



2017-2018

Syllabus Handouts

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Helping Children be the Best They Can Be

Objective

Must discipline be negative? Must it be about “whipping into shape”, negative feedback and “toeing the line”? Or, is it about guiding children to realize their capability, potential and self-reliance across the spectrum of their daily and spiritual lives? Helping children be the best they can be requires a highly effective parenting style. The question for today; can the rod be replaced with a thoughtful parental response guiding children to a better way?

Song Suggestion

They'll Know We are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728, Music Issue 609)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Proverbs 13:24

Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them.

Ephesians 6:4

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

Colossians 3:21

Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.

Catechism 2222

Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.

Catechism 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.

Vignette

Their children were difficult. Discipline methods they had learned from their own parents; loud voice admonishments, spankings, and battles of wills, were not working. What could they do differently? These parents realized they might not be getting the right results because they consistently delivered negative discipline and kids became angry in response. They wondered, would it better to show the children opportunities to be the best they can be; rather than rapping the knuckles with a ruler. But how could they discipline without causing anger? Not to worry, they knew all actions have natural consequences; consequences are life's natural feedback loop. Allowing natural consequences into a child's life could be much better than the rod, or the ruler. Natural consequences tighten the loop between actions and results. Teaching children to be the best they can be is inspirational, a seed to be sown that could help the child apply it independently in decision making. After talking it over they decided to use less, negative discipline, though they realized they must be aligned, and very consistent.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Is Proverbs 13:24 consistent with Catechism 2223, or is it in conflict?
2. How might teaching children to be the best they can be align with Catechism 2222?

3. How might a conversation go between a parent and child about the importance of attending Mass, engagement and respect for others in attendance?
4. If a child is not being “the best they can be”, how might you speak to them about what that means and why it is better?
5. Can teachable moments be a form of discipline?
6. What is the role of natural consequences in disciplining your children?
7. Is it your duty to protect your child from natural consequences? Why or why not?
8. When disciplining, what is the difference between a parental response and reaction?

Action Plan

This week I will assess if I have provoked my children to anger.

1. Identify how I might have responded differently
2. Discuss with my spouse to determine if we may have opportunities to help our children be the best they can be by doing something differently.
3. Other: _____

Author

Kurt Buckman

Who Are Your Male Friends? 2 A.M.'ers or Fantasy League?

Objective

To explore how we as men discern and develop adult male relationships. To serve others or ourselves? What's the difference and why is it important in today's culture?

Song Suggestion

Servant Song (Red 661, Gather 295, Music Issue 374)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Sirach 6:5-17

Pleasant speech multiplies friends, and gracious lips, friendly greetings.
Let those who are friendly to you be many, but one in a thousand your confidant.
When you gain friends, gain them through testing, and do not be quick to trust them.
For there are friends when it suits them, but they will not be around in time of trouble.
Another is a friend who turns into an enemy, and tells of the quarrel to your disgrace.
Others are friends, table companions, but they cannot be found in time of affliction.
When things go well, they are your other self, and lord it over your servants.
If disaster comes upon you, they turn against you and hide themselves.
Stay away from your enemies, and be on guard with your friends.
Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure.
Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth.
Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them.
Those who fear the Lord enjoy stable friendship, for as they are, so will their neighbors be.

John 15:12-17

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.

Catechism 609

By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end", for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men. Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death.

Vignette

In his talk to us in April of 2016, Keith Lawrence (co-author of "Your Retirement Quest") shared with us the idea of having a handful (if that) of 2AM friends. It got me to thinking..."Do I have any 2AM friends?". The answer to that was an unequivocal yes, but more importantly, I wondered..."Am I a 2AM friend?" Would others consider me one?

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Discuss what the greatest obstacles to deep friendships between men are.
2. What characteristics are important to you in male friendships? Are they Christian or secular?
3. What ways can male friendships enhance our life in Christ? Conversely, what ways are detrimental?
4. If you had to name the single top quality you most want in a close friend, what would it be?
5. Do you believe that we are called to lay down our lives for another as Jesus suggests in John's gospel? Pondering our own death for another can be difficult to embrace. What are tangible ways that we can live Christ's call that speak to the nature of self-giving?
6. The Catechism reading points to laying our lives down by choice. How can we be more intentional about our covenant with each other?
7. Which male friends would you go to for advice? Do you seek them to hear the truth or to support your own position?
8. WIIFM? (What's In It For Me) if I do any of what has been discussed today?

Action Plan

I will take stock of my relationships with other men by:

1. This week, work to strengthen the positive attributes I bring to my relationships with men while minimizing what could be construed as negative.
2. If you have had the good fortune to be the benefactor of a good male friend, call them this week to thank them and confirm that they are a gift in your life.
3. Offer to be an accountability partner/mentor to another man.

Author

Mitch West

10 Commandments – Review and recommitment to their relevancy

Song Suggestion

City of God (Blue 100, Red 663, Music Issue 373)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Exodus 20, 1-20

Then God spoke all these words:

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

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

Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your work animal, or the resident alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

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

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

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

Moses Accepted as Mediator. Now as all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blast of the shofar and the mountain smoking, they became afraid and trembled. So they took up a position farther away and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die." Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and put the fear of him upon you so you do not sin."

Deuteronomy 5, 1-21

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances which I proclaim in your hearing this day, that you may learn them and take care to observe them. The LORD, our God, made a covenant with us at Horeb; not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, all of us who are alive here this day. Face to face, the LORD spoke with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to announce to you these words of the LORD, since you were afraid of the fire and would not go up the mountain:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, e out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or serve them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, bringing punishment for their parents' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation, but showing love down to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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

Observe the sabbath day—keep it holy, as the LORD, your God, commanded you. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey or any work animal, or the resident alien within your gates, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you too were once slaves in the land of Egypt, and the LORD, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the LORD, your God, has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

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

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear dishonest witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

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

Matthew 22, 36-40

"Teacher,* which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Catechism: Part 3, Life in Christ, Section 2, 2052

"Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" To the young man who asked this question, Jesus answers first by invoking the necessity to recognize God as the "One there is who is good," as the supreme Good and the source of all good. Then Jesus tells him: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." And he cites for his questioner the precepts that concern love of neighbor: "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother." Finally Jesus sums up these commandments positively: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Vignette

I'm wondering if we can name all of the 10 Commandments. I bet we can get most of them, maybe not in order, but that's not the point. Jesus mentions the 2 most important commandments as "loving God with all your heart and soul and loving and treating others as we want to be treated". Why then do we need 10? God gave us the commandments to free us from ourselves and not as

punishment. Ultimate freedom comes when we have self-mastery and the commandments keep us on track and focused when followed. In the secular world that we live in, we are constantly tempted multiple times a day with sin from a variety of different sources and choices. I would bet that not many of us outright defy and break the commandments, or do we? Choose to make the commandments relevant again. Jesus makes it clear that real burden and bondage is slavery to sin. John 8 31-36.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. As an exercise, let's see if we can list the commandments in order. If not in order then just list all 10.
2. Discuss: Is the problem with the Laws or with our weakness? Talk about ways we can overcome the weakness. Discuss how following them sets us free.
3. Discuss the spiritual intent of some of the commandments and the different ways we could be breaking some of them. For instance, I doubt anyone in the group will actually murder someone. But could hate be considered murder? John said, "Whoever hates his brother or sister is a murderer". 1 John 3:15. How can other commandments be broken by this interpretation? For instance could stealing also be considered as not paying bills on time? Could we be committing adultery with lustful desires? Come up with more examples and discuss.
4. Offer ideas and plans on how we can refocus on making the commandments relevant again in our lives. Prayer, fasting, confession, etc...

Action Plan

1. Reflect and read the commandments again in a new light, how can they be applied to free us from our sin.
2. Focus and understand the variety of ways we may still be breaking a commandment while not necessarily doing the literal act but an act that is related.
3. Ask and pray for God's mercy and direction to help you identify and be conscious of our weakness.
4. Know that we are forgiven and accept God's ultimate freedom of forgiveness when we do fall. And we will on a constant basis.

Author

David Karsten

Civil Discourse: The Biblical Reasons and Practical Principles in Engaging in Respectful Dialogue with Spouse, Children, Neighbors, even Enemies.

Objective

We live in a time and culture in which Civil Discourse is probably at its lowest. Ethnic and racial groups use racial slurs against each other (“All lives matter!”). Republicans and Democrats say hateful words about each other. Christians and non-Christians unfortunately do the same. This rancor will not improve, unless I first become aware of my own attitudes and language, and make conscious choices to respect the people I interact with even when I strongly disagree with some of their ideas or beliefs. Remember: People are more willing to listen to me when I am willing to listen respectfully to them.

Song

They will know we are Christians by our Love (Blue 476, Red 728, Music Issue 609)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Luke 10:25-28:

“There was a lawyer who, to test him, stood up and said to him, ‘Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him ‘What is written in the Law?’ He replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘You answered rightly,’ said Jesus, ‘do this and life is yours.’”

Matthew 5:43-48:

“You have learned how it was said: ‘You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say this to you: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes the sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.’”

Catechism 2062:

“In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, ‘You shall not kill,’ and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred, and vengeance. Going further, Christ asks his disciples to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies. He did not defend himself and told Peter to leave his sword in its sheath.”

Paragraph 1825:

“Christ died out of love for us, while we were still ‘enemies’ (Rom 5:10). The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself. The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: ‘love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, endures all things’ (1 Cor 13:1-4).”

Vignette

It is not uncommon today to hear or see in tweets or on Facebook the calling of people as: “stupid”, “loser”, “over-rated”, “ugly on the outside and inside”, “worst-ever” even by presidents. The political rancor has gotten so bad that even it has led to the shooting of some of the opposing party representatives. This all shows a basic lack of respect for people.

Mr. U.B. Good has found that his own discourse has become much more civil when he always keeps in mind: 1. The same loving God who has made me has made the person with whom I am speaking. 2. Jesus died on the Cross to redeem the sins of both of us. 3. It is the Divine Will that we

all become one in Christ Jesus. Mr. U.B. Good has also found three basic principles for Civil Discourse that has been very helpful for him: 1. “Genuinely listen” means I will listen for the purpose of understanding the speaker’s point of view, without prejudging whether the point of view is right or wrong. 2. “Speak respectfully” means I will voice my point of view calmly and kindly without losing the passion of my position and commitment, discussing the issues without personal criticisms. 3. “Being accountable” means I accept responsibility for my words and actions. Mr. U.B. Good has learned that the main objective of civil discourse is to enhance the Common Good rather than his own self-interests.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. How can I control my anger when somebody uses degrading language toward me?
2. What is more important than defending my point of view?
3. Does my respect for someone depend on them agreeing with me? Why or why not?
4. In my relating with my wife or children, do I need to be right?
5. If Jesus commands me to love my enemies, when is it justified to belittle or even kill them?
6. In all honesty, has my discourse with others become more civil or less civil in recent years?
7. In what ways is Jesus calling me to conversion?

Action Plans

1. Practice listening before speaking.
2. Practice listening for understanding rather than thinking of rebuttals while trying to listen.

Author

Rick Kasper

Do you believe in miracles?

Objective

One definition of Miracle is, “an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause.” We hear of the miracles Jesus and the apostles performed in the New Testament, but do we see them in today’s world? More specifically, do you personally see them in your life? If God is part of your everyday life, I bet you will see His work more often than you realize. Work toward recognizing his presence today!

Song Suggestion

Glory and Praise to our God (Blue 160, Red 537, Music Issue 550)

Bible and Catechism Readings

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

Matthew 9:20-22

A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, “If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.” Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, “Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.” And from that hour the woman was cured.

Catechism 548

The signs worked by Jesus attest that the Father has sent him. They invite belief in him. To those who turn to him in faith, he grants what they ask. So miracles strengthen faith in the One who does his Father's works; they bear witness that he is the Son of God. But his miracles can also be occasions for "offense"; they are not intended to satisfy people's curiosity or desire for magic. Despite his evident miracles some people reject Jesus; he is even accused of acting by the power of demons.

Vignette

Ten years ago, Steve’s wife Linda died from cancer. About the same time, Kathy’s husband Don died in a car accident. They were each praying for a miracle, but it didn’t happen. Steve and Kathy did not know each other at the time. They met through a grief counseling program where they took their children. It was only a meeting, and they really didn’t interact much. Four months after the conclusion of the sessions, Steve was searching for something to ease the emptiness in his life. In a very uncharacteristic choice, he decided to attend the men’s CHRP weekend. Independently, as a CHRP alumni, Kathy volunteered to help serve a meal. They recognized each other from their introduction at the grief counseling. A brief conversation took place where they updated each other on how things were going. For Kathy it was a particularly difficult time, since it was the 1 year anniversary of Don’s death. When the CHRP weekend ended, Steve sent Kathy a sympathy card expressing his support for her during this difficult time. No further interactions took place. Six months later, it was time for Steve to attend the Giving weekend for CHRP. Kathy had suspected that this would be difficult for Steve since the death of Linda would likely influence his witness. So,

she sent him a Help letter to provide her support for him. This was a meaningful gesture, so after the weekend, Steve called Kathy to thank her for that support. They then began to talk more regularly, and although neither was looking for a romantic relationship, this turned into dating. Three years later they got married. A seemingly random sequence of events? Simply a coincidence? They both believe that God's work was taking place, and they were part of "miracle".

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Do you believe in coincidences? Has something ever happened that seemed like a coincidence, but perhaps was simply God performing a small miracle in your life?
2. Have you ever prayed for a miracle? If it didn't happen, how did that affect your faith?
3. Are you on the lookout for the amazing beauty in the world - natural wonders, amazing feats, unbelievable love? Might these be miracles? When have you seen them?
4. How do you balance science with miracles? Comment on that from the perspective of the birth of your child.
5. Do you see miracles because you believe in God, or do you believe in God because you have seen miracles? Which do you think comes first, belief in God or seeing miracles?

Action Plan

Consider that "coincidences" are not real, but they are really "God-incidences". If you think of it that way, how does that change your point of view?

1. Really look at the week ahead in a different light. Pray that Christ reveals to you the miracles of every day.
2. Think about some of the wonderful things that have happened in your life. Given today's discussion, do you think any of them were miracles?

Author

Steve Frazer

Talking to Your Kids About the Gift of Sexuality

Objective

The Catholic Church has been accused of being both preoccupied with sex and “down” about sex. The truth is that the Church has taught for centuries that sex is a gift from God, and also a gift mutually given between spouses. In contrast to a Hustler Store T-shirt, which says, “What’s the big deal, it’s only sex,” the Church holds that sex within marriage, when approached properly, should be “highly prized” and is the physical sign of the inner one flesh union that exists in marriage. It is also a glimpse into the very nature of the Trinity, the mystical communion of one God made of three persons.

In sharing the Church’s teaching about sex, too often the message in the past has been a series of “no’s” when God’s original plan for sex is about “yes’s.” If our children are to ever choose the Church’s vision for the gift of sex over our culture’s vision (which is not about giving, but about mutual taking), then we must share with them this beautiful vision. This topic is meant to encourage and equip us fathers to fully embrace this vision ourselves and to share it with our families.

Song

Companions On The Journey (Blue 114, Music Issue 606) or We Are Many Parts (Blue 510, Red 727, Music Issue 610)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Genesis 2:18,24,25

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Catechism 2362

The acts of marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable: the truly human performance of these acts fosters the mutual self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude. Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure.

Catechism 2226:

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith.

Vignette

“Where do babies come from?” asked 7-year-old Elizabeth.

“Well,” I said as I swallowed hard and said a quick prayer, “They come from God.”

“But don’t they come out of Mommy’s tummy?”

“Yes they do, but God makes it possible for babies to begin and grow in Mommy’s tummy. When a man and a woman love each other a lot like Mommy and I do, they get married. Then sometimes

when they are holding each other very close, their bodies join together in such a way that a small part of the husband and a small part of the wife come together and actually make a new person-- a baby. Just like God's love gives new life, Mommy and Daddy's love helps to make new life."

Questions for large and Small Group Discussion

1. What are some of the gifts of sex?
2. Why do you think God gave us the gifts of sex?
3. Do you, yourself, think of sex as a gift from God?
4. Are you a gift to your spouse? Does sex bring joy to your spouse?
5. Adam and Eve originally were naked in the garden yet they were chaste--is that possible?
6. Do you feel comfortable talking to your children about sex? Why or why not?
7. What experiences (good or bad) have you had sharing the gift of sexuality with your children?

Action Plan

1. Commit to learning more about God's gift of sexuality, especially if you grew up mostly learning the "do not's" about sex.
2. Talk with your spouse about the gift of sex. Are you a gift to each other?
3. Commit to having one conversation about the gift of sexuality with at least one of your children.

Author

David Rahner

Resources

- Monica Ashour is the author of several TOB books for little kiddos, here's a link:
<http://store.pauline.org/english/books/sortfield/productname?txtsearch=%22monica+ashour%22#gsc.tab=0>
- *"The Joyful Mysteries of Life"* (probably age 10ish)
- *Wonderfully Made! Babies: A Catholic Perspective on How and Why God Makes Babies (for ages 9 and up)* by Ellen Giangiordano
- *The Joyful Mysteries of Life* by Catherine and Bernard Scherrer
- *Beyond the Birds and the Bees* by Greg and Lisa Popcak
- *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids* by Kristen Jenson & Gail Poyner, Ph.D.
- Protect Young Minds (protectyoungminds.org): Great resources on how to talk to kids about pornography.
- Ruah Woods here in Cincinnati is in the process of producing the first of its kind curriculum to teach Theology of the Body to K-12 students. Some of it is available now for educators and parents at www.ruahwoodspress.com. More to come over the next year.

What Responsibilities do most of us Catholics Avoid?

Objective

For many Catholics, their faith life consists of attending Mass on Christmas, Easter and some maybe some weeks in between. Even for regular church goers, they don't always see themselves as part of the Body of Christ, but only think about themselves and God. How can we, as fathers and husbands, show our families the way to be more fully Catholic?

Song Suggestion

God Has Chosen Me (Blue 166, Red 669, Music Issue 379)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law* who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Catechism 783

Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet and king. The whole people of God participate in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them.

Vignette

For years, Phil took his family to Mass. He was always very diligent about getting to church on time because as a young boy, he was taught that he would go to hell if he were late or missed Mass.

Once there, Phil would stand there with his arms folded, not singing and wearing a scowling expression because he had other things on his mind. Phil went to confession regularly and would scold his children until they went as well, but his children always had a great deal of anxiety and fear when approaching the confessional. Most of his attention to matters of faith were about defending it against slander and attacks by those in the secular culture. In discussing his faith Phil would adopt a self righteous attitude, not giving other opinions respect or consideration. Because of this, his family and friends would avoid talking about their faith with him, not wanting to get into an argument.

When he was an older man, Phil was driving along a road and saw a homeless man walking in the hot sun. He had a sudden call to give the homeless man a lift. The man shared some of his struggles and

was very grateful for the kindness Phil showed him. Afterward, Phil had a new perspective on what it means to be Catholic.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. How does your faith impact your relationships with others?
2. What rules are most important in being a good Catholic?
3. Do we have any responsibility in the salvation of others we may meet? If we do, when were we given that responsibility?
4. Why do you think Jesus choose a Samaritan as the “Good Samaritan”?
5. Have you ever encountered a stranger in trouble? Which of the passersby in the parable have you been?
6. When you've seen dirty, homeless people with your wife and children. How do you typically react?
7. What is the most important thing for you when going to Sunday Mass with your family?
8. In reference to the Catechism, what does it mean to share Christ's role as priest, prophet and king?

Action Plan

1. This week, commit to being a good example to your wife and children of Christian love when interacting with them when any tough situation arises.
2. Consider how your words and actions at work or recreation reflect the sacrificial love of the Good Samaritan.
3. Other action steps?

Author

Vince Phelan

Wholesome family entertainment / "You are what you eat"

Objective

As we know, there have been many studies on the impact of certain types of entertainment on our children. Today there are many sources of entertainment that can negatively influence and impact their development: TV, movies, the internet, video games and social media. As parents we need to pay attention to what entertainment our kids are consuming. It is our duty to keep them safe.

Song Suggestion

The Summons (Red 687, Music Issue 380)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Psalm 101:2-3

I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.

Ephesians 6:11-17

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Catechism 2207

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

Catechism 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."³¹ 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:

Vignette

Brenda had let her 9 year old son watch the Simpsons. One of the episodes had Bart (the young boy character in the show) taking another child's test paper (smart kid) and erasing his name and putting his own on it.

Brenda's son thought this was a great idea and did the same thing at school. Of course, he got in a lot of trouble.

Just because the show is a cartoon doesn't mean it is appropriate for children (e.g. Family guy, American Dad, South Park).

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Do you pay attention to what your kids watch on TV and in movies or on the on the internet?
2. Do you monitor or control your kids' internet and phone usage?
3. Does your family watch TV during dinner?
4. What kind of family activities to you participate in?

Action Plan

1. Don't allow TV watching during dinner.
2. Institute a no "device" policy during dinner.
3. Pay attention to what you kids are watching or accessing and make appropriate adjustments.
4. Make a list of family activities and plan to do an activity once or twice a month.

Potential family friendly activities:

- Reds games
- Reds hall of fame
- FC Cincinnati
- Hiking at Cincinnati Nature Center
- Bengals game
- Go to Jungle Jim's - buy them a pop and just hang out and watch a Red's game
- Go on a road trip to The Baseball Hall of Fame
- Go on a road trip to a different baseball park (Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago,)
- Camping
- Kayaking / canoeing / tubing on the Little Miami river
- Picnic at Our Lady's Farm in Falmouth, KY
- Frisbee golf at a local park (Woodland Mound)
- Putt Putt
- Fishing on the Little Miami
- Toss frisbee at Devou Park
- Hocking Hills State Park Hiking
- Explore downtown Cincinnati (Carew Tower, OTR, The Banks, Carousel, walk across the Suspension Bridge)
- Rappelling and rock climbing at Red River Gorge
- Hunting / Shooting (East Fork, Elk Creek, etc.)
- Biking on the Milford bike trail
- Dayton Flyers baseball / Florence Freedom, (Minor League baseball - CHEAP :-))
- trip to and tour of Louisville Slugger
- Bourbon Trail tours near Bardstown, KY (Maker's Mark, etc.)
- Trip to Lexington horse farm
- Horseback riding

Author

Tony Heekin

Other Resources for Family Friendly Entertainment:

<http://www.funattheweb.com/blog/136-things-kids-cincinnati/>

<http://decentfilms.com/>

Forgiveness

Objective

As Christians, we are called to forgive as God forgives us. Along with that is the notion the God will only forgive us to the extent we have forgiven others. That is a very scary thought. The objective of this session is to examine our own relationships and determine if there is someone we need to forgive. We will define forgiveness and help determine if we have indeed forgiven.

Definition of Forgiveness: Forgiveness is our decision to accept God's grace to let go of the hurt due to sins committed against us and to express this by acts of mercy and love toward the offender.

Song Suggestion

The Servant's Song (Red 661, Gather 285, Music Issue 374)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Mark 11:25

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Mark 18:21

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven!

Catechism 2840

Now - and this is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see.¹³⁶ In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace.

Catechism 2842

This "as" is not unique in Jesus' teaching: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."¹³⁹ It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make "ours" the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.¹⁴⁰ Then the unity of forgiveness becomes possible and we find ourselves "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave" us.¹⁴¹

Vignette

Joe was working with a fortune 500 company. He was married with 4 kids. He decided to leave the company and try consulting with a small firm. The new company was only about 15 people. With a large and hopefully still growing family, salary was very important to Joe. The new company had given Joe a small raise from his previous position and promised a lucrative performance based bonus.

Joe put his head down and worked hard to learn the new software he would be implementing and starting working with his first client.

Joe was counting on the bonus to allow his wife to quit her job and stay home with the kids. As Joe was getting acclimated to his new job and company, he noticed certain unethical practices on the part of the partners. Also, he discovered that employer turnover was very high for such a small firm. In talking with other employees, Joe discovered that no one in the company had EVER received a bonus.

Over time, management became aware of Joe's inquiries about the bonus and after six months with the company, Joe was let go. They indicated that "it just wasn't a good fit". Joe was stunned. He went home and told his wife he had just been fired and was given no notice or severance.

After the initial shock, Joe was able to pick up a part-time job and was able to make ends meet until he got another job a couple of months later. For years Joe would pass by the previous company's office and occasionally run into his former employers at business events. Each time he could feel his anger and resentment overwhelm him. He wanted nothing more than for their business to fail.

As a faith-filled man, Joe knew that God has a better plan and things happen for a reason. The new job was even better and Joe began a 20-year career. Eventually Joe ran into the owner of the old company and did not feel the anger well up. He was cordial and even connected with him on LinkedIn. He had forgiven him.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. What characteristics in your life might indicate that you haven't fully forgiven past hurts, even if you know in your head what you need to do?
2. Are there any sins committed against me which I don't have to forgive?
3. Must I forgive if the person that offended me isn't sorry?
4. Is there someone in your life you need to forgive?
5. How do I know if I have forgiven? (See Action Plan)

Action Plan

Here are 5 ways to tell if you've forgiven someone:

The first thought test

When the first thought you have about them is not the injury they caused in your life you have probably extended forgiveness. You should be able to have normal thoughts about the person occasionally. Remember, you are dropping the right to get even — the grudge you held against them.

An opportunity to help them test

Ask yourself: Would you help them if you knew they were in trouble and you had the ability? Most likely this is someone you once cared about — perhaps even loved. You would have assisted them if they needed help at one point. While I'm not suggesting you would subject yourself to abuse or further harm, or that you are obligated to help them, or even you should, but would you in your heart want to see them prosper or would you still want to see them come to harm? This is a huge test of forgiveness.

Your general thoughts test

Can you think positive thoughts about this person? Again, you've likely been on positive terms with this person or in a close enough relationship for them to injure you to this extreme. Is there anything good you can come up with about them which is even remotely good? If not, have you really forgiven them?

The revenge test

Do you still think of getting even with the person? There may be consequences which need to come for this person and you may have to see them through to protect others, but does your heart want to hurt them? If so, would you call this forgiveness?

The failure test

When someone injures us we can often wish harm upon them. This is normal, but it's not part of the forgiveness process. Have you have stopped looking for them to fail? If you have truly forgiven someone, then just like you would for anyone else, you would want them to succeed or at least do better in life. Forgiveness means you've stopped keeping a record of the person's wrongs. That's how believers respond to others. We consider their best interests.

I realize this is a tough list. Those struggling with forgiveness will most likely push back against it a bit. I know this, however, for your heart to completely heal, you eventually need to forgive the one who hurt you the most.

And, if you're struggling to "pass the test" don't beat yourself up. Pray about it. Ask God to continue to work on your heart.

Author

Tony Heekin

Am I Doing My Fair Share

Objective

Fathers will share the things they do to strengthen their relationship with their wife and ensure their family is rooted in the love of God and the teaching and beliefs of our Catholic faith.

Some of the Father's Team related past topics were "What Kind of a Marriage Do You Have", "How Do You Make Your Spouse Feel Appreciated", "Are You and Your Spouse on the Same Page" and others. This topic will bring to bear the non-social responsibilities we might consider which will certainly require a coordinated effort on the part of both spouses.

When one Googles this topic there are a very secular set of articles. Two of the main items causing tension between husband and wife are "chores" and "money". These are very real, but from our prospective fall way short of what could be a husband's responsible share. As a husband go beyond what you do as your share and consider what you as a Christian father (husband) [and the Christian mother (wife)] have not done to infuse the practice of our faith into your family. Open and read the first reference from the US Bishops and you will find 15 topics that can cause difficulties. The beliefs of our faith relate to all of these topics. There are additional sources of related information listed for each topic.

Many of us have a strong marriage that is embedded in our Catholic faith. So let us identify the belief related things you do in your marriage that make a positive difference, sharing with others so they can try it for themselves.

Song

"When Love Is Found " (Blue N/A, Red 856, Gather 351, Music Issue 685)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Ephesians 5-28

In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Colossians: 3-19

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Catechism:

1639: The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, even in the eyes of society." The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."

1644: The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh." They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving." This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

Vignette

Robert and Judy both worked. Robert's FT job had some travel. Fortunately, Judy worked only PT and did not need to travel. Robert squeezed in helping coach his son's two sporting ventures. Judy was

involved with the PTO and dance lessons for their daughter. Overtime; conflicts in scheduling occurred which lead to some disagreements and a growing elevated frustration for both. Their synced iPhone calendars did not solve their problems. A friend observed Robert and Judy growing tension and mentioned he and his wife had experienced a similar problem. For them, the problems subsided when they decided to make it a point to sit together and discuss what was ahead for the family. On their own initiative, they took this opportunity to add a prayer to begin their meeting together. They came to understand that both had similar priorities for their family's activities but each had to give some on their specific needs.

Jerry was upset when he was challenged for not getting his child to Mass on a regular basis on Sundays. His response was that his conscience was clear because his child had been ridiculed by his friends when he missed a soccer game because of going to Mass, besides he did go to Mass every Thursday at IHM School. He is a well behaved, good kid and Jerry did not want to risk the psychological impact on his son if his friends continued to make fun of him for missing games. [We do have a God given free will, but it comes with the moral responsibility of following an informed conscience] Jerry is not sure how to approach these horns of a dilemma. Does any Father have a suggestion as to how Jerry can solve this issue?

Questions:

1. What have you and your wife established as requirements and priorities for yourselves and your children on faith, prayer, Church attendance and social opportunities? What technique did you use to do this?
2. How do you unexpectedly surprise your wife (or children) to show your love of them?
3. Do you and your wife set aside scheduled together times to discuss your marriage, dealing with your children or other family problems or issues?
4. Do you have prayer opportunities you and your wife conduct? Give examples.
5. How does teaching and instilling in your children our Catholic faith, beliefs and way of life rank in importance to you? Illustrate things done in light of this importance.
6. Do you set aside time with your wife and/or your children to hear them talk while you are listening? (See KOC site at:
http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/common_challenges/listening.html)
7. Identify how you and your wife need to change your approach to discussing the practice of your Catholic beliefs with your children as they age.

Action Plan

1. Pick a new faith based activity that could be used in your family and discuss this with your wife this week.
2. If you don't already have it, set up a specific time for your wife and you to pray for your children's faith practices.
3. Pick an item from today's meeting that you plan to work on during the week. Next week discuss it and how trying it went. Did you have your wife involved?

Author

Clyde Dial

Reference Material

Go to www.usccb.org – search for “Difficulties Married Couples Face”; it covers 15 subjects with further references for each subject.

The Relevancy of the Catholic Faith in Today's World

Objective

If relevancy is measured through impact for bettering society, no single force is more relevant than the Catholic Church. One in five people in America receive medical care at a Catholic Hospital. The Catholic Church teaches 3 million children per day. Each day the Catholic church feeds, clothes and shelters more people than any organization in the world.

Let's be clear: It is the focal points and devotion to our Catholic faith that create the output of corporal acts of Mercy and relevancy to this world: A few of these many focal points are the richness of tradition, the intimacy of the sacraments, the divinity of the mass, the vast foundational history and the Biblical basis that has brought about the relevancy of our Catholic faith and outpouring of Mercy.

Song Suggestion

They'll Know We are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728, Music Issue 609)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Matthew 7:15-18

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. I By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit.

Corporal Acts of Mercy – Matthew 25: 35-40

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Catechism 830 - 831

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the Parousia.

Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race:

Vignette

Danny grew up Catholic. He went to Catholic schools and even attended a Jesuit College. Amidst his early adult life he swayed from the church and explored other churches outside the Catholic faith. He felt spiritually fed in these churches with more relevant music, shinier media and great small group content. For a decade he felt he was growing closer in relationship with Christ until he met Emily. Emily had a similar upbringing but remained devout in her Catholic faith. She went to mass frequently and embraced the sacraments. She volunteered at the local food pantry and orphanage.

She had a firm understanding of the Bible and embraced the hierarchy, the Saints and her church family. Danny grew to understand the power in her disciplines and rituals that he seemed to miss in his previous Catholic experiences. They married and he fell in love with the Catholic faith. Today, Danny and Emily are active in their parish and a model in their community for how they love their neighbor and treat those in need. He attests to the fact that observing Emily as a devout Catholic made all the difference in the perception he had about the relevancy of the Catholic church to be a change agent in this world.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Why are you a Catholic? If you are a convert, why did you become a Catholic?
2. What aspects of the Church or its doctrines do you struggle with? What aspects deeply resonate with you?
3. How is your devotion / daily and weekly Catholic routines faith helping you be in a posture to give mercy to others?
4. Does the way you interact with your faith help you see every person made in the image of God?
5. How can your witness be a positive influence on their perceptions of Catholicism?

Action Plan

1. This week would be a good time to start reflecting on why you are Catholic.
2. If there are certain Church teachings that you struggle with, learn more about what the Church teaches on that topic, starting with the Catechism.
3. Thank the Lord in prayer for your gift of faith, for your relationship with Him, and His Church.
4. Seek a way to engage in a corporal act of mercy and give God the Glory for your experience.

Author

John McCarthy

How to introduce the faith to young children

Objective

Whether we currently have young children or not, the Church needs strong, kind, and knowledgeable men like us to teach the faith in order to keep it alive and growing. While it is vital that children learn the basics of their faith, they also need to see that we love and prioritize our faith.

Song Suggestion

Faith Of Our Fathers (Blue 130, Red 579, Music Issue 450)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Luke 18: 15-17

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Catechism 2688

The catechesis of children, young people and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on The Word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer, and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life. Catechesis is also a time for the discernment and education of popular piety. The memorization of basic prayers offers an essential support to the life of prayer, but it is important to help savor their meaning.

Vignette

Chuck was a flustered father of three children under the age of seven. Despite attempts to bribe, plead, threaten, and ignore his children at Mass, their behavior was constantly disruptive. He and his wife would slip into the back of church for Mass in order to "be respectful" of the quiet of the other Mass-goers. However, behavior never improved and Chuck was at his wit's end. One Sunday, Chuck and family got to Mass right before it started and the only available spot big enough was in the front pew. He couldn't get the two-year-old to calm down, but the older two asked questions about what words meant or why the priest did something. Chuck himself felt closer to the action for the first time in years.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Can you remember a time you had a *eureka* moment with one of your children regarding the faith? How did that opportunity come about?
2. What are you most passionate about regarding your faith? How can you share that with your kids?
3. Do you and your wife work together to teach the faith with your kids? How do you use your strengths and weaknesses as a couple to share and teach?
4. When is the last time you *savored the meaning* of a prayer, as the last sentence of catechism reading suggests?
5. Do *you* know enough about the Mass and basic tenets of your faith to answer a young child? If not, do you know where to go to find out?

Action Plan

1. If you have young children currently, try sitting closer to the front of church for Mass. Ask

your kids about something that happened or was said at Mass or ask them if they have any questions.

2. If you have young grandchildren, respectfully ask your adult children how you can be involved in teaching the faith to their children. If you are not able to have this conversation with your children, pray specifically about their spiritual nourishment and demonstrate your faith by inviting them to Mass when you and they are able.
3. If you do not have young children in your life currently, prayerfully consider the possibility of being involved in the parish's many religious education programs, including PRP, being a confirmation sponsor, or assisting in Vacation Bible School.

Author

John Murphy

Materialism, and How to Parent Effectively Against It

Objective

Our consumer culture urges us to want more and then to buy it. We and our children are constantly being tempted to believe you are what you own. The philosophy of our age wants us to believe that what exists is limited to the material, to what can be verified by the five senses. How do we fight against these currents, teaching our children through our example and words that generosity and the supernatural are realities worth giving our lives to?

Song Suggestion

Eye Has Not Seen (Blue 128, Red 616, Music Issue 498)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Tobit 4:8:

If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have.

Psalm 10:4:

In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, "God will not seek it out"; all their thoughts are, "There is no God."

Luke 6:20, 26:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

CCC 33:

The human person: with his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material", can have its origin only in God.

CCC 1723

The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement - however beneficial it may be - such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love...

Vignette

When Frank was in college, his Catholic schooling had not prepared him for professors and other students challenging him about his faith. They argued that religion is irrational, anti-science, intolerant, and ultimately dangerous. Because Frank did not really understand the reasonableness underlying the faith and did not have a deep prayer life, he slowly lost his faith. Becoming convinced that there is no reality beyond our senses, he began to live a life devoted to pleasure and

possessions. In his thirties, he began to sense an emptiness that he could not explain or satisfy. In conversation with a Catholic co-worker, Frank was directed toward videos by Fr. Robert Barron that addressed some of his concerns. Frank did some reading, and started to pray again. Eventually, he returned to the Church and looked beyond pleasure and possessions to what could truly satisfy him.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Before I can parent in an intentional way, I have to examine myself. Do I make material possessions or money more important than I should? In what way might they be replacing God in my life?
2. While as a parent I may be firmly convinced that the material world is not all there is, do I talk with my children about it? Am I a witness to that reality through my prayer life, and by talking to my children about God and the saints and heaven as though they are real?
3. Do I need to sell everything and give it to the poor, or am I to give more proportionately? Should I tithe? How do I know what I should do?
4. Am I familiar with some of the arguments and authors being used these days to convince young people that there is no God and that religion is at best foolish and at worst harmful? Do I know how to counteract these arguments, or where to go for resources?
5. Such technology as smart phones, tablets, and gaming systems have begun dominating the lives of our children, taking up much of their time and replacing more direct human interaction. How can I talk to my children about an appropriate role for technology that leaves more room for God?

Action Plan

This week, I will do my best to discourage materialism in my children by:

1. having them give a portion of their allowance to charity
2. talking as a family about how we might simplify our lives
3. praying as a family to saints such as Francis of Assisi or Teresa of Calcutta and asking for their intercession to help us discern if our approach to possessions should change
4. finding a resource that helps argue against the materialistic culture which denies the existence of God
5. other

Author

Pete Caccavari

Living God's will in everyday life

Objective

Often times we will look to do God's will when making a tough decision (for Him), but how we take on a doing God's will everyday and in every way (with Him) is more central to our faith walk. The bible gives us two clear directions about living out the Will of God that points us (1) an ongoing posture to embrace the circumstances in our lives (1 TH 5:16 – 18) to be ever connected with His will and (2) Sanctification: a renewal process to replicate the more holy image of God in ourselves (1 TH 4:3-7).

Song Suggestion

Amazing Grace (Blue 36, Red 586, Music Issue 424)

Bible & Catechism Readings

1 TH 5:16 – 18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you

1 TH 4:3-7

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

Catechism 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 the 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.

Vignette

Jerry was serious about his faith life. He sought to please the Lord through his countless hours of serving in the Church. He felt he was doing the will of God by doing work *for* God. He overloaded his calendar with church activity. Eventually he got very sick and doctors told him he would have to slow down and not take on so much work for the Church. In his time off from his typical work *for* God he heard God's voice clearer than ever. His prayer time was more powerful and although he, at first, was saddened by his illness he began to give thanks and see it as a blessing because he was reuniting with an intimate relationship *with* God as opposed to doing things *for* God. It was through this time when Jerry realized he had some tendencies in life that were not pleasing to God. God gave him the self-control to overcome those tendencies through Jerry's new found desire to converse with God constantly and to replicate God's true character in all areas of his life. Jerry now realizes that God's will is not as much what he does *for* God, rather how he does life *with* God.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. What rhythms of your life could you change to be more grateful?

2. How could you converse *with* God more regularly?
3. When have struggles in your life been a blessing that has brought you to a deepened relationship with God?
4. How has God taken areas of your life that were impure and made them holy?
5. Are there ways in which you live life *for* God as opposed to *with* him?

Action Plan

1. Identify any ways you might be able to live in a healthy rhythm of giving thanks no matter what the circumstances are.
2. Make your prayer life more conversational. Don't abandon your typical routines, but look for opportunities to have more ongoing conversation with God throughout your day.
3. Take inventory of how the struggles in your life have grown you closer to God.
4. Ask God if there are any areas of your life where you work *for* Him as opposed to *with* Him?

Author

John McCarthy

Moral Absolutes

Objective

What are Moral Absolutes? There are standards that are universal to all humanity despite culture or era, and they maintain their relevance whether or not an individual or a culture values them. The U S Conference of Catholic Bishop's web site has 515 articles on the topic. To narrow this down consider what Jesus tells or demands in the Bible, Cannon Law, -- the Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church, Works of Mercy; what about our Creed. The Church has been unwavering in its expectations for our behavior.

Moral Absolutes matter because:

- Abandoning moral absolutes facilitates evil and irrationality
- Without moral absolutes, conscience loses its foundations
- Moral absolutes protect and promote the good
- Moral absolutes help disclose man's ultimate horizon

This topic should help us understand how people use their conscience and natural law to view truth of these moral absolutes differently; as a result of Relativism increasingly creeping into our culture. As we identify some of the moral absolutes that we dismiss or modified as we have drifted into becoming "Cafeteria Catholics" we have to question how we can expect the rest of society to believe, or how we can explain and defend God's and the Churches position on these truths in the conduct of our lives.

We will identify many of these moral absolutes, how society and we relate to these truths and what we might do to improve our conduct in living these truths and opportunities to evangelize others to change their stand and demands.

Song

Christ Be Our Light (Blue 91, Red 512, Music Issue 542)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Deuteronomy 4:13

He proclaimed to you his covenant, which he commanded you to keep: the ten words,* which he wrote on two stone tablets.

Deuteronomy 27:10

You shall obey the voice of the LORD, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes which I am giving you today.

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

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

You shall not have other gods beside me.

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

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

Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your work animal, or the resident alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

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

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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

Catechism

1776-1794; 1954; 2052-2074 (very long – pick a selection for meeting)

Vignette

Jerry was upset when he was challenged for not getting his child to Mass on a regular basis on Sundays. His response was that his **conscience** was clear because his child had been ridiculed by his friends when he missed a soccer game because of going to Mass, besides he did go to Mass every Thursday at IHM School. He is a well behaved, good kid and Jerry did not want to risk the psychological impact on his son if his friends continued to make fun of him for missing games.

[We do have a God given free will, but it comes with the moral responsibility of following an informed conscience]

Mark was taking legal action to avoid offering his employees a health insurance plan that paid for contraceptives and abortions. His basis for the suit was his religious beliefs which absolutely forbid these types of devices and procedures. He is severely being accused of being **intolerant** of a women's choice on how she wants to live her life. [Turn this around and ask the accusers of why they are so intolerant of your faith, beliefs and way of life]

Questions:

1. Do you have any Moral Absolutes which you have modified to fit the way you live your life? What is your reason for making the modification?
2. Are you faithfully living the Precepts of the Church?
3. How are you being intolerant where you should change your behavior to better reflect God's call for us to love all people?
4. What areas of our beliefs are you comfortable to talk with others? Which areas do you shy away from for concern that you can't adequately defend or it will create tension in your group?
5. What are some safeguards you can use to avoid impulsive immoral behavior?
6. What question or method would you add to help follow Fathers deal with a moral issue in their lives?

Action Plan

This week I will do my best to make better moral decisions by:

1. Read 1776-1794 in the Catechism on "Moral Conscience" (Q#1). Pick one area where you and your wife can tackle to respond to Jesus' request.
2. Read the reference material on Precepts and identify an area where you are falling short. Set a specific time table to correct the situation. (Q#2)
3. When you encounter some act, rule, statement by someone that is contrary to God's demands, or your beliefs, do not remain quiet but speak out for your beliefs. The next time you are in a group where this opportunity occurs be prepared to (and do) "speak your belief". Take this step to blunt the rapid growth of Relativism. This is a straight forward way for each of us to follow God's request to evangelize. (Q#4)
4. Pray daily this week for help with your most important morality situation.

Author

Clyde Dial

Reference Material

Go to www.usccb.org – search for Moral Absolutes; on the first page of 515 sources of information go to [Course VI. Life in Jesus Christ](#) near the bottom of the page. This reference is excellent (7pages) citing numerous sections of the Catechism, Canon Law, and giving some direction on topics within.

MORALITY

To get this go to www.usccb.org – search for Canon Law, choose Morality

Made in the Image of God

The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the awareness that every person bears the dignity of being made in the image of God. He has given us an immortal soul and through the gifts of intelligence and reason enables us to understand the order of things established in his creation. God has also given us a free will to seek and love what is true, good, and beautiful. Sadly, because of the Fall, we also suffer the impact of Original Sin, which darkens our minds, weakens our wills, and inclines us to sin. Baptism delivers us from Original Sin but not from its effects—especially the inclination to sin, concupiscence. Within us, then, is both the powerful surge toward the good because we are made in the image of God, and the darker impulses toward evil because of the effects of Original Sin.

But we should always remember that Christ's dying and rising offers us new life in the Spirit, whose saving grace delivers us from sin and heals sin's damage within us. Thus we speak of the value, dignity, and goal of human life, even with its imperfections and struggles. Human life, as a profound unity of physical and spiritual dimensions, is sacred. It is distinct from all other forms of life, since it alone is imprinted with the very image of its Creator.

The Responsible Practice of Freedom

The second element of life in Christ is the responsible practice of freedom. Without freedom, we cannot speak meaningfully about morality or moral responsibility. Human freedom is more than a capacity to choose between this and that. It is the God-given power to become who he created us to be and so to share eternal union with him. This happens when we consistently choose ways that are in harmony with God's plan. Christian morality and God's law are not arbitrary, but specifically given to us for our happiness. God gave us intelligence and the capacity to act freely. Ultimately, human freedom lies in our free decision to say "yes" to God. In contrast, many people today understand human freedom merely as the ability to make a choice, with no objective norm or good as the goal.

The Understanding of Moral Acts

Another important foundation of Christian morality is the understanding of moral acts. Every moral act consists of three elements: the objective act (what we do), the subjective goal or intention (why we do the act), and the concrete situation or circumstances in which we perform the act (where, when, how, with whom, the consequences, etc.).

For an individual act to be morally good, the object, or what we are doing, must be objectively good. Some acts, apart from the intention or reason for doing them, are always wrong because they go against a fundamental or basic human good that ought never to be compromised. Direct killing of the innocent, torture, and rape are examples of acts that are always wrong. Such acts are referred to as intrinsically evil acts, meaning that they are wrong in themselves, apart from the reason they are done or the circumstances surrounding them.

The goal, end, or intention is the part of the moral act that lies within the person. For this reason, we say that the intention is the subjective element of the moral act. For an act to be morally good, one's intention must be good. If we are motivated to do something by a bad intention—even something that is objectively good—our action is morally evil. It must also be recognized that a good intention cannot make a bad action (something intrinsically evil) good. We can never do something wrong or evil in order to bring about a good. This is the meaning of the saying, "the end does not justify the means" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1749-1761).

The Reality of Sin and Trust in God's Mercy

We cannot speak about life in Christ or the moral life without acknowledging the reality of sin, our own sinfulness, and our need for God's mercy. When the existence of sin is denied it can result in spiritual and psychological damage because it is ultimately a denial of the truth about ourselves. Admitting the reality of sin helps us to be truthful and opens us to the healing that comes from Christ's redemptive act.

The Formation of Conscience

The formation of a good conscience is another fundamental element of Christian moral teaching. "Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1796). "Man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary (GS, no. 16).

Conscience represents both the more general ability we have as human beings to know what is good and right and the concrete judgments we make in particular situations concerning what we should do or about what we have already done. Moral choices confront us with the decision to follow or depart from reason and the divine law. A good conscience makes judgments that conform to reason and the good that is willed by the Wisdom of God. A good conscience requires lifelong formation. Each baptized follower of Christ is obliged to form his or her conscience according to objective moral standards. The Word of God is a principal tool in the formation of conscience when it is assimilated by study, prayer, and practice. The prudent advice and good example of others support and enlighten our conscience. The authoritative teaching of the Church is an essential element in our conscience formation. Finally, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, combined with regular examination of our conscience, will help us develop a morally sensitive conscience.

The Excellence of Virtues

The Christian moral life is one that seeks to cultivate and practice virtue. "A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1803). An effective moral life demands the practice of both human and theological virtues.

Human virtues form the soul with the habits of mind and will that support moral behavior, control passions, and avoid sin. Virtues guide our conduct according to the dictates of faith and reason, leading us toward freedom based on self-control and toward joy in living a good moral life. Compassion, responsibility, a sense of duty, self-discipline and restraint, honesty, loyalty, friendship, courage, and persistence are examples of desirable virtues for sustaining a moral life. Historically, we group the human virtues around what are called the Cardinal Virtues. This term comes from the Latin word *cardo* meaning "hinge." All the virtues are related to or hinged to one of the Cardinal Virtues. The four Cardinal Virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

There are a number of ways in which we acquire human virtues. They are acquired by frequent repetition of virtuous acts that establish a pattern of virtuous behavior. There is a reciprocal relationship between virtue and acts because virtue, as an internal reality, disposes us to act externally in morally good ways. Yet it is through doing good acts in the concrete that the virtue within us is strengthened and grows.

The human virtues are also acquired through seeing them in the good example of others and through education in their value and methods to acquire them. Stories that inspire us to want such virtues help contribute to their growth within us. They are gained by a strong will to achieve such ideals. In addition, God's grace is offered to us to purify and strengthen our human virtues, for our growth in virtue can be hampered by the reality of sin. Especially through prayer and the Sacraments, we open ourselves to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God's grace as another way in which we grow in virtue.

The Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love) are those virtues that relate directly to God. These are not acquired through human effort but, beginning with Baptism, they are infused within us as gifts from God. They dispose us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity. Faith, hope, and charity influence human virtues by increasing their stability and strength for our lives.

Each of the Ten Commandments forbids certain sins, but each also points to virtues that will help us avoid such sins. Virtues such as generosity, poverty of spirit, gentleness, purity of heart, temperance, and fortitude assist us in overcoming and avoiding what are called the seven deadly or Capital Sins—pride, avarice or greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth or laziness—which are those sins that engender other sins and vices.

Love, Rules and Grace

Our culture frequently exalts individual autonomy against community and tradition. This can lead to a suspicion of rules and norms that come from a tradition. This can also be a cause of a healthy criticism of a legalism that can arise from concentrating on rules and norms.

Advocates of Christian morality can sometimes lapse into a legalism that leads to an unproductive moralizing. There is no doubt that love has to be the essential foundation of the moral life. But just as essential in this earthly realm are rules and laws that show how love may be applied in real life. In heaven, love alone will suffice. In this world, we need moral guidance from the Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Precepts of the Church and other rules to see how love works.

Love alone, set adrift from moral direction, can easily descend into sentimentality that puts us at the mercy of our feelings. Popular entertainment romanticizes love and tends to omit the difficult demands of the moral order.

In our permissive culture, love is sometimes so romanticized that it is separated from sacrifice. Because of this, tough moral choices cannot be faced. The absence of sacrificial love dooms the possibility of an authentic moral life.

Scripturally and theologically, the Christian moral life begins with a loving relationship with God, a covenant love made possible by the sacrifice of Christ. The Commandments and other moral rules are given to us as ways of protecting the values that foster love of God and others. They provide us with ways to express love, sometimes by forbidding whatever contradicts love.

The moral life requires grace. The *Catechism* speaks of this in terms of life in Christ and the inner presence of the Holy Spirit, actively enlightening our moral compass and supplying the spiritual strength to do the right thing. The grace that comes to us from Christ in the Spirit is as essential as love and rules and, in fact, makes love and keeping the rules possible.

---excerpted from the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*

Precepts Of The Church

by Fr. Larry Rice, CSP

To get this go to www.usccb.org – search for Precepts, click on Precepts of the Church for your marriage

Being Catholic sometimes asks a lot of us. We are supposed to avoid sin, do good, and serve the poor and marginalized in justice and charity. Those are all things that are required of us by God, or because we are followers of Jesus Christ. But there are also some things we are required to do that have been decreed by the authority of the church. These “positive laws” set forth five obligations called the

Precepts of the Church. As found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2042-2043, these precepts are:

1. To attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and to rest from servile labor.
2. To confess our sins at least once a year.
3. To receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter Season.
4. To observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.
5. To help provide for the needs of the Church.

Note that these precepts are not derived from natural law, or from any direct revelation from God. Instead, they are set forth by the Church itself, to “guarantee to the faithful the indispensable minimum in the spirit of prayer and more effort, in the growth in the love of God and neighbor.” (CCC 2041) The problem with how these precepts have been interpreted, particularly in the past, is that many people became satisfied with this minimum. And so receiving communion only once a year, and going to confession once a year, became one’s “Easter duty.”

It’s good to know the minimum that’s required of us. But it’s also important to know that in matters of the heart, soul, and spirit, God will always challenge us to do more than the minimum. Indeed, the words of Jesus in the Gospels, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” and “Love one another as I have loved you,” set an ideal for us that we’ll never completely achieve. But these ideals should keep us aiming high. The precepts of the Church are important statements of the Church’s expectations of her members, but our faith will always challenge us to reach higher than the minimum.

Question: "What is moral absolutism?"

<https://www.gotquestions.org/moral-absolutism.html>

Answer: Moral absolutism is the philosophy that mankind is subject to absolute standards of conduct that do not change with circumstances, the intent of the acting agent, or the result of the act. These standards are universal to all humanity despite culture or era, and they maintain their relevance whether or not an individual or a culture values them

. It is never appropriate to break a law that is based on one of these absolutes. Moral absolutism does not dictate *which* acts are moral or immoral; however, merely that absolute morality does exist.

Moral absolutism is the main category of deontological ethics. Deontology bases an act’s morality on its adherence to rules. While all categories of deontological ethics hold that absolute morality does exist, not all of them believe that morality lies in the act alone, as moral absolutism teaches. Kantian ethics (or duty ethics) is the other significant form of deontology and says that an act is moral if it is done deliberately and with the right motives. Contemporary deontology says that doing harm is only allowable if it is for a greater good. And the non-aggression principle bases morality on force; a person may only use force or cause harm when defending against an aggressor.

The absolutes in moral absolutism come by their authority in several different ways. *Natural law theory* says that human nature inexorably reveals some things as absolutely right or wrong. For instance, torturing innocents is absolutely wrong, and any reasonable contemplation of human nature would agree. *Contractarianism* teaches that morality is determined by a mutual, voluntary agreement between parties. The contract can be a legal document outlining the responsibilities of the parties involved or the assumed civil duties a citizen takes on in exchange for the benefits of living in a society. *Divine command theory* asserts that the morality of an action is dictated by God. Only God can determine the rules, and we are obligated to follow every word that applies to us.

The Bible teaches moral absolutism in spirit, if not in specifics. We are to look to God’s Word, not our own judgment, to know what right and wrong behavior looks like. But because God’s creation reflects His character, it’s inevitable that men seeking wisdom would occasionally stumble upon His truths.

God has placed in our hearts a standard of right and wrong that, if followed, would result in our being blessed ([Romans 2:14–15](#)). But our fallen nature and bent to sin cloud our conscience. Therefore, the

Bible admonishes us to ask God for wisdom ([James 1:5](#)). [Psalm 119:59](#) says, "I considered my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies." Consideration of human nature shows us our inability and our need for God: "If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction" ([Psalm 119:92](#)).

God has set in place certain standards, and it is sin to break those standards. [Psalm 24:1](#) testifies to God's authority: "The earth is the LORD's, and all it contains; the world, and those who dwell in it." He set the absolutes of our morality in His Word: "You shall therefore obey the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today" ([Deuteronomy 27:10](#)). The divine command theory of moral absolutism comes the closest to what the Bible teaches.

Discussing the philosophy of ethics from a secular, humanistic viewpoint is an interesting intellectual exercise, but the simple fact is that fallen man cannot discover truth and goodness without God. As in Abraham's case, there is only one way that we can be moral: "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" ([Genesis 15:6](#)).

Why Moral Absolutes Matter

[December 13, 2016](#) [Dr. Samuel Gregg](#)

<http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/12/13/why-moral-absolutes-matter/>

Far from being rigid, moralistic or legalistic, insisting on the reality of moral absolutes promotes human flourishing and true human freedom.

At the core of the now-famous *dubia* submitted to Pope Francis by four cardinals is the question of moral absolutes. By "moral absolutes," Catholicism doesn't mean vague generalizations such as "don't offend others" or even more specific claims like "don't steal unnecessarily." Instead the Church has something very particular in mind: that there are intrinsically evil acts which admit of no exception whatsoever.

Back in 1984, Saint John Paul II [affirmed](#), "The whole tradition of the Church has lived and lives on the conviction" that "there exist acts which *per se* and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object." An example of such an exceptionless norm is the direct killing of an innocent person. Even if an act of directly killing an innocent person might save an entire city from destruction, such an act remains intrinsically wrong. It can therefore never be freely chosen—period.

As the late pope's words indicate, this understanding of moral absolutes has always been Catholicism's position. It's also earned the Church considerable criticism over the centuries, including from some Catholic theologians in more recent decades. Some consider this teaching to be impractical or idealistic. Others believe it is acceptable to, for example, directly kill innocent lives in some circumstances in order to attain apparently higher goals. But Catholicism's insistence that certain acts may never be done has also been affirmed by other Christians, Jews, and even pagans. Socrates famously claimed, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do it." Perhaps he understood something which some Catholics don't.

So, putting aside the specific context surrounding the four cardinals' *dubia*, why are moral absolutes so important? Why is Catholicism so insistent on this point?

Abandoning moral absolutes facilitates evil and irrationality

Christianity has never denied what might be called certain relativities in morality. One such relativity is that many moral principles apply variously. Take, for example, the commandment to honor our parents. The requirements of living out this positive commandment rightly vary with persons and circumstances. Some of the ways in which an eleven year-old child honors his living parents can't help but be different to how an adult honors his aging or deceased parents. Note, however, that acknowledging this variability involves no denial or undermining of the objectivity, universality and absoluteness stressed by Catholic ethics.

By contrast, if we try to relativize those *negative* norms which forbid absolutely, the door opens quickly to barbarism. Suddenly it becomes conceivable that the choice to carpet-bomb cities full of noncombatants might be ok if it's deemed likely to undermine the enemy's will to fight. Maybe it's

occasionally fine to terminate a life of a person who you view as enduring unbearable suffering. Perhaps a government, in order to forestall an invasion by Nazi Germany and prevent a subsequently brutal occupation, might choose to hand over its Jewish minority to the SS and certain extermination.

Put another way, in the absence of negative moral absolutes, you are at least in principle open to doing evil in order to realize good. That means you *are* willing to freely choose to do evil.

The deeply irrational nature of all this is illustrated by the truth that the only alternative to a morality that stresses exceptionless norms is some form of consequentialism. According to this way of thinking, as no less than John Rawls once wrote, “the good is defined independently of the right, and then the right is defined as that which maximizes the good.” The difficulty is that this involves trying to determine good and evil by seeking to measure something which can’t be quantitatively measured: i.e., moral good and moral evil. Consequentialism can thus only lead to moral irrationality.

Without moral absolutes, conscience loses its foundations

A second problem with rejecting the negative moral absolutes is that it undercuts the integrity and coherence of something which Catholicism has especially emphasized: the idea of conscience.

Catholicism holds that there are two levels of conscience. The first is called *synderesis*. This encapsulates the notion that knowledge of unchanging truths about good and evil is written into our nature as *rational* beings. As Saint Paul says, all humans have a basic prior knowledge of the essential elements of moral truth (Rm 2:14-15). To obey conscience-as-*synderesis* is to adhere to moral truths knowable through natural reason, including the truth that certain acts are intrinsically evil.

The second level of conscience is what Aquinas called *conscientia*. This is Aquinas’s way of describing the *act* of applying the basic knowledge of *synderesis* to concrete situations. *Conscientia* thus involves individuals making practical judgments about what to do in light of *synderesis*. That’s why an erring *conscientia* doesn’t necessarily absolve me of guilt. The guilt may involve my suffocation over time of the voice of *synderesis*: of consistently deciding, for instance, that there may be circumstances when it’s acceptable to commit perjury.

Applying *conscientia* isn’t a simple exercise. Prudence is involved as we deduce on the basis of positive and negative principles how to act in different conditions. But the truly prudent person will always exclude from the range of possible choices any act which involves directly violating the negative moral absolutes. For, not to exclude such choices would be to (1) act unreasonably and (2) deny the moral truth found in our *synderesis*. It would also risk turning the discernment, to which Pope Francis often refers, into a process of rationalizing evil acts. In short, there is *no* prudent act which involves violating any of the negative moral absolutes. No one can prudently discern that it’s permissible in some circumstances to engage in idolatry.

Moral absolutes protect and promote the good

But does God insist that we may never do certain things because he wants order for the sake of order? The answer is “No.” God also asks us never to do certain acts because He loves us and wants us to flourish.

In a time of emphasizing God’s mercy, we risk forgetting that God is also a Lawgiver. This was most clearly manifested in the Decalogue given to the people of Israel by Yahweh. The same Decalogue was explicitly and rather bluntly reaffirmed by Christ in his encounter with the rich young man (Mt. 19:16-19), especially the second tablet’s prohibitions (Mt 19:19), the observance of which Christ identified as a condition for eternal life. Paul states that the law which is fulfilled by Christian love is summarized in the Commandments, most particularly the negative commandments contained in the second tablet (Rm. 13:8-10). These negative commandments are, as Aquinas writes in his *Commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, always binding and in every situation (*semper et ad semper*).

But what’s noticeable about these negative commandments is how each of them protect certain fundamental goods in which we can choose to participate and thereby flourish precisely as human beings. The prohibition against directly killing the innocent, for instance, underscores the requirement to protect the good of human life. Likewise, the prohibition against bearing false witness highlights the good of truth-knowing and truth-telling.

To observe the negative commandments in each and every action is thus indispensable if we want to participate in such goods. The moral absolutes consequently function as signposts on what Christ describes as “a hard road that leads to life” (Mt. 7:14). In this sense, adhering to these absolutes is the first step towards true freedom, at least as that word is understood by Christians. Freedom, for the Christian, isn’t just or even foremost a question of negative liberty. Rather, it’s the living-out of the

Christian life: the flourishing which we realize through living the virtues and achieving mastery over ourselves as children of God.

To reject or obscure the negative moral absolutes in the name of being pastoral, prudent, discerning, accompanying others etc., is thus to downplay or even deny the truth that everyone—rich, poor, man, woman, Jew, Gentile—is called to greatness by God. As one saint once wrote, “*When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone.*” It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the ‘poorest of the poor’ on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal” (VS 96).

Moral absolutes help disclose man’s ultimate horizon

There’s little question that adhering to the moral absolutes is demanding. For some, it’s even resulted in martyrdom. The last years of Thomas More’s life not only exemplify this, but also highlight further reasons why the moral absolutes are so significant for Christians.

It’s well-known that More tried to avoid publicly confronting Henry VIII’s policies after resigning the Lord Chancellorship in 1532. Yet, when asked to affirm the Oath to the Act of Succession on 12 April 1534, More declined to do so. He refused to specify the reason for his choice, beyond stating that swearing the Oath would violate his conscience. Nonetheless it’s clear that central to More’s refusal was his certain knowledge that he was being asked to affirm on oath something to be true which he believed to be false—an act that More, like all other Christians, understood as something which may never be done.

One reason we know this is that More emphasized this theme in writings composed while imprisoned in the Tower of London. In one note, More wrote: “Every act of perjury is (as it seems to me) a mortal sin without any exception whatsoever.” More’s act of *conscientia* thus involved being faithful to part of the *synderesis* written into reason itself and confirmed by Revelation: the moral absolute that it’s never permissible to lie on oath.

More’s refusal to violate this exceptionless norm and thus sin mortally only makes sense if he believed that such a choice would in fact separate him from God and endanger his salvation. To that extent, More’s refusal to lie on oath reflected his confidence that God’s offer of eternal life which he makes to all people includes respecting the moral absolutes proposed to us as part of God’s providential plan. More’s adherence to the moral absolutes in the face of pressures which most of us would find unbearable consequently testified to the trust which God asks us to have *in* him and his promise of oneness *with* him if we freely choose, as More wrote in his Tower cell, “to walk the narrow way that leadeth to life.”

Of course, every single one of us has departed from that way many times. All of us have violated one or more of the moral absolutes throughout our lives. The good news is that through a simple act of acknowledging our sins and resolving to go and sin no more, we can get up and continue walking on the path towards true freedom and true life.

Without the negative moral absolutes, however, we can have no sure knowledge of evil, when we have chosen it, and how it imperils our salvation. Considered in these terms, the moral absolutes are far from being a burden. Instead they are a tangible sign of God’s love for us. To forget that in the name of being merciful would be folly itself.

6 Ways to Love Your Wife

Let us pray:

Creator of Marriage, forgive me when I take my wife for granted, acting as if she's not there or doesn't even matter to my life; show me how to love her more tenderly, passionately, and selflessly.

Objective

The “Six Ways to Love Your Wife” asks humility from husbands. The above prayer speaks to a man's natural inclination to try to be self-sufficient. We run the risk of becoming alienated from our spouse if we don't remember God's purpose in instituting marriage in the Book of Genesis.

Song Suggestion

The Servant Song, (Red 661, Gather 285, Music Issue 374)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Ephesians 5:25-33

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Catechism 796

The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. The Lord referred to himself as the bridegroom. The Apostle Paul speaks of the whole church and each of the faithful, members of his body, as a bride betrothed to Christ so as to become one spirit with him. The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her. He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for His own body.

Vignette

When Mark saw Linda for the first time he thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. They fell in love and got married within 6 months of meeting. After a few years of marriage, Mark began to get irritated with Linda's quirks and how she didn't keep house and cook like his mother had. Mark became distant from Linda, even privately blaming her for his frustrations in not achieving his career goals; in his free time he took up hobbies to occupy himself instead of spending time with his wife.

Gradually Linda also became distant from Mark because of his inattention and lack of interest in her. The couple stopped communicating in any meaningful way, and Mark began to take notice. At first Mark didn't realize that Linda needed him to show his love for her before she could show him love in

return. But recently at Mass, Mark heard Ephesians 5, and reflecting on it, he is beginning to see that God is calling him to love his wife Linda as deeply as Christ loves His Church.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. What changes does Mark have to make in order to love his wife as Christ loved His church?
2. What qualities did you value in your wife early in your marriage? What qualities do you value now?
3. Has your wife or another relative/friend inspired you by their example of selfless love?
4. The six ways to love your wife is common sense advice- you've heard most of the ideas before. Which ones have you tried? How did your wife respond to you?
5. Which of the Six ways do you feel most expresses Paul's exhortation to love your wife as Christ loved His Church?
6. What do Paul's words "He who loves his wife, loves himself" mean to you as a husband?
7. Are Paul's words to us in Ephesians 5 too idealistic for most of us to put into practice?

Action Plan

1. Discuss the Six Ways to Love Your Wife with your wife – which one does she most want you to put into practice?
2. Pray over Ephesians 5 then look for the opportunity to talk with your children about what it means to you.
3. Be an example to young men of a husband who shows deep sacrificial love for his wife.

Author

Vince Phelan

Online Resource

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/moi/relatebetter/tomywifefamily/six-ways-to-love-your-wife/>

(you have to subscribe to the site to get the full article, below is a summary of each)

From "The Six Ways to Love Your Wife":

1. Discover her little joys : Give her time to enjoy a good book while you do the dishes.
2. Kiss Unselfishly: Give her a kiss on the cheek
3. "Just Because" Gifts: give her a gift when she's not expecting one.
4. Ask "Is this okay?": Ask her advice and counsel on matters that are important to her
5. Say, "I'm sorry": Nothing shows strength like true humility
6. Live your faith: Pray with your wife and read scripture like it's an owner's manual!

Are We Called to Tolerance or Something More: How to Share the Church's Teaching on Sexual Identity with Our Families?

Objective

Transgender individuals are rapidly becoming more visible in our society. Despite scientific controversy concerning what causes individuals to identify with a sex other than their biological sex, our government, schools, places of work and the media are promoting transgender ideology. Our Catholic faith teaches us that man and woman were created as complementary to each other, but also distinct from each other. This distinctiveness and complementarity are given to us for the raising of children, but also reflects the image of our God who is 3 distinct and complimentary persons. As Catholics we are called to love all people and help protect people from discrimination. We are also called to promote the traditional family and the dignity and value of each person as God originally created them. As transgenderism becomes more mainstream, how are we as Christians to love the transgenders around us while protecting our culture and our families from ideologies that are contrary to natural law and our Catholic faith.

Song Suggestion

Prayer Of St. Francis (Blue 368, Red 721, Music Issue 508)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Genesis 1:27

"God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Catechism 369

"Man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons, on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. "Being man" or "being woman" is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their creator."

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church: Paragraph 224:

Faced with theories that consider gender identity as merely the cultural and social product of the interaction between the community and the individual, independent of personal sexual identity and without any reference to the true meaning of sexuality, the Church does not tire of repeating her teaching: "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral and spiritual differences and complementarities are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarities, needs and mutual support between the sexes are lived out." According to this perspective, it is obligatory that positive law be conformed to the natural law, according to which sexual identity is indispensable, because it is the objective condition for forming a couple in marriage."

Vignettes:

1. Your daughter, who is a freshman at an all-girls Catholic high school, comes home confused and distraught one day. There is a club at school encouraging students to "explore" their sexuality and to be open to different options.
2. You are a 5th grade teacher at a Cincinnati Public School. "Michelle" is a new "girl" in your class. Your principal informs you that Michelle was Michael last year. You are also instructed

by your principal to not use the terms “boys” or “girls” in your classroom, just “students.” Michelle will also be using the female bathroom at school.

3. You are watching TV with your 13-year-old son. The entertainment news show that you are watching presents a story about Bruce Jenner, who is now Caitlyn Jenner. What do you say to your son about all this?

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Have you had a direct experience with a transgender person, either at work, acquaintances or family? How did you feel about it?
2. How did you approach that situation? What would you change?
3. Is it hard to love a transgender person?
4. Our children and family members are being exposed to transgender ideology through the media and social contacts. How can we help to protect them from confusion or even a rejection of God's
5. Would you feel comfortable talking about this with your family? If not, why not?
6. How could your Fathers Team brothers help you with this?

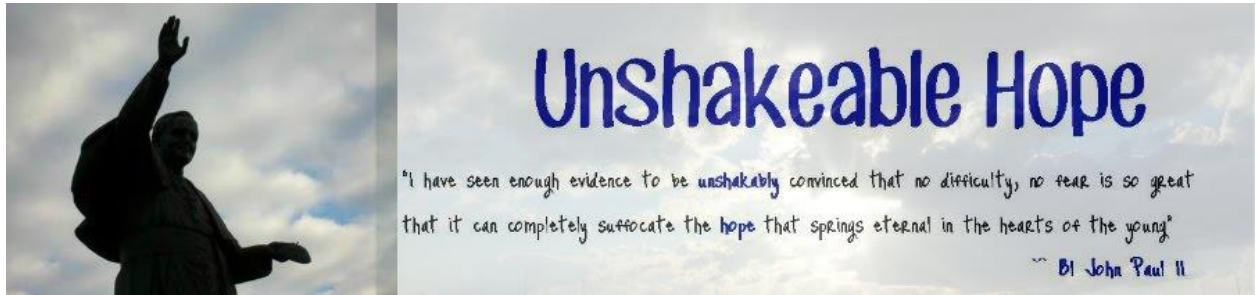
Action Plans

1. Learn about God's plan for man and woman and the dignity and value of every person as God created them. Learn about the Theology of the Body, especially by authors Christopher West and Mary Healy.
2. Talk to your wife about this. Assess how your family might be exposed to transgender ideology. How might you talk to your children about this?
3. Pray for any transgender individuals in your life.

Author

David Rahner 8/8/2017 Please feel free to contact me with questions. 513-378-8300.
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Resources:



Emily Macke, Theology of the Body Curriculum Specialist, Ruah Woods

emilymacke@ruahwoods.org

<http://unshakeablehope.blogspot.com/2013/10/questions-from-credo-what-to-say-to.html>

Q. What would you say to someone who just came out as trans?

A. Before answering your question directly, let's look at what the Church says about our sexual identity. *** (See paragraph at the bottom of this post for the actual citation.) The Church tells us that every person is called to "acknowledge and accept his sexual identity." Because our culture today tells us that our sexual identity is whatever gender we happen to "feel" like, it might seem that the Church is saying we need to embrace our gender feelings. But, by "sexual identity," the Church is referring to our masculinity and femininity.

How do we discover our sexual identity? From the earliest moments of our existence, our bodies, right down to our DNA are differentiated as male or female. Some might argue that the Church puts too much emphasis on biology, basing everything about our identity, our morality and our happiness on body parts. Instead, the Church says that our biology -- our bodies -- reveal, or make visible to us, higher truths like God, love, and who God created us to be. The body reveals the person. Our bodily masculinity or femininity isn't some random attribute we happen to have. It's who we are. And who we are, male or female, reveals something about who God is -- Love.

What "sexual difference"/gender reveals to us:

1) My male or female body is a beautiful reminder that I was created. I am not God. I am a child of God. I did not create myself. My life is such a radical gift that there are some things I did not choose for myself -- my gender, my birthday, my name, my family, etc. Since there is also another way of being that is different from me (male or female), I also realize that I cannot encompass the whole of reality.

2) My male or female body is a beautiful reminder that I am called to love. In seeing that there is another with whom I have unity (the same gift of humanity) and difference (masculinity or femininity), I see that it is possible for me to give and to receive from another. I am called to live "for" another. I am then able to see that love is possible,

that love is good and that love is the meaning of life.

3) My male or female body is a beautiful reminder that I am called to love fruitfully. When I realize that I did not create myself, that I come from God, and when I realize that I can love another with whom I share a unity (humanity) and a difference (male or female), I can see that my love can be fruitful. It can grow and be more. It doesn't have to collapse in upon itself. It can open me up to new experiences, new wonder, new gratitude as I watch love unfolded as something I am given and not as something I create, dominate or master.

In short, my sexual identity, which I discover in my body, is a constant reminder of who I am as a human person -- a gift from God, called to give in love, fruitfully. So, embracing this gift of our masculinity and femininity, which is revealed in and through our bodies is key to understanding who God created us to be and what He is calling us to (ultimately, eternal communion with Him in heaven).

But back to your main question ... what should you say to a friend who is experiencing gender confusion?

First, be sure to acknowledge the long, hard struggle that gender confusion has caused in your friend's life. Have compassion for their struggle and for the suffering that the search for identity has caused.

Ask your friend if he or she has spoken to parents, a priest, a youth minister or a counselor about the feelings of being transgendered. If they need a good counselor to speak to, recommend one.

Perhaps in conversations with your friend, you will have the opportunity to discuss the gift that God has given us of our body. You might ask your friend what it means that he or she has the particular body God gave. You might have the opportunity to share with your friend that God gave us our body for a reason.

Throughout your conversations with your friend, be compassionate about this struggle and know that there are qualified people who can give more guidance to your friend during this challenging time.

*** *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church.*

224. *"Faced with theories that consider gender identity as merely the cultural and social product of the interaction between the community and the individual, independent of personal sexual identity without any reference to the true meaning of sexuality, the Church does not tire of repeating her teaching: "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral and spiritual difference and complementarities are oriented towards the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarities, needs and mutual support between the sexes are lived out". According to this perspective, it is obligatory that positive law be conformed to the natural law, according to which sexual identity is indispensable, because it is the objective condition for forming a couple in marriage."*

From an Evangelical Protestant perspective but very helpful:

Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria.*

Gender Theory

While camping at the World Youth Day vigil in Kraków this summer, I spoke with a young woman who was preparing to enter her first year of college at a prestigious university in California. She pulled her iPhone out of her backpack and showed me where her online college application required her to check the appropriate box to indicate her gender.

There were 18 boxes to choose from.

I read through the litany of genders, and noticed that two were missing: male and female. (Facebook—which invites its users to identify as one of 58 genders—at least offers them the possibility of choosing to be male or female.) The university application, however, did allow the incoming students to choose “cis-male” or “cis-female,” which means that the biological sex one was assigned at birth aligns with the gender one chooses as their identity.

What’s going on? Where is this coming from? In a sense, it could be said that *Gaudium et Spes* prophesied our culture’s sexual identity crisis by stating, “when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible.”¹

The Beginning and the End of Gender Theory

In order to offer pastoral care for individuals who struggle with gender dysphoria, it is useful to reflect upon the roots and ultimate goal of gender theory. Throughout its history, the Church has defended the truth of the human person from ideologies that aimed to separate the body and soul, including Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Cartesian Dualism. In varying ways, each of these schools of thought pitted the physical against the spiritual, considering what is material to be inferior to what is immaterial. Similarly, gender theory promotes the notion that one’s gender is a reality that exists independently of one’s body, and it defines one’s true identity. In other words, one’s body is not a reliable guide to discovering one’s identity. Rather, the body is a collection of parts that may be augmented or even surgically removed if they conflict with one’s internal feelings.

In his *Theology of the Body*, Saint John Paul II noted that concupiscence “brings with it an almost constitutive difficulty in identifying oneself with one’s own body.”² In context, he was speaking of the problem of shame. However, a fruit of concupiscence is that the meaning of our bodies

Responding with Love and Logic

By Jason Evert

becomes obscured. Take, for example, the recent death of the transgender actor Alexis Anquette. Alexis’s family stated, “Our brother Robert, who became our brother Alexis, who became our sister Alexis, who became our brother Alexis, passed this morning.” His siblings added, “In the days leading to (Alexis’) death, she told us she was already visiting the other side, and that where she was going, there was only one gender. That on the other side, we are free from all of the things that separate us in this life, and that we are all one.”³

What’s perhaps most intriguing in this statement is not the fluidity of Robert’s gender, but the notion that gender is something that *separates* us from one another. The ultimate goal of gender theory is not to have 18 or 58 genders, but to eliminate gender distinctions altogether.

Pope Francis rightly noted, “I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to deal with it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution.”⁴

Erasing Our Meaning

If the goal of gender theory is to cancel out sexual difference, then it aims to erase what St. John Paul II called the spousal meaning of the body. In his words, the human

body "has the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence."⁴ The body, in its masculinity and femininity, reveals that we find ourselves by making a sincere gift of ourselves. Not only is this the central concept of the Theology of the Body, it is the fundamental truth about human beings. To understand what it means to be human, one must understand this—we are called to be a gift. However, if there is no objective difference between the sexes, there can be no complementarity.

In response to those who struggle to accept their gender, the Church reminds individuals that one's sex is not something "assigned" at birth that might be at odds with one's true identity. Rather, the body reveals one's identity. Our gender—and therefore our sexual difference—is a gift, not a decision or feeling.

The Task of the Body

St. John Paul II noted, "the Creator has assigned the body to man as a task, the body in its masculinity and femininity."⁵ For some individuals, this task is especially difficult, and the Church understands this. She is not afraid to invite people to be introspective about their sexuality or their feelings, and is not encouraging anyone to live a duplicitous life. Rather, the Church is gently calling her sons and daughters to remember that it is sometimes necessary to peel away layers of woundedness to uncover our identity and calling. Although advocates of gender theory claim that they assist individuals in embracing their identity, they're only giving people the permission to reject it. It is the Church that is encouraging individuals to embrace the deepest truth about their identity, even if this process of discovery is a difficult one.

The Wisdom of Pope Benedict XVI:

The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. According to the biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something previously given is what is now disputed. The words of the creation account: "male and female he created them" (*Gen 1:27*) no longer apply.

No, what applies now is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves. Man and woman as created realities, as the nature of the human being, no longer exist. Man calls his nature into question. From now on he is merely spirit and will. The manipulation of nature, which we deplore today where our environment is concerned, now becomes man's fundamental choice where he himself is concerned. From now on there is only the abstract human being, who chooses for himself what his nature is to be. Man and woman in their created state as complementary versions of what it means to be human are disputed. . . . When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being. The defense of the family is about man himself. And it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears. Whoever defends God is defending man.

(Address to the Members of the Roman Curia for the Exchange of Christmas Greetings, 21 December 2012)

Jason Evert has traveled to six continents to bring the message of chastity to more than one million people over the past 18 years, including World Youth Days in Australia, Spain, and Poland. Jason earned a master's degree in Theology, and undergraduate degrees in Theology and Mental Health and Human Services, with a minor in Philosophy at Franciscan University of Steubenville. He is a best-selling author of more than ten books, including *Saint John Paul the Great, How to Find Your Soulmate without Losing Your Soul*, and the curriculum *YOU: Life, Love, and the Theology of the Body*. He and his wife Crystalina run chastityproject.com.

Notes

1. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), art. 36.
2. Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, translated by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 28-9.
3. Pope Francis, General Audience Catechesis, April 15, 2015.
4. *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 15.1.
5. *Ibid.*, 39.2.

Go to Steubenvilleconferences.com/youth for Jason's next speaker events in St. Paul, Minnesota and Tucson, Arizona July 2017.

'Gender Identity': A Complex Battleground for Religious Freedom



Karen Elam, a member of the Mississippi's Board of Education, listens to Special Assistant Attorney General Joe Runnels explain various facets of Title IX, prior to the board going into executive session on May 24 in Clinton, Miss. The board voted 9-0 to follow political leaders' opposition to federal

guidance on use of bathrooms and locker rooms by students that self-identify with the opposite sex of their biological sex. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

| Jun. 1, 2016

'Gender Identity': A Complex Battleground for Religious Freedom

NEWS ANALYSIS: As the Obama administration calls for the adoption of new accommodations for people who refer to themselves as transgender, religious-freedom experts and Catholic leaders weigh a swiftly changing legal and political landscape.

JOAN FRAWLEY DESMOND

WASHINGTON — Eleven states [have filed a legal challenge](#) to the Obama administration's [directive](#) that called on public-school districts to permit students to use bathrooms based on their gender identity, not their biological sex.

[According](#) to papers filed on May 25 in a Texas federal district court, the 11 states argue that the administration has "conspired to turn workplaces and educational settings across the country into laboratories for a massive social experiment, flouting the democratic process, and running roughshod over commonsense policies protecting children and basic privacy rights."

The lawsuit marked a new front in the culture wars that will likely pose fresh challenges to the religious freedom of public-school students, faculty and parents, as well as Catholic universities and individual believers in the workplace.

"Gender ideology is the next tsunami that threatens to sweep away centuries of accepted human wisdom about the complementarity and real differences between men and women," said Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, in a [column](#) for the archdiocesan website that was provided to the Register

before the 11 states filed suit against the federal government.

"These differences are not merely about self-expression and personal choice. Science, philosophy, theology and the accumulated wisdom of every culture have recognized that these differences are rooted in something real and objective.

"They are rooted in biology, and, more fundamentally, they are rooted in the design of the Creator," said Archbishop Coakley.

Legal analysts and religious-freedom advocates are still reviewing the broad implications of the May 13 letter issued by the federal Department of Education and the Department of Justice that interpreted Title IX language prohibiting discrimination based on sex to include people who do not identify with the sex noted on their birth certificates.

According to this new federal guidance, a student's gender identity will be considered the student's sex, and U.S. states and school districts that resist this "guidance" could risk the withdrawal of federal funds for education. The government defines "gender identity" as "an individual's internal sense of gender," which "may be different from ...the person's sex assigned at birth."

The directive applies for bathrooms and locker rooms, sports teams, school records and the use of pronouns when addressing an individual who no longer identifies with his or her biological sex.

"As is consistently recognized in civil-rights cases, the desire to accommodate others' discomfort cannot justify a policy that singles out and disadvantages a particular class of students," read the "Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students" issued by the Departments of Justice and Education.

'Uncharted Territory'

Douglas Laycock, a leading authority on religious-freedom issues at the

University of Virginia School of Law, acknowledged that state and federal courts were moving into “uncharted territory.”

It was not clear, said Laycock, whether resistance to new accommodations for people who refer to themselves as transgender would be treated as a religious matter, and so allow for exemptions in public-school settings, among other locations. But he speculated that religious objections to specific accommodations might win support from the courts.

“I do think there is a plausible religious-liberty issue about locker rooms. Religious teachings on sexual modesty may prohibit exposure to a person who is biologically a member of the opposite sex,” suggested Laycock.

At present, the Alliance Defending Freedom, a religious-liberty advocacy group, has [filed a lawsuit](#) on behalf of a group of Chicago-area public school students and parents that called on the local school district to halt the new accommodations. The ADF lawsuit argued that the federal directive was unconstitutional and posed a threat to student privacy and safety, but the legal challenge did not highlight religious-freedom concerns.

Meanwhile, the requirement that people in the school community or workplace adopt pronouns that reflect an individual’s gender identity will likely spark additional debate and litigation.

“What pronouns to use should be a matter of free speech,” said Laycock.

“But free speech cannot be used to harass individuals; there is no right to throw objectionable pronouns in the face of a transgender student.”

He predicted that “the transgender movement, and the school systems regulating pronouns, will take a very expansive view of what counts as harassment.”

Implications for Catholic Schools

When the administration issued its letter providing guidance on gender-identity accommodations, Loretta Lynch, the U.S. attorney general, equated resistance to such practices with the segregationist policies of the Jim Crow South.

Kyle Duncan, a lawyer who represents North Carolina's speaker of the house, Rep. Tim Moore, and Philip Berger, president pro tempore of the state senate, in one of several legal challenges to the federal guidance, told the Register that Lynch's strong language should raise a red flag with Catholics.

"If I were an administrator of a Catholic school, I would not feel confident that I could maintain" an exemption from this accommodation, "not when the U.S. attorney general equates my school's position with the continuation of Jim Crow laws," said Duncan, who has litigated numerous religious-freedom cases.

After the Department of Education adopted a new interpretation of Title IX in 2014 that prohibited discrimination based on gender identity at institutions of higher education, a growing number of Catholic and Christian colleges and universities have obtained waivers that allow them to adhere to their own policies.

However, the American Civil Liberties Union and other advocates have pressured religious institutions to change course, and a slew of "LGBT" (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) organizations have called on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to sever its ties with faith-based schools that have sought exemptions from Title IX.

In this harsh political environment, conscience protections are often framed as a license to discriminate. Thus, when Catholic educators act to defend the religious mission of their institutions, they risk provoking retaliatory actions from activist groups that can damage a school's reputation.

"We have not filed for an exemption" to Title IX, said John Garvey, the

president of The Catholic University of America. He noted the existence of a [“shaming campaign,”](#) organized by groups like the Human Rights Campaign, to target institutions that seek the religious exemption included by Congress in Title IX.

“A natural consequence [of the new Title IX guidance] is that organizations like us may find themselves seeking an exemption now,” Garvey told the Register.

Given the swiftly changing political and legal landscape, Laycock was cautious about assessing the future ability of Catholic and Christian universities and colleges to secure religious exemptions.

“The resistance to allowing any such right is fierce,” agreed Laycock.

Federal Overreach?

For now, states that challenge the Title IX directive in court have targeted the administration’s failure to follow the formal rulemaking process.

“They are trying to insert a definition of sex in federal anti-discrimination law with no mandate from Congress and without going through the normal regulatory process,” argued Kyle Duncan, who has filled multiple lawsuits on behalf of Speaker Moore and Sen. Berger.

“They are doing it by letter and then going to court to force that on sovereign states.”

The North Carolina Republicans’ legal argument has received a boost from some legal specialists.

In a May 18 [op-ed](#) in *The New York Times*, Yale law professor Peter Schuck underscored the need for protections for people who identify as a member of the opposite sex, but criticized the administration’s decision to circumvent the rulemaking process. Further, he challenged the adoption of an absolutist

legal argument that ignored the rights of others.

"A legal right trumps any other non-right claim, and those who disobey may suffer serious sanctions," read Schuck's critique of the federal guidance.

"This absolutist rigor is precisely why we accord the status of 'right' only to those claims that are essential to individuals' well-being. Do identity-based bathrooms meet this demanding test?" asked Schuck.

Maya Dillard Smith, the interim director of the ACLU's chapter in Georgia, raised similar concerns when she resigned from her post in late May, linking her decision to the organization's strong support for the new bathroom accommodations.

In a [statement](#) that marked her departure from the ACLU, Smith said her own daughters were "frightened" when they visited a women's bathroom and encountered "three transgender young adults, over six feet [tall] with deep voices." She argued that civil-rights advocates should look for solutions that respect the rights of all groups.

CUA's Garvey Stands Firm

If the federal government prevails in these lawsuits, Catholic universities like CUA will face mounting pressure to adopt the accommodations or obtain an exemption — and bear the brunt of partisan attacks in the public square.

But John Garvey signaled that he would not yield to the latest skirmish in the culture wars. Not only is he committed to defending the religious freedom of a storied Catholic institution of higher education, he is even more concerned about protecting "the legitimate privacy concerns of our students."

"If a biological male who is transitioning to female applies to our freshman class, we must assign that person housing with women, and a single-room option may not be a solution" that fully adheres to the new guidelines, he noted.

"So a young woman who comes to Catholic University and finds she is rooming with a biological male is asked to dress and bathe and brush her teeth with someone who is biologically male," he explained, outlining a possible scenario if CUA adopted the new guidelines.

Garvey contended that university personnel must be free to engage and work with students dealing with gender-identity issues, just as faculty and staff offer a range of services to other members of the student body.

The decision to adopt a different gender identity, he noted, is "loaded with moral implications."

"We know our students better than anyone else. I don't think it is the government's place to legislate our students' passage through moral maturity."

"If we have students struggling with gender-identity issues, we would naturally want to talk with them," while encouraging discussions with "the parents, campus ministry and others," he said, noting that individuals often reverse course after exploring the "transitioning" option.

Strongly opposing any attempt to prevent his institution from forming students in the faith, Garvey takes inspiration from Pope Francis' encyclical [Laudato Si](#). "Pope Francis says that we need to 'accept our bodies as God's gift' and show them the respect we show the rest of creation. This is 'an essential element of any genuine human ecology.'"

[Joan Frawley Desmond](#) is the Register's senior editor.

It is not “Do as I say, not as I do”, but “Do as I do”

Objective

As we go through our lives as fathers it can be easy, but shouldn't be, to forget our children are watching us all the time. Even when they can't see us they only need to overhear a story told by mom to her sister or a neighbor. It is easy to lay down the law for our kids but are we paying attention to how we act? How we treat others, especially our wives, sends a message like an LED sign about the kind of person we are (Do as I do).. Let's talk and pray today for the grace to be better than the Pharisees, or better yet, be the best dad we can be.

Song

Come Holy Ghost (Blue 104, Red 472, Music Issue 477)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Matthew 23:1-3

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ...

[Romans 12:2](#)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Catechism 2223:

“...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...”

Vignette

Arnold and Martha Stevens have a twelve year old son Sean and an eleven year old daughter Sue. The Stevens have been parishioners at St Williams Church for eight years. Arnold and Martha are active in their parish and at the public school Sean and Sue attend. Sue loves playing on the school basketball team and is pretty good at it. Dad says Sue must leave basket ball practice early to attend CCD on Wednesdays. Mom tells Sue, you will only play basketball a few years but you will have your religion your entire life so you must attend CCD. On the other hand Dad's friends called him about playing golf early Sunday morning. Arnold agreed to play golf on Sunday and would not make it to mass on Saturday because he and Martha had agreed to go to dinner with Martha's sister. Sean and Sue were completely aware of all these plans and after their parents left for dinner on Saturday evening Sue asked Sean how come I have to miss basketball practice for CCD and Dad can skip mass to play golf, it's not fair. Sean says I don't know Dad is an adult and they can do what they want but we have to do what they say.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Is there something in your life that you can't seem to bring the “Do as I do” in alignment with “Do as I say”?
2. How do you make the “Do as I do” reflect Catholic values?
3. When was the last time you were aware that your behavior was inconsistent with the theme of today's topic?
4. Share a situation when your behavior reflected the wrong message to your children?

Action Plans

1. I will be mindful of my behavior as it relates to the message my kids may be receiving.
2. I will explain to my kids how “Do as I do” works in their life. And it’s ok to tell me if I blew it sometime. Just be careful what you ask for!
3. I will ask to agree it is acceptable for us to lovingly remind each other when we go astray of the “Do as I do” theme.

Author

Nick Carpinello

References

Catholic Resource Center

Building Catholic Character: 5 Things Parents Can Do by Thomas Lickona

What is “Catholic character,” why does it matter, and what can we do as parents to develop it in our children?

<http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic-contributions/building-catholic-character-5-things-parents-can-do.html>

2. Use the power of good example

The example we set — especially when it is coupled with a loving relationship — is one of the most important ways we affect the character of our kids. Our example includes not only how we treat our children but how we treat each other as spouses and how we treat and talk about others (relatives, friends, neighbors, and teachers).

We increase the power of our own example when we expose our children to other positive role models. The [Giraffe Heroes Project](#) has developed a bank of more than 1,000 stories of everyday heroes of all ages who have shown compassion and courage by sticking out their necks for others.

William Kilpatrick's [Books That Build Character](#) offers hundreds of fictional stories whose admirable characters will live in a young person's heart and imagination.

The website www.teachwithmovies.com catalogs hundreds of good films that offer positive role models and strong character themes.

And we should be sure to tap the rich resource provided by the lives of the saints (see Mary Reed Newland's book, [The Saints and Our Children](#)). "The saints had their eyes on God," says one Catholic mother. "They make very real what it means to follow Christ."

Fasting

Objective

We pretty much know what the Church traditionally teaches about fasting, number of meals, liturgical seasons, and types of food. Today we are going to take some license, step it up if you will, and consider how one might consider more options in the area of self-control, self-denial.

Song Suggestion

Forty Days and Forty Nights (Blue 144, Red 411, Music Issue BE NOT AFRAID 426)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Tobit 12:8

Prayer with fasting is good. Almsgiving with righteousness is better than wealth with wickedness. It is better to give alms than to store up gold,

Mt 6:16-18

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

Catechism 1438

The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice.³⁶ These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

Catechism 1832

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

Vignette

Rocky was always pretty clear about what fasting meant, or at least vaguely, after all he was a cradle Catholic. After a long period of lapse in the practice of his faith, he returned and was careful about following the “rules.” Yet he felt there was room to both follow the rules and enrich his faith by expanding his concept of fasting.. He knew that during Lent many folks added to the fasting regimen some other practices, both giving up things and also taking some positive actions. In his renewed spiritual journey, he felt a need to grow. So often prayer and fasting are linked, he began to incorporate small acts of fasting into his prayer petitions. He began to see the link between fasting and self-discipline. Harnessing the power of his will to moderate his consumption, , to enhance self-control, indeed to practice self-sacrifice. And way beyond choice of food or number of meals. To see in these small acts how to infinitesimally imitate Christ. It was then just a small step to connect self-sacrifice to self-giving. He chose each day to share something positive with each family member or co-worker. He chose to park farthest from Church in the parking lot, to let others who needed closer access have the close up spots. He chose to slow down and chat with an elderly (and slower moving) person, rather than blowing by them with a quick hello. He chose to say no to participating in office gossip. In fact he tried to find something to say positive about the subjects of gossip to defuse the conversation. He started and ended every day by noting for what he was grateful. He liked to read,

so he made a pact with himself that a portion of his reading (even daily if possible) would be spiritual. Each time he started the car, he prayed for patience; each time he was impatient, he called himself out.

He knew all this wasn't fasting per se, but it served a similar purpose for him. And you know what. It made him think about going further. He remembered Mother Teresa urging us to the little things with love. So not only practice these small acts, but do them with a smile, then thank God for that opportunity. Rocky saw that these actions were his small way of spreading the Good News, setting a good example, disciplining himself for the positive, challenging himself to recognize and be grateful for all that we experience.

Questions for the Large and Small Groups:

1. What was your "growing up" experience of fasting? Did it leave a good impression on you?
2. Do you and your family find it hard to fast? Why or why not?
3. How do you handle self-sacrifice during Lent? Are there positive actions you take? Do they ever extend beyond Lent?
4. Have you ever combined prayer and fasting in your petitions? Share some examples and what motivated you.
5. The Church Precepts on fasting are in limited circumstances. How might you incorporate fasting/self-sacrifice into more of your life? Would you want to?
6. Fasting/self-sacrifice do have limits, can you think of some reasons for limiting these practices?

Action Plan

Choose one area in your life, this week, to practice an example of self-sacrifice or self-denial. This could be traditional fasting (the E5 Men's Fasting website might be of interest to you) or some of what was shared by Rocky. Be creative; make it a challenge for yourself. Try other choices if you struggle the first time. When you succeed, consider upping the challenge, make it part of you, and know that you are winning the battle against the flesh. Now challenge your family to join in.

Author

Charlie Pfizenmayer

Being Catholic in a divided spiritual house

Objective

Various situations come to mind that fit within this topic. Such as a husband feels his wife is far more spiritual than he and maybe ok with that or maybe he is not ok and it stresses their relationship. A wife and husband may be of different faiths where different worship times, decisions about schools and primary faith of the children are concerns. Tensions or differences may be openly discussed or repressed. In any such situations how we approach the issue is critical to success in dealing with all members of our family. So today let us focus on how we employ our Catholic faith to address such issues.

Song

They Will Know We Are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728, Music Issue 609)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Ephesians 5:32

In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband."

1 Corinthians 7:12-13, 16

"If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him ... How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"

Catechism 1634:

¶1634-- Differences about faithbut also different faith mentalities, can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children. The temptation to religious indifference can then arise.

Vignette

Juan's spiritual state is by all accounts a work in process but he seemed to feel he was making progress. He attended daily mass often, tried to pray the rosary daily and in the evening he would take time for a little quiet time with the Lord. Juan, while not a regular, frequented Eucharistic adoration at his parish. Alicia and Juan were happily married for 16 years both feeling the other was a devoted spouse. Except, Alicia had been feeling for some time that Juan's attention to his spiritual life was coming at the expense of time he could be spending with her. Juan began to notice Alicia appeared irritated when Juan got up early to go to mass or close himself in the study to pray in the evenings. The occasional visit to Eucharistic adoration seemed to bother Alicia the most. Juan considered how he might approach Alicia about this but had reservations. Juan thought, what if Alicia becomes defensive or worse she feels demeaned. As far as Juan could tell Alicia was content with attending mass and encouraged their children to attend CCD, Alicia was very private about the extent of her prayer life. Up till now Juan and Alicia had not openly discussed their spiritual lives.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Have you ever felt that way about your wife or her you (to your knowledge)?
2. How would you describe the objective of discussing what Juan seems to feel about Alicia?
3. What are some suggestions you might give Juan?
4. How would you handle a strong negative reaction from Alicia to bringing up the topic?
5. What if you saw this in the relationship of a friend and her husband, or your adult child and their spouse?

Action Plans

1. First we must be aware. Men are often accused of being oblivious to what goes on with our wives (and rightly so at times....).
2. Make a plan to invite or ask to be invited to service (daily mass, holy hours, bible, study, etc) you or your wife attend. Show interest.
3. Talk to a friend that you feel has a good relation in this respect about how they deal with such topics.

Author

Nick Carpinello

Reference suggestions

Our Sunday Visitor- Healing a House Divided

Marriages where spouses practice different faiths can be difficult, but through work and prayer, unity can be achieved by Megan Nye OSV Newsweekly.

<https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Faith/Article/TabId/720/ArtMID/13628/ArticleID/21470/Healing-a-house-divided.aspx>

Focus on the Family

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/relationships-and-marriage/living-with-a-spiritually-mixed-marriage>

Here are a few principles to keep in mind as you face the daily challenge of living with a mate who doesn't share your deepest spiritual commitments:

Be patient. Try to remember that God loves your spouse even more than you do. He may be taking your partner on a spiritual journey that you know nothing about. He may choose to use you in the process, but He doesn't *need* your help. So don't play the role of the Holy Spirit. Stay in prayer and trust the Lord to do what *He* wants to do.

Don't stand in the way. While perfection isn't possible or even necessary, your behavior can attract or repel your spouse where spiritual things are concerned. You're living out what you're experiencing with God. Is it appealing? Is your relationship with Christ making you a more enjoyable person to live with - or just a more religious one?

Be authentic. You should not only share your faith with your spouse, but your concerns as well. In other words, don't be afraid to reveal your personal weaknesses. It would be hypocritical to pretend that you're not worried when you really are, or that you don't have doubts when you really do. Your transparency can be especially healing if your mate has felt - accurately or not - that spirituality has become a competition in your marriage. The spouse who struggles with faith issues needs a "safe" and gentle partner to come home to. A holier-than-thou approach is sure to deepen the divide - not only between your partner and yourself, but also between your partner and God.

Stay balanced. There's no doubt about the importance of faith. But it's possible to lose a healthy perspective when you're worried about your spouse's spiritual welfare. You can't be too devoted to Christ, but over spiritualization and hyper-religiosity will hurt your efforts as much as falling into the opposite error of apathy.

Examine the reasons. Take time to explore and understand the underlying reasons for your spouse's skepticism. What was his/hers religious experience as a child? Was his/her faith nurtured or hindered? Was his/her parents' faith real and meaningful or a hypocritical chore? The Bible is clear: we're not authorized to judge others (Matthew 7:1). Sometimes in marriage we're prone to judge because of what we know - or *think* we know - about our spouses. Only God can see the individual heart.

Balancing Work and Family

Objective

Men are pulled in many directions during the course of the day. We work all day, come home, and after a quick meal the kids need help with homework, or we're running kids to sports events. We try to spend quality time with our wives, but often we let that slip through the cracks. Fulfilling work is important to us as men, but it can become an escape or our master. How do we find the right mix between work and family?

Song Suggestion

Lord of all Hopefulness (Blue 273, Red 560, Music Issue 394)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Colossians 3:24-25:

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.

Psalm 127:1-2:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.

CCC 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. Hence work is a duty: "If anyone will not work, let him not eat." Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work 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.

CCC 2184:

Just as God "rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done," human life has a rhythm of work and rest. The institution of the Lord's Day helps everyone enjoy adequate rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious lives.

Vignette

Keith was coming home late from work each night exhausted and frazzled. He made a good living and provided his family with the necessities, as well as some perks. They did not have to worry about money. However, the job was taking its toll on his family, as well as himself. Keith prayed for guidance, and that night his wife said, "We need to talk." They discussed the situation and the possibilities. Keith ended up taking a new position with less pay and less stress so he could spend more time with his family. What they gained more than outweighed what they lost.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. What does it mean for work to be a means of sanctification? What does that look like? Is your work a means of sanctification for yourself and others?

2. Do you keep Sundays as a day for rest and family? Or is it just another day of the week with its errands and work? If so, what stops you from taking that rest?
3. When is the hardship of work a redemptive cross to bear, and when is it an indication that we need to re-balance our life?
4. Have you ever had to re-balance your life? What were the signs that this was needed? How did you go about making that change? What did you lose? What did you gain?
5. Are you too self-reliant? Do you need to trust the Lord more in some aspect regarding your work or your family? Do you ask the Lord in prayer for guidance or for more trust?

Action Plan

This week, I will do my best to review my work-family balance by:

1. asking the Lord in prayer if I need to make some adjustments
2. asking my family if they think I need to make some adjustments
3. carving out some time this Sunday for real rest and quality time with my family
4. other

Author

Pete Caccavari

Getting Through Spiritual Dry Spells

Objective

Every disciple of Jesus can expect spiritual dry spells. Even the greatest saints had spiritual dry spells. It is how we respond to the dry spells that makes all the difference. We can become “bitter” or we can become “better” and “stronger”. They actually can be a fertile time of growing in patience, endurance, and faithfulness—building our character into Christ! As St. Paul reminds us: “It is when I am weak that I can become strong.... And it is no longer I, but Christ Jesus that lives in me.”

Song

Be Not Afraid (Blue 54, Red 596, Music Issue 426)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Luke 4:1-13:

“Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, ‘I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’” Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and: ‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him in reply, ‘It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.”

Catechism 538:

“The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among wild beasts, and angels minister to him. At the end of this time Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert, and the devil leaves him until an opportune time.”

Catechism 539:

“The evangelists indicate the salvific meaning of this mysterious event: Jesus is the new Adam who **remained faithful** just where the first Adam had given in to temptation. Jesus fulfills Israel’s vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had once provoked God during forty years in the desert, Christ reveals himself as God’s Servant, totally obedient to the divine will. Jesus’ victory over the tempter in the desert anticipates victory at the Passion, the supreme act of obedience of his filial love for the Father.”

Vignette

One of the holiest persons living during our very own lifetime was Mother Teresa. About ten years after her death, her private letters to her spiritual director were made public. What shocked many people, who are unfamiliar with the patterns of the spiritual life, was the fact that she experienced a spiritual dryness for about 40 years after her initial spiritual fervor. She compared her pains to a hell and at one point says they had driven her to darkness and to doubt the existence of heaven and of God. What got her through this spiritual dryness was her insistence which shows up throughout her public writings of “staying faithful” despite the distractions, doubts, deserts, and temptations that we all experience in life. St. Teresa of Calcutta followed the example of Jesus, the new Adam, who remained faithful to the divine will and love of God the Father. Probably none of us will have a

spiritual dryness that will last 40 years! But we will probably have a number of different times in our life in which we feel distant from God or from our loved ones.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. What was one time in your life that you experienced a spiritual dry spell? How long did it last?
2. What helped you get through it?
3. What did you learn about yourself and about God during your spiritual dry spell?
4. Would the advice of Mother Teresa of “staying faithful” help you? Why or Why not?
5. Would the example of Mother Teresa “to get out of herself during spiritual dryness and helping other people in need” be an inspiration for you? Why or Why not?
6. What are the dry times during marriage and during family life for you?
7. What can you do to help your wife and children during their spiritual dry times?

Action Plans

1. To give God thanks for both the spiritual times of fervor and times of dryness.
2. To ask God for the strengthening of patience, faithfulness, and endurance during spiritually dry spells.
3. To get out of ourselves and into helping others in need during our or our family members’ dry times in life.

Author

Rick Kasper.

Additional Resources

You may use the included prayer “Footprints” as an opening prayer.

Footprints

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.

For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand;

One belonged to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it.

“LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you’d walk with me all the way.

But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life,

there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.”

The LORD replied, “My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.

During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints,

It was then that I carried you."

ABBA's Love and Forgiveness

Objective

ABBA, God the Father, calls you by name and, you by His. Become more aware of His unconditional love. Invite the Spirit to reveal the Father's deep love for you (as if you were truly his child). Become aware of how his love manifest in your life. Renew your awareness of His love, His forgiveness? Make sure, He knows you are His.

Song Suggestion

Glory and Praise to Our God (Blue 160 , Red 537, Music Issue 550)

Bible and Catechism Readings

1 John 4:9

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

John 8:19

Then they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

Matthew 18:21

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

Galatians 4:6

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Catechism 2781

When we pray to the Father, we are in communion with him and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Then we know and recognize him with an ever-new sense of wonder. The first phrase of the Our Father is a blessing of adoration before it is a supplication. For it is the glory of God that we should recognize him as "Father, the true God. We give him thanks for having revealed his name to us, for the gift of believing in it, and for the indwelling of his Presence in us.

Catechism 2782

We can adore the Father because he has caused us to be reborn to his life by adopting us as his children in his only Son: by Baptism, he incorporates us into the Body of his Christ; through the anointing of his Spirit who flows from the head to the members, He makes us other "Christs."

Vignette

He is a father; doing the best he can balancing family, work and everything else life throws at him. He was Baptized and Catholic. He goes to Church but he is simply going through the motions. To others, he presents confidence, capability, a good Catholic man. However, he often feels incapable, stressed, inadequate and not spiritually connected. He struggles with spiritual intimacy. When he was growing up he never fully felt his father's love; it still haunts him. He still struggles with forgiving him for that. He wonders if somehow it lingers within his spiritual dryness. He is heartened, albeit slightly, by what he hears in Sunday Gospel readings; especially about God's love. He wishes to really feel more spiritually alive and closer to God the Father.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Do I discern God's love; intellectually or spiritually?
2. How does prayer bring me into communion with the Father and the son?

3. What does it mean “to be reborn to his life by adopting us as his children in his only Son”?
4. How does God reveal his deep love for you to you?
5. How have you struggled with being a son of God through the Church?
6. What is God’s forgiveness contingent upon?

Action Plan

This week I will strive to focus on my relationship with Jesus and the Father by:

1. Discern where I am in my relationship with the Father
2. Daily list where I see God’s love in my life, and those around me.
3. Assess if I have forgiven, and thus can be forgiven
4. Other: _____

Author

Kurt Buckman

Service

Objective

(or perhaps part of the opening prayer):

"If the Church should request your services, do not accede to this request out of a desire to get ahead, nor refuse it moved by pleasurable idleness. Obey God, rather, in simplicity of heart, submitting yourselves humbly to Him Who directs you. Neither should you prefer your peaceful leisure to the needs of the Church. If there were no people to minister to her as she gave birth, not even you would have found a way to have been born." (St Augustine Letters 48,2)

"Lord, those are Your best servants who wish to shape their life on Your answers on their wishes." (St Augustine Confessions 10, 26)

Song Suggestion

Whatsoever You Do (Blue 535, Red 656, Music Issue 585)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Rom 12:11

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

Matt 25:35-40

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Catechism Reading (...I rather chose some quotations ...)

"Whoever serves and gives, seems like a failure in the eyes of the world. In reality, it is exactly in giving their life that they find it." (Pope Francis)

Helping a person in need is good in itself. But the degree of goodness is highly affected by the attitude with which it is done...help the person in a spirit of joy, then the help will be received joyfully...And joy is the appropriate attitude with which to help others because acts of generosity are a source of blessing to the giver as well as the receiver.' (St John Chrysostom)

"...drawing on the strength and model of Christ, who continually reached out to the outcasts and sinners and who never hesitated to wade into life's toughest, most confrontational circumstances with His gentle but determined spirit." "Christians are called to see the face of Jesus in the face of everyone." (Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration, USCCB)

Vignette

Sam was just returning from a long lapse in the practice of his faith. He was retired, he had some time. He did some volunteering but there was still an itch he couldn't reach. He knows he needed to make a more radical choice in his faith life and to find more focus in his volunteering. A mission trip opportunity presented itself and he went for it, definitely a jump out of his comfort zone. Ten days in a foreign country just helping, but mostly listening and learning about living in poverty. An up close and personal look at serving others. At home again the realization that both poverty and service to others opportunities were all around him right here. He may not yet have realized that the Spirit was

calling him. A class was advertised at Church, one on prayer and service, 21 sessions, once/week, a pretty big commitment. He knew only one or two, plus the presenters, but his interest was piqued by both the to improve his prayer life but also the tie to some type of charitable service. The readings were inspiring and the conversations were sincere and energizing. The service opportunities were new and different. As the course came to a close, the whispering began. A thought emerged, a nudge to try something totally new. The nudge grew to a desire to act and so began a journey. As Frost would say, down the road less traveled. But he was not afraid, the Spirit was with him. It did really feel like a calling, stronger and unlike anything he ever felt. The calling was broad in that it involved a broadening faith/spiritual path, as well as a call to a particular type of service. Over time they would nurture one another. There continue to be speed bumps along the way, but the service grew into a whole new ministry. The spiritual understanding goes on as well, to deeper and richer levels. The strength of the calling has allowed to see how earlier parts of his life have led him to this point, perhaps his real life's calling. What a thrill, at this age, to have finally realized what it is he wanted to when he grew up!

Questions for Large and Small Groups:

1. Do you pray for help and understanding of what God's plan is for you?
2. Have you experienced a whisper, a nudge in your life that felt like the Holy Spirit calling?
3. If we believe we are all called to serve, does it have to have some religious connection? What kinds of service can you name?
4. Serving others, whether a simple one time gesture, or a long term commitment, has both pluses and minuses. Can you name a few of each from your experience?
5. Is it difficult to balance opportunities to serve with the responsibilities of your state in life? What are some positive ways to manage that balance?
6. Where might you go to learn about some role models of "serving others?"

Action Plan

In the next few weeks set aside some "for real" quiet time. If possible go to a room by yourself, or best of all sit in the Adoration Chapel. Pray first, relax, then close your eyes and for two minutes clear all your thoughts, will them into the background. Choose a simple, couple word phrase (I use "Here I am Lord"), this will be the phrase you use whenever you feel distracted in your meditation. For the next several minutes, remain still with your eyes closed, invite the Holy Spirit to enlighten you with His plan for you (use that [phrase each time other thoughts interfere), listen only during this time. When you reach your limit, open your eyes, say a prayer of thanksgiving. You have done your part, now be vigilant for the signs, a whisper, a nudge, an itch and then answer the call. God Bless.

Author

Charlie Pfizenmayer

Getting your wife (and each other) to heaven

Objective

The primary job of a Catholic husband and wife is to help get each other to heaven. That's a big part of what it means to say that marriage is both a sacrament and a vocation. When a husband and wife get married in the Catholic Church, they are affirming that they believe God has chosen them to play an essential role in each other's sanctification — second only to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Sounds like a big responsibility. How can we do that?

Song Suggestion

Prayer of St. Francis (Blue 368, Red 721, Music Issue 508)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Ephesians 5:25-33

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

1 Corinthians 7:12-14

To the rest I say (not the Lord): if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she is willing to go on living with him, he should not divorce her; and if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he is willing to go on living with her, she should not divorce her husband. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through the brother. Otherwise your children would be unclean, whereas in fact they are holy.

Catechism 1661

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

Catechism 1534

Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.

Vignette

Sam and Karen have been married for many years but over the last 10 years Sam has been really growing in his faith. Karen, on the other hand, seems no further along in her Christian walk than she was 10 years ago. She thinks and hopes there is a God, but doesn't desire a real relationship with Jesus. She considers herself to be a 'good person' (which she is) and hopes she'll get to heaven because of that. Sam has tried to sit down and explain salvation to her, but she just doesn't get it.

Sam has been praying for her for many years. When she does go to church with him, Sam gets so upset by her whole attitude. He is ready to tell her to just stay home if she doesn't really want to go. It's putting a wedge between them in what is otherwise a very good marriage. Sam is always hoping and praying that one of these Sundays when she's at church, something will happen in her spirit. So Sam still tries 'dragging' her along once a month or so. But it has been so hard.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Do you really believe it is your job to get your wife to heaven? And vice versa?
2. If that is your role, then what is God's role? How can you work together with Him?
3. In what ways do you think your spouse needs encouragement to more fully rely upon God? What ways could your spouse help you?
4. If you believe that your spouse is further along in her faith journey than you are, does that relieve you of that role to get her to heaven? Is there anything you can do? What might be some ideas?
5. If you take time and effort to educate your children in the faith, what are you doing to educate yourself and your wife in the faith?

Action Plan

1. Humbly share the hopes and fears you have about encouraging and challenging each other in your walks with God.
2. Prayerfully select another couple or small faith group from your church that can help you grow as a couple.

Author

Steve Frazer

Additional References

This came from a "Catholic Mommy's Blog" (<https://www.catholicmommyblogs.com/being-your-husbands-accountability-partner/>), and it is a little different perspective. It says that it is NOT our job to get our spouse to heaven. However, the points about being a supportive spouse are right for either perspective. While geared toward wives, I believe it has valid points for us as husbands also.

5 Ways to be an Accountability Partner for Your Husband

When you are first united in marriage to your husband, you might think that dividing your chore list and throwing out his ratty bachelor couch are high on the priority list. Trust me, that couch still needs to go but there are more important matters that soon press on your heart. One of the most important jobs you have as a wife is to love your husband.

My husband and I were sitting in premarital counseling just months before getting married. The priest looked over his glasses at me, his eyes dancing with the apprehension of his next question. "What is your primary role as a wife?"

The word "wife" still made me giddy. It was the anticipation of becoming something so dear to my fiancé that I could only count down the days until we would be united as one. "It's to get him into heaven," I responded confidently.

“Wrong,” the priest shook his head, “your job is to love him.”

“I love him,” I responded, but it sounded more like a question when those words came out of my mouth. I couldn’t believe that I was about to get married and I didn’t know what my primary role as a wife would be!

“No,” the priest’s eyes stilled the air between us. “Getting him into heaven...that’s between him and God. You can’t make his decisions for him. Your job is to love him. This is a bigger job than you can imagine right now.”

The priest was right. It’s a big job to love your spouse. Most of the times, it’s extremely easy to love your husband. Sometimes, it’s difficult. Sometimes, it’s a job. The misconception that lies in marriages is that spouses believe it is their job to get their loved one into heaven. And it isn’t. It would be a beautiful thing to walk into heaven with your spouse.

Your primary role as a wife is not to get your husband into heaven. You can’t do that, because you can’t make those decisions for him. You can help him. And the biggest way you’re going to help him- the one thing that is so powerful that it will take over your marriage and shake you in your boots and make you want to sing: it’s love. Your job is to love him. And if you love him the way Jesus wants you to love him, you’re going to help him get into heaven, but that’s not your primary role as a wife. Because that would be like skipping steps. First, love him. Your love is the biggest support that he can have in his life.

Accountability partner for your husband

Let’s talk about accountability. Accountability is needed in relationships. Your kids need you to keep them accountable with telling the truth and washing their hands before meals. They need you to keep them accountable so they know that your rules should be obeyed and that you will watch to make sure they are.

You might have an accountability partner in your best girlfriend or your mom. You can call and spill the beans. Let your heart speak for itself and know that the next steps you take will help to make you a better person. But usually men don’t have someone they can contact like this. Your husband has you. And that’s the deepest relationship he’s ever had and ever will have.

You are your husband’s accountability partner. But are you doing it lovingly? Are you helping or hurting the situation? Here are 5 Ways to be the Best Accountability Partner for your Husband.

Coach Yourself. Know that you are the person that your husband most trusts in this world. And if you aren’t? You want to be. You should be. Pray to help become that person. Pray to be the support your husband needs. Pray to have the right reaction when he talks with you.

Breathe First, Listen Second, Talk Last. (And only talk if that’s required of you.) Your husband doesn’t want the reaction that you give your best friend when she tells you something juicy. Your reaction should be, first and foremost, loving. So your husband has something to say? Breathe. Don’t let your emotions, hot headedness, or know-it-all get in the way of helping him. Listen to what he has to say. He’s approaching you because he needs to talk about it. And then ask the Holy Spirit if he has something for you to say. Because in the end, that’s where the words of true love come from anyways. Don’t say anything if the Holy Spirit doesn’t prompt it. You can provide a hug or a loving pat on the arm, but any words said should be inspired.

Don’t Judge Him. It’s not your place to think that you have the upper hand on your husband. You shouldn’t look down on him for his sins or his confessions to you. You should feel honored that he trusts

you with what weighs on his heart. Don't put yourself on a pedestal, because you won't be able to help him from there; you won't be able to hear the Holy Spirit.

Suggest Next Steps. If the Holy Spirit encouraged you to speak, you might be able to suggest next steps. You can pray with your husband, hold him, suggest confession (or better yet, ask to go to confession with him). You could pray a novena together, the rosary, or attend daily mass. Whatever it is that you suggest, don't make him feel guilty about what he has confessed to you. Remember what my priest said? Your goal as a wife is to love your husband, not get him into heaven. This might be hard if you know confession will fix the whole thing and your husband just doesn't want to go to confession yet. Pray for him. Pray for yourself. You can't save him; just love him with everything you have.

Stay United. As your husband's accountability partner, you need to stand by his side. Fight with him. Pray with him. Let him know that he's not in this alone. And ask him how you can help him. How can you keep him accountable? And then do it. If you have the tendency to forget, mark it in your calendar and set an alarm to remind yourself. That's showing that you love him and he will appreciate that.

I hope that these 5 steps will help you to be the best accountability partner for your husband. Whatever it is in the end, remember that love for your husband comes first. Your primary goal as a wife is to love, not to get him into heaven. You can't skip that step, because it won't help him in the end. First, learn how to love him like Jesus wants you to. Just by reading this, you're showing how much you love and care for your husband. Start praying for him today and ask him how you can best pray for him.

Understanding the Mass

Suggested Song

Gather Us In (Blue 150, Red 743, Music Issue 302)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week when we gathered to break bread, Paul spoke to them because he was going to leave on the next day, and he kept on speaking until midnight.

Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed.

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

Catechism [1322](#)

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.

Catechism [1323](#)

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

Vignette

What a great topic to give me. For this I am grateful and blessed to have you as my Christian Brothers. Speaking of gifts, what a gift we have in the Mass with the privilege of receiving the Eucharist. The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given for you. There are too many directions to go in when preparing this outline. Pray that you will be led by the spirit to give the presentation in your own faithful way. I highly recommend that you listen to the podcast by Father John Riccardo to help you prepare for this topic. I have listened to it a few times now and find it very enlightening, meaningful and spirit led.

Here are a number of thoughts and excerpts I got from the podcast and insights that should be helpful. 1) Realize that the Mass is about love. When we are walking into Mass we are walking into heaven and the whole church is present. The angels and saints as well as those who have died are present with us. 2) God is speaking to us. When scripture is proclaimed at mass it is an event. 3) It feeds us. The Lord is handing himself to us in all his divinity which injects us with Grace. We become in union in the Eucharist with God, Body, and Spirit. Love is communion. Never receive the host in an unthinking state of mind. 4) The Mass sends us. It does not end but rather Sends us to rescue people and provides a reason for hope.

Prepare for mass. Mass is not meant to be entertaining. It's meant to be contemplative. I can't tell you how many times I hear statements from friends that say "I don't get anything out of the mass"

My question back to them is “what are you putting into it?” It’s important to reflect on the mass and let the Lord do the work. Be open to it and be prepared. We live in a restless world. The mass moves at it’s own pace, don’t hurry it along. Think like the early church when they said that “without the day of the Lord we cannot exist”. Also remember that the devil is everywhere, even at mass. He will do anything to distract you from getting closer to Jesus.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. When you go to Mass, where is your head? Are you mentally prepared or are you just showing up because you are supposed to?
2. List ways that you can be more prepared to enter this great event. Turn off radio, be on early or at least on time, read scripture ahead of time, etc.....
3. Discuss what it would feel like the next time you enter church knowing that the whole church is in attendance (angels, saints and departed loved ones) if you have never thought of it that way before.
4. Ask ourselves, where are we placing God in our lives?
5. Share how the Eucharist is the source and summit of our lives.

Action Plan

1. This week make plans to be prepared and get to church early, avoid distractions and focus on the gift we are receiving.
2. Read the scriptures before attending mass.
3. Pray to God to help me hear what you are saying.
4. Make a commitment to actively participate with the Priest and pray with him when he prays.
5. Be a light to help and rescue others when we are Sent after Mass.

Author

David Karsten

Resources

Father John Riccardo’s podcast:

<http://traffic.libsyn.com/stanastasia/RCIAforCatholics-WhatHappensAtMass.m4a?dest-id=13713>

Jeremy Driscoll’s book: What Happens at Mass?

Scott Hahn’s Book: Lambs Supper

Catechism: Celebration of the Christian Mystery: ARTICLE 3
THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

How to reach young people with the message of the Catholic faith

Objective

Explore the responsibility and role of father in helping young people embrace our Catholic faith.

The trends are rather bleak, and quite clear, indicating that young people continue to leave the church at a high (and growing) rate.

Why is this, and what can we do about it?

Song Suggestion

Amazing Grace (Blue 36, Red 586, Music Issue 424)

Bible and Catechism Readings

Proverbs 22:6

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

2 Timothy 2:22

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

2 Timothy 3: 16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Catechism from the Prologue paragraph 3

Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world. This treasure, received from the apostles, has been faithfully guarded by their successors. All Christ's faithful are called to hand it on from generation to generation, by professing the faith, by living it in fraternal sharing, and by celebrating it in liturgy and prayer.

Catechism 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." 31 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:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod.... He who disciplines his son will profit by him. 32

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

Vignette

Dan is a good dad, thankful for his large family. He has worked years of long hours to provide everything his family needed, including a Catholic education for all of his kids. He had always hoped that his kids would embrace their Catholic faith.

As Dan has developed a much deeper personal faith in recent years, he now faces great disappointment over the fact that all but one of his children have either discarded, or at least suspended their involvement with the church. He also faces regret over his failure to prioritize faith development among the temporal needs and interests of his family over the years.

Dan clearly hears the call to redouble his efforts to inspire, lead, and encourage his kids in their own faith lives. But the competition is STIFF, and he finds it very hard to even engage his kids in conversation about their faith.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. As our youth are trained in the Catholic faith many turn away before they have internalized or come to “own” their personal faith. Without that flame of personal faith how can we interest our youth in the church? \What can young parents do to help their children more seriously consider the question of personal faith? Are we living the faith life that we want our kids to adopt?
2. What can the church do to help this?
3. What are the specific deterrents to faith development in our youth that we might block or prevent?
4. Does our responsibility for the faith of our children decrease as they enter adulthood?
5. Where can we get help in this regard ?

Action Plan

“Failure is not an option”

Every week as I read the signals “I will teach it diligently to my children” I am convicted for my failure to honor this charge. But the battle is not over, and the ways that I pledge to devote myself are:

- To deepen my faith through daily prayer and witness that to my kids
- Openly engage my kids in the discussion about THEIR faith lives, offer encouragement and assistance
- Work to link my kids to available church resources that are relevant to them

What can you do to reach the young people in your life with the message of the Catholic Church?

Author

Bill Birmingham

Overcoming Failure: What Struggles In Your Life Have Made You Stronger?

Objective

To discuss how we have dealt with failure in the past both real and perceived. Discuss practical ways that we can use these lessons to strengthen our families focusing on what we have *modeled* in the past and can *model* in the future.

Song Suggestion

Though The Mountains May Fall (Blue 486, Red 595, Music Issue 435)

Bible & Catechism Readings

2 Corinthians 12: 7-10

Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." 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.

Catechism 520

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is "the perfect man", who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way

Vignette

The Man In the Arena

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. -Theodore Roosevelt

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Do you believe Paul? Why/Why not?
2. Describe a time in your life when it didn't seem possible that you could overcome what was facing you? Job loss? Marital struggle? Loss of a child? Financial stress?
3. After the situation reconciled itself, did you feel glorified by God or beaten up by life?
4. Do you believe that these so-called failures/struggles are sharpening you for something more?
5. It is in our nature to "go it alone". How did that work out for you? What led to you to ask for help from...other men, your wife, children, priest?
6. Do you believe that sharing your "victory" over adversity lacks humility? What can your experience teach others especially your children?

7. WIIFM? (What's In It For Me) if I do any of what has been discussed today?

Action Plan

Identify a current struggle/failure and:

1. Resolve to see God's plan for you through the adversity.
2. Ask a confidant for help. This could be your wife, accountability partner, priest.
3. Dare greatly!

Author

Mitch West

Lust and fighting it as a devoted husband

Objective

For many marriages, lust is a powerful wedge between husband and wife. Not only is itself disordered, but the pull of imagination and emotions can drive lust into serious, habitual sin that can cause long-lasting damage to a family. How can we recognize situations that might lead us to lustful thoughts? How do we fight lust when we do feel its pull?

Song Suggestion

Hosea (Blue 190, Red 405, Music Issue 679)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Matthew 5: 27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Catechism 2351

Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

Optional Catechism 2520

Baptism confers on its recipient the grace of purification from all sins. But the baptized must continue to struggle against concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires. With God’s grace he will prevail

-by the *virtue* and *gift of chastity*, for chastity lets us love with upright and undivided heart;

-by *purity of intention* which consists in seeking the true end of man: with simplicity of vision, the baptized person seeks to find and to fulfill God’s will in everything;

-by *purity of vision*, external and internal; by discipline of feelings and imagination; by refusing all complicity in impure thoughts that incline us to turn aside from the path of God’s commandments: “Appearance arouses yearning in fools”;

- by *prayer*:

I thought that continence arose from one’s own powers, which I did not recognize in myself. I was foolish enough not to know...that no one can be continent unless you grant it. For you would surely have granted it if my inner groaning had reached your ears and I with firm faith had cast my cares on you. (St. Augustine)

Vignette

Ian works closely with Rebecca, a woman who is attracted to in many ways. As they work together in a close-knit and congenial team, they see each other socially and enjoy each other’s company. Even though Ian is happily married, Ian feels a sexual attraction to Rebecca and finds himself thinking about her quite often. While Ian has never cheated on his wife, he fantasizes about Rebecca. Once, while away from home on a business trip, his fantasies reach the point of masturbation. This action startles Ian, as, until now, he had not taken this seriously. He thinks he might have crossed a line, but does not know what he should do.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. How is lust commonly portrayed in our culture? How is that portrayal different or the same as the Church teaches about lust (as a disordered desire)?

2. What triggers lust in your heart? What traps do you find most difficult to fight?
3. The vignette described an instance where lust was found in a personal relationship. Have you had to change how you thought about or interact with another person because of lust? How did it affect your relationship with that person?
4. Have you had to give up a TV show, website or pastime because it opened the door to lust (or even pushed you to that door)?
5. Have you ever talked about your struggles with lust with your wife?

Action Plan

1. Go to confession.
2. If you have acute difficulties with lust, pray specifically about these desires. If you lust after someone you know, pray specifically for that individual. Write a prayer down or find a prayer that helps and put it somewhere you will see it every day (bathroom mirror, closet).

Author

John Murphy

Redefining the Good Life; Debunking the lies our world tells us about happiness.

Prayer

Lord, I thank you for the life you have given me. Help me to see your plan for me. I want to live a happy life, and enjoy all the blessings this life has to offer; but sometimes they cloud my vision. I don't always realize it when I have let myself lose sight of you. Don't let success or money or selfishness get between us, Lord, for I know that with great privilege comes great responsibility. May I give you glory in all that I am, and in all that I do, for there is no "good life" that can compare to the *eternal* life you promise to those who love you.

Objective

The topic "Redefining the good life" forces us to assess the balance between our personal desires and drive, and the reality that we should not be focusing all our efforts on building a comfortable life for ourselves. We recall the words of Pope Benedict to the World Youth conference: "You were not made for comfort; you were made for greatness."

Song Suggestion

Glory and Praise to Our God (Blue 160, Red 537, Music Issue 550)

Bible & Catechism Readings

Genesis 39:1-6a

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The **LORD** was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the **LORD** was with him and that the **LORD** caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

Luke 12:13-21 32-34

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Catechism 1723

The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement—however beneficial it may be—such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love:

All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability. . . . It is a homage resulting from a profound faith . . . that with wealth he may do all things. Wealth is one idol of the day and notoriety is a second. . . . Notoriety, or the making of a noise in the world—it may be called "newspaper fame"—has come to be considered a great good in itself, and a ground of veneration.

Vignette

Bruce was exhausted after another long Saturday at the factory, but he took comfort at the thought of the overtime check that would soon be coming his way. He never considered himself a “yes man”, but he had gotten into the habit of always saying “yes” to any and all overtime assignments that came up. All this overtime had given Bruce enough cash to upgrade to a shiny new sports sedan, and finally buy that boat he had always dreamed of. Then the phone rang. Shattering his quiet drive home, Bruce’s wife informed him that she was tired of being like a “single parent” all the time, handling the family activities alone. Bruce volunteered that when summer came, things would be better, and they would all enjoy the new boat. He held the phone away from his ear as she replied:

“At this point, I could care less about your stupid boat. I don’t feel like I even know you anymore! You need to get your priorities straight, Bruce.”

As Bruce hung up the phone, he felt completely deflated. He had made a lot of sacrifices for his family, but they didn’t seem to appreciate his efforts. He hated to give up the overtime, but it’s now clear to him that “extra money” was no compensation for his absence at home.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion

1. Bruce was excited about finally obtaining a nice car and boat. Is he trying too hard to live the “good life”? What if his wife never complained about it—would it be OK to work all the overtime he wanted? What if SHE was the one who was overly attached to the extra money?
2. There are (3) lies that are often associated with the “good life” in our world:
 - Hedonism (pleasure),
 - All-you-can-be-ism (I am defined by my success and achievements), and
 - All-about-me-ism (everyone is here to affirm me and give me what I want).

Which of these “lies” are you most susceptible to? Why?

3. Achievement: Have you ever been laid off, or “let go” from your job? How did it affect your self-image, your sense of self-worth? What advice would you give about self-worth to a young person entering the workforce? How much should level of compensation influence their career choice?
4. Money/wealth: Do I make room in my budget for an offering to God? Or am I putting it off until I have enough savings built up?
5. Pleasure: How much fun is too much? How do I know if I’ve crossed the line into hedonism?
6. What does my trust in God affect my outlook on the future? What’s wrong with storing up treasure when you have a good year, like the rich man did? Isn’t that the wise thing to do?
7. Think of someone who “lived a good life”—i.e. they left a legacy of good works, or left an indelible mark on your life. What part of their life do you want to emulate?

Action Plan

1. Assess your commitment level at work. Are you working extra time out of necessity, or is there a need to rebalance?
2. Pray the first Fathers Team signal each day this week when you rise: “On my honor, I will do my best to present myself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of Truth.”.

3. Talk to your children about the difference between the pleasures of this life, and the promise of heaven.

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Online Resource

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/moi/transformmymind/aboutmyselfsuccess/redefining-good-life/>

(you have to subscribe to the site to get the full article, but a summary of each can be viewed without subscribing)