, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds."

So you can easily talk to God in your thoughts, and these conversations can be done anytime or anyplace. They can be done in school, at work, or at any other place, even if the rules of the world are against it.

2) The second thing you need to do in order to better communicate with Jesus is to read the Word of God each and every day. The Bible was the one thing that Jesus left for each one of us to read and study so that we would be able to find out about God. Only by reading the very word of God can we hope to draw near to him.

When Our Lord sees that you are taking the time to read his word every single day then what he is going to do is begin to peel away the layers of cloudiness that are covering your eyes and that hide the truth. Once he sees that you are serious about reading his word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will begin to open your eyes and mind, and allow you to begin to understand the Word of God and the incredible meaning that it has on every aspect of your life. It won't be long before you realize that the Bible isn't difficult at all to read and understand, and to your amazement you will begin to also realize that

you and Jesus have been drawn closer together. Suddenly you will know that indeed he is communicating with you.

It is really a joyous occasion to see a believer who has devoted the time to talk to God and to read his word daily, suddenly realize just how much God is speaking to them. The true believer takes great comfort in knowing that Jesus Christ is constantly talking to them, directing them, guiding them, and teaching them throughout each and every day.

Also keep in mind that the way you talk to God is extremely important. Do you talk to him only when you are in trouble and need help? If so then it shows God that you are simply taking him for granted. However if he sees that you are setting aside certain periods of time during each day just to talk to him, then what you are doing is opening up the channels of communication between you and God.

We are living in a world that rarely thinks about Jesus and seldom talks to him, and if Jesus sees one person out of a million who is actually taking the time each and every day just to talk to him, then you are going to put great joy in his heart. Just think of it. The creator of the entire universe will be personally listening to you each and every time you talk to him.

He may watch for a while to see if what you are doing is only temporary and whether or not you will stop it after a few days. But if you continue, then God is going to be extremely pleased and I believe he won't be able to wait to begin to communicate with your heart, your conscience, your soul, your spirit. In fact you will not believe how much God will be talking to you.

Listening to God

Listening to God is probably the most important thing that will ever happen to a person. In fact your entire eternal future is based on you hearing God speaking to you and whether or not you listen to him. And this is because your spiritual life doesn't begin until God speaks to you and you finally decide to listen. This is so beautifully described in **John 10:27-28**. "**My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, **and they follow Me**. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand".

It is for this reason that you need to not only talk to God constantly about everything, but you must also listen for God to speak to you. And the best way to listen for God to speak to you is to look to your heart and your mind for his answer. Most people expect God to answer them in some divine way or somehow speak to them verbally, right out of the heavens, but that isn't the way God operates. God speaks to a person's heart. To their mind. To their sense of moral righteousness and fairness. To their sense of what is right and Godly. When Jesus Christ is dwelling within a person he is communicating constantly with that person's heart, conscience, soul, and spirit. His answer may even be in that certain feeling that you have. That unexpected feeling that came out of nowhere and that shines additional light on the problem. His answer may lie in that sudden pause that you experience. That pause that gets you thinking about a different path to take.

And those methods of communication that God uses are extremely loud and clear. The true child of God can hear God speak just as clearly as if God was standing right along side of them and verbally talking to them. However for most people, especially in the beginning, they need to be quiet and really listen for God's answer because it is so very

easy to block his answer out. You can get busy watching a TV program or cleaning the house and you never really hear his side of the conversation.

It's amazing, but a true child of God is carrying on a constant two way conversation with God all day long. This is why talking and listening to God is so easy. It's like listening to music. That's why if your driving down the street going 30 miles over the speed limit, you know that's the voice of God telling you that you are wrong and that you must get back to the proper speed limit. That speeding is against the law, that you very possibly might hurt or kill another person, that you will be stopped by the police and given an expensive ticket, that your insurance rates will go up, or any number of other reasons. (You know it's not satan talking to you because if it was satan he would be telling you to go faster, that a little extra speed doesn't matter, that the other drivers owe you, or that it is ok for you to speed because you are in a hurry).

Another example might be if you are at work and you see something that you would like to have at home, and you suddenly begin to think that your employer will never miss it, and that it really isn't that expensive. Well, that's God speaking to your entire being through your conscience. He's pleading with your heart not to steal that item. He's telling your mind that it will only bring dishonor and guilt upon you and upon God. He's telling your moral righteousness that it is very wrong, and that nothing good can ever happen when you steal from another.

After a while God is carrying on a conversation with you even while you are talking to other people; and you are tuned in to God just as much as you are to the other person. When was the last time you and another person were talking and that person used the name of God in vain. Did your **mind** not hear the Lord cut into that conversation and instantly begin to tell you that the conversation was wrong. That it is wrong to be around someone dragging his Father's name through the dirt? Or how about the time when you were talking with another person and one of you happened to mention vicious gossip about another person. Didn't your **heart** hear God tell you that it wasn't right to gossip? Did you feel that gentle warning letting you know that you were traveling out of God's camp and into an area that is owned and ruled by satan. That was God simply talking to you. And it will be one of the most glorious days of your life when you finally realize that you can conduct a constant two way conversation with God 24 hours a day.

Also a great many people love to say that God works in mysterious ways. That they have absolutely no idea how or why God does what he does. But for the true believer, God's ways aren't mysterious. His ways aren't concealed behind smoke and mirrors. It is just the opposite. Because once you begin to understand Jesus Christ, once you begin to learn what he is all about, once you begin to understand what he is trying to do in this world and in your life, once you begin to understand the tremendous importance that he holds for all of mankind, then his actions will not be mysterious. That's when his ways will become crystal clear. In fact many times you will actually be able to predict what he is going to do.

The believer, who has surrendered his life up to Jesus Christ, will see God actively working in their daily lives. But this seeing will not be a visual image focused in our eyes. Instead, God has allowed his children to see him through his faithfulness, his blessings, his guidance, his encouragement. Our very spirits tell us that he is very near to us. Do we not see him by the feeling of peace and calm that his very presence brings? Do we

Talking and Listening to God

not see God through the daily provisions that he brings for our many needs? We see God when he is carrying our burdens, when he is lighting our paths, and when he is nestling us in his arms. The believer that has surrendered, is able to see God all day long.

Our Relationship with our Spouses – Fighting Fair

Summary

All married couples have arguments, or rather fights. How you fight is the key to whether or not you will have a successful, long term marriage. This Father's Team topic will help you discover/learn this critical marital skill.

Objective

1. We'll need to discuss the importance of fighting. Rather than avoiding conflict in marriage, we must embrace healthy conflict as a way to enjoy and love our spouse. Avoiding or denying the inevitable mix-ups of marriage only postpones having to really deal with them and grow through them.
2. Then we'll see that resolving conflict is a balancing act. By purposefully holding back honest communication, the silent partner in marriage can stunt the growth of the relationship. The opposite characteristic – being the overly dominant spouse – also has its pitfalls. By finding appropriate balance between these extremes, we create a better marriage. More importantly, these characteristics often carry over into our relationship with God.
3. Lastly, we need to examine the role of emotional and sexual intimacy in marriage. We honor God when we consistently resolve marital conflict without letting it build into resentment. Sexual intimacy, then, stems from emotional safety in marriage.

Here are some suggested principles to guide you through the process of fighting fair:

- Emotions are nothing to avoid or be afraid of. Emotions just are. God gave them to us. Let's celebrate them in all their messiness, complexity, joy and pain.
- Emotions are signposts that help you navigate the journey of marriage. Embrace the emotional expressions of your spouse and look for the message behind the words. What does your spouse's anger mean about their current experience and satisfaction in marriage? Learn from these.
- You make a better marriage when you work through conflict and honestly confront emotions.

Here are some things to think about:

- Maybe you're the spouse using words to tip the balance of power in your favor. You trample on your spouse's feelings, self-esteem and dignity with every hurtful verbal exchange. Maybe you find yourself rationalizing your communication style by saying, "She needed to hear that," or, "I know the truth hurts, but somebody has to tell her." If this is you, I'd caution that there are very rare, limited cases when a married individual should take this stance of being marital judge and jury.
- Find balance in your style of managing marital conflict. Silence hurts. So does verbally lashing out. Neither is a healthy way to resolve conflict in your marriage. In extremes, both styles of resolving conflict are futile relational power-grabs. If you're the quiet one, learn from your

blabber-mouth spouse. If you're the talker that shoots verbal darts non-stop, learn from your tight-lipped spouse. Stop doing things the way you've always done them, and begin looking for different results.

- Most importantly, though, don't focus solely on the balance of power in your marriage. Focus on the balance of power between you and your Maker. Balance this scale, and the rest tends to take care of itself. Are you talking with God? Or are you the silent partner?

Here is a checklist of items to consider:

1. Don't let little things that bother you build up until one of you explodes the issue into a large fight. That's not fighting fair in your marriage.
2. If you are angry about something and don't try to talk about it with your spouse within 48 hours, let it go. Otherwise, you are not fighting fair.
3. If your spouse doesn't want to discuss the matter, set an appointment within the next 24 hours to have your fair fight. It is okay to go to bed angry. You need your sleep. Just make sure that the issue is addressed the next day.
4. Fighting fair means you know what the issue is. Then, both of you stick to the subject.
5. Keep your fight between the two of you. Don't bring in third parties like your mother-in-law, his best friend, or your children.
6. Fighting fair means you don't bring up past history.
7. Fighting fair means no name calling. Even endearing terms and pet names can be hurtful when you are using a sarcastic tone.
8. Be careful how you use humor. Laughter is good, but teasing can be misinterpreted and can be hurtful.
9. Listen to one another fully while you fight. This includes watching body language. Look at one another while you speak.
10. Don't interrupt during your fight.
11. Fighting fair means you don't blame one another make accusations.
12. Try to use 'I' sentences instead of 'you' sentences.
13. Be open to asking for forgiveness and being willing to forgive.

Bible Readings

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1
There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.
2. Ecclesiastes 3:7
A time to rend, and a time to sew: a time to be silent and a time to speak.
3. Ephesians 4:25-26
Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun set on your anger.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1638

"From a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state *by a special sacrament*."

Small Group Questions

1. Examine your last 'fight' with your spouse – what role did you play – aggressor or silent?
2. This is not the first time we have talked this topic – what steps have you put into place to 'fight fair'?

Recommended Resources

Focus on the Family –

http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication_and_conflict/fighting_fair.aspx

About.com – Marriage - <http://marriage.about.com/cs/conflictandanger/ht/fightfair.htm>

Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to have a discussion with your spouse about how you fight.
2. Think about addressing this as you are 'developing' your children in the way you and your spouse interact

Author(s)

Rich Delcore

Understanding the Non-Negotiables in Politics

Summary

Pope Benedict has stated that the Catholic Church's principal focus in the public square is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and outlined three specific areas that are "non-negotiables"

Objective

In remarks to the European People's Party on 30 March 2006, Pope Benedict XVI presented the following principles which he describes as "non-negotiable" for Catholic voters:

As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today:

- protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death;
- recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family - as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage - and its defense from attempts to make it juridical equivalent to radically different forms of union which in reality harm it and contribute to its destabilization, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable social role;
- the protection of the right of parents to educate their children

The pope recognized that these principles "are inscribed in human nature itself and therefore they are common to all humanity." They are "addressed to all people," regardless of religious affiliation.

"Consequently, Catholic politicians and legislators, conscious of their grave responsibility before society, must feel particularly bound, on the basis of a properly formed conscience, to introduce laws inspired by values grounded in human nature," he said.

"These values are not negotiable," he said in the new document.

The pope also said that local bishops in the United States have a responsibility to encourage local politicians to uphold pro-life values.

"Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them," he wrote in the document.

The bishops are also charged with the task of monitoring whether elected officials in their local churches shouldn't be receiving communion because of a violation of the church's pro-life teachings.

"There is an objective connection here with the Eucharist. Bishops are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them," the pope said.

Bible Readings

1. Deuteronomy 30 : 11-20

"For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.

Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy. If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and occupy. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1934

Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

2. Paragraph 2270

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.⁷²

Small Group Questions

1. When evaluating politicians, how much do moral values really count?
2. Does a politician being Pro-Choice automatically eliminate them from consideration even though they maybe the best qualified?

Recommended Resources

1. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060330_eu-parliamentarians_en.html
2. <http://www.lifenews.com/2007/03/13/int-211/>

Author(s)

Tim Arnold & Trey Rouse

Simplicity

Summary

Step out of the rat race and enjoy life. How can we achieve a less stressful life with an over-scheduled family that has too much to do and never enough time to do it? Work, school, and social commitments have us racing from event to event, seldom with the time to savor the wonder of the good life God has given us. Less is more!

Objective

Have you ever contemplated how calm and peaceful people are when they have very little to “clutter” their lives? In our motivation to be active, be involved, and acquire goods we often find ourselves to be exhausted, stressed, and never satisfied. Give some thought to how you might re-prioritize what goes on the calendar, how you could reduce your possessions, and be more satisfied with a simpler life having what you need rather than what you want. Think about practical ways to separate the wheat from the chaff in your life and the life of the family you lead.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew Chapter 19 19-20

The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

2. Wisdom Chapter 1 : 1

Love uprightness you who are rulers on earth, be properly disposed towards the Lord and seek him in simplicity of heart.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2470

The disciple of Christ consents to "live in the truth," that is, in the simplicity of a life in conformity with the Lord's example, abiding in his truth. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth."

2. Paragraph 533

The hidden life at Nazareth allows everyone to enter into fellowship with Jesus by the most ordinary events of daily life: The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us. . . A lesson on family life. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character... A lesson of work. Nazareth, home of the "Carpenter's Son", in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work. . . To conclude, I want to greet all the workers of the world, holding up to them their great pattern their brother who is God.

Small Group Questions

1. What have you done, or heard of others doing, to simplify their lives?
2. How do you and your wife decide on when “enough is enough” on the calendar.
3. What guidelines or rules do you have in your home as far as number of activities for children?

Recommended Resources

1. "Simplify Forum" <http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=470791>
2. Seven Levels of Intimacy – Matthew Kelly - This book serves as a good reminder of why we need to simplify our lives, reevaluate our purpose in life, and the priority we give to our relationships.
3. How to Simplify Your Life – Jeff Cavins – on CD

Accountability

1. Make a family project to go through items in the garage, make liberal use of the garbage can, and have each child pick out items that you will take to St Vincent DePaul. Next week...the basement!
2. Commit to giving "nothing" a regular spot on your family calendar. Keep holy the Sabbath.
3. If you get a new item (coat, shoes, bike), be sure to give the old one away.
4. Sign up for no more than one team/club per season!
5. Unplug at the dinner table and on vacation.

Author(s)

Reid Rooney / Kevin McDonough / Anthony Your

Included Resources

<http://www.lifetoolsforwomen.com/p/simplify-your-life.htm>

Ten Ways to Simplify Your Life - by Jennifer Ottolino

In this very fast-paced world, it seems impossible to simplify our lives. But consider this: how much time and energy do you waste on the unnecessary? How much time do you waste because you can't find things? How much energy do you waste telling yourself all the things you should do?

We often make life much more complicated than it needs to be and somehow we convince ourselves that our lives must be filled to the max. We over-schedule our lives, and then wonder why we feel dissatisfied. In turn, we end up spending the majority of our time on the things that don't matter to us.

Here are some strategies to help you weed out the unnecessary and simplify, simplify, simplify.

1. Extend your boundaries

It is okay to say no. If you are not comfortable committing to a task, or something doesn't feel right to you, then don't do it. We often get in trouble because we ignore our gut feelings, and most of the time it leads us down the wrong path.

2. Drop your to-do's

Drop the to-do's that have been on your list for a couple of months. Get rid of those tasks that you keep telling yourself that you will get done but you always find something more interesting/important to do. If you have not done them by now, they are not important and are merely draining your energy.

3. Remove clutter

How much time do you waste looking for things? Do you have stuff that you need to get rid of? The more cluttered your space is, the more stressed you are going to feel. When you remove clutter, get rid of stuff that you no longer need, and your life will run more smoothly. In addition, you will create a space for new things to enter your life.

4. Define your values

Determine what your values are and live to those values. We often feel conflicted because how we are living is out of sync with our values. For example, if your number one value is family and your job requires you to work 65 hours a week, is it any wonder that you feel unsettled and unhappy? When you're clear about what is important to you, it will be easier to let go of things that don't fit.

5. Examine your Beliefs

What are your core beliefs? Some of your beliefs maybe limiting your ability to let go of tasks and projects that don't add value. If you believe that you create value by being busy, it is much harder to let go of tasks. If you believe that the only way to make money is to work hard, then you will always work hard. Remember, we look for circumstances in our lives to reinforce what we believe.

6. Create priorities

Determine one or two things you want to accomplish within the next year for your career/business, home life, relationships, and self. Work only to those priorities. If your goal is to develop a new income-generating product line, then that is where you should spend significant time focusing your attention.

It's very easy to get distracted from our priorities, because there is so much information out there that attracts our interests. How often do you get diverted to other projects and never finish what you were originally working on? What happens? The year goes by and you did not accomplish any of your objectives. When new ideas do excite us, get an idea notebook and write all of your new ideas down for future projects. One note, if you find yourself working on everything but your stated priorities, it may be time to reexamine what you think you want.

7. Give yourself permission to relax

We live in a culture that has taught us that relaxing is the equivalent to being lazy so we have created lives that are bursting at the seams and don't give us time to think. There is another way. Give yourself permission to relax. Revel in doing nothing. Give yourself time to just think and do nothing. You will be amazed at all the new and interesting discoveries that come to you.

8. If you are struggling - let it go

If something is a real struggle, or you can't come up with a solution, drop it for a while. Giving yourself a mental break will allow your brain to rest and therefore create new ideas. Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and had an aha? This happens for two reasons, 1) because you are relaxed, and 2) because you were not trying to direct your brain's thoughts. Giving yourself a mental break from a challenge is a great way to consciously create that aha.

9. Take care of yourself

Isn't it funny that we take better care of our cars than our bodies? Take care of your body and mind. Eat things that bring you a sense of energy and lightness. Eat to fuel your body. Exercise your body to reduce stress and clear your mind. Exercise your brain with new activities. This will go a long way in helping you feel more calm and relaxed.

10. Have fun

Why is it so hard for us to have fun? Make time each week to do something that brings you joy. Do something completely silly. Have fun with yourself. Laugh. Forget all the other stuff for a while and just have fun. You will feel a whole lot better.

Am I Putting Dad Last?

Summary

How do I sincerely place members of my family above me and my desires?

Objective

As the family leader I am most able to determine its spiritual, social, and financial atmosphere through my actions. How do I sincerely place members of my family above me and my desires? What do I do to be sure that I am not keeping score or manipulating situations to my advantage, rather teaching through humility.

Bible Readings

1. Romans 12: 1-12

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.

2 And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.

4 For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office:

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

6 And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith;

7 or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching;

8 or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another;

11 in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer;

2. 1 Kings 3:10-14

Catechism Readings

1. Part III, Section One; Article 7: 1808-1809 (page 444)

1808 Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. "The Lord is my strength and my song."⁷⁰ "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."⁷¹

1809 Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a

healthy discretion: "Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart."⁷² Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: "Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites."⁷³ In the New Testament it is called "moderation" or "sobriety." We ought "to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world."⁷⁴

To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).⁷⁵

Small Group Questions

1. What do you do to make sure that you are placing others before you?
2. Do your children believe that you are sacrificing for them? How do they understand this without you "laying a guilt trip" on them?
3. How do you manage the line between putting others first and not being taken advantage of?

Recommended Resources

1. Rediscovering Catholicism, by Matthew Kelly, pages 27-29

Accountability

1. This week bring this topic up to your family at the dinner table and have a discussion about putting other needs above their own.

Author(s)

Taken from 2009 syllabus and adapted by Mark Oliva