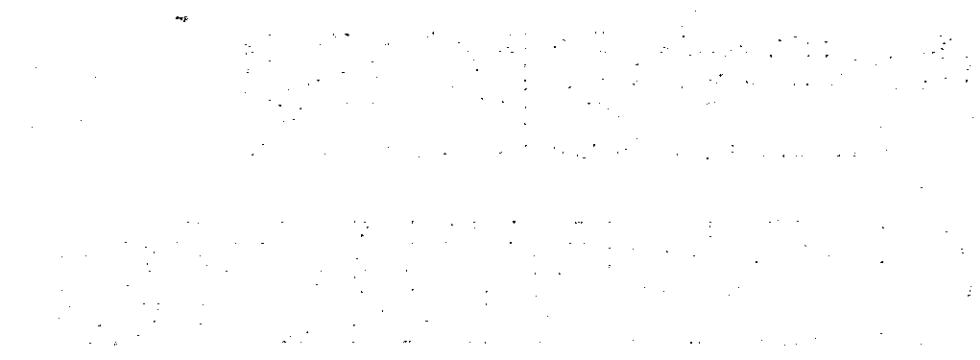


PURPOSE

A Transformative Plan
for Confirmation

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BEGINNINGS

Story Guide



Introduction to the Confirmation Process

Parent & Teen Session

There are three things that make a journey worthwhile. The first, and most obvious, is the end of the journey. We want to know where we are going, and we want it to be a worthy destination. Few people get excited to go on a journey that has an anticlimactic ending. Think of the old joke about parents telling their children they are going to Disneyland only to drive them to the dentist; the parents, knowing their kids would not be excited for that check-up, lied about the end destination to get their children in the car. Second, the journey has to help us grow. The phrase, "It is about the journey, not the destination," rings at least partly true here — the destination is the point of the journey, but we also want to be able to grow along the way. Finally, a journey is most worthwhile when we experience it with other people. While we might appreciate a few hours of solitude on a road trip, we will eventually long for some company.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is a journey and it contains all three parts of a worthwhile journey. First, the end goal is definitely worth the effort. The Sacrament of Confirmation unites us more deeply with the mission of the Church, strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit we received when we were baptized, and deepens our relationship with the Holy Spirit — the power of God.

The second part is present as well; this journey should change us. We should end the journey as different people than when we started so we are ready to receive the grace and power of the Sacrament. We are going to take several weeks to grow in our understanding of the Catholic faith, as well as what exactly it is that we are about to do. After all, we want to understand where we are going and why.

Finally, we are going to journey as a community. There are parents and sponsors who walk alongside teens, adult volunteers who form a Core Team to mentor youth as they walk through the process, the parish priest and even the bishop who will be a part of this journey. We do not walk through this process alone.

As we begin, we need to be clear about why we are making this journey. For some of us starting out, we may be doing this more out of a

sense of obligation or because it is a sort of family tradition. If that is where you are as we start the journey, it is totally fine. We are all going to grow over the coming months on this journey and, hopefully, all of us will be changed and draw closer to Christ though it.

Being confirmed in our faith is about more than going through the motions; it is about making a commitment to be a disciple. Statistics continue to reveal that the fastest growing religion in our country is "nones," people who do not affiliate with any church. Confirmation is the opposite of that — it is a sacrament that unites us more deeply with our faith.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is one of the seven sacraments of the Church. Sacraments are important to our faith because they give us grace, which is a sharing in God's life. This is what sustains us as Christians. Grace makes us holy and is what we need to enter heaven. When a person is baptized, they are given sanctifying grace. We can think of this kind of grace as a seed that, if nurtured, will grow into eternal life. We nurture this "seed of grace" with the grace found in the other sacraments.

The beauty of the sacraments is that we do not need to be a perfect person to receive them. The sacraments of the Church are for sinners — people like us — not for saints. We believe the sacraments affect change — namely, making sinners into saints.

This is why Jesus instituted the Church; the Church is a means for us (sinners) to get to heaven. The God who loves us sent His Son to save us, not condemn us — not because we are worthy of grace, but precisely because we needed His Son (John 3:17).

Confirmation is not graduation; it is not the end, but the continuation of our journey toward heaven that began at our baptism. It is more than a kind of "family tradition." Confirmation changes us.

The journey is important, and we need to be prepared for the ending. We will change through this process and be different people when we reach the end; God has already begun to do that work in our lives, but now we need to respond to what He is offering. Let the journey begin.

SEEKING_

What Is Our Desire?

We all "want" something. Some of our wants are actually needs: We "want" to eat, but we actually need to eat. We "want" love, but we actually need love and care. Some "wants," on the other hand, are just wants. We want a new phone. We want a new car. We want to win the lottery.

Yet, all of our wants and needs never seem to be really, totally fulfilled. We eat, but we need to eat again. We receive affirmation, but pretty soon we need to be reminded of the love someone has for us. We get a new phone and realize that, three months later, the model is outdated so we want a new one.

We have all of these human desires, but they never seem to be totally fulfilled. When we talk about our "supernatural origins" — that God created us intentionally — we might ask an important question, "Why did God give me all of these desires that never quite seem to be totally satisfied?" We could even ask a second, potentially better, question, "Why do my desires sometimes get me in trouble?"

God wrote a big desire on our hearts, a desire to know Him. Since God is the source of our creation, He "programmed" us with a kind of internal GPS system that will always point us back to our eternal home: heaven. All of our good desires point back to God. We hunger and thirst, but God promises to satisfy us. We want love and affirmation, so our desires should point us back to a God who is love. These desires can and should be fulfilled on Earth, but we will never be fully satisfied. This is intentional — God is the only thing that can truly make us full.



This is where the second question comes in — we know that our desires sometimes get us into trouble. Nobody would doubt the reality that our desire is not always for good things. Oftentimes, the kinds of desires that get us in trouble are distortions of good desires. A desire for food is a biological necessity, but when we overeat or become overly restrictive in our eating, our desire for food (which is good) becomes distorted (which is bad). We each have a mix of good desires and desires that are distorted.

This can make it difficult for us to discern our needs and wants at times, especially in one big question:

What is my purpose here on Earth?

It is a question that has been echoed by philosophers for thousands of years: What is the meaning of this life? Do I matter? What is my mission? How do I fit into all of this? We all desire to know our purpose and meaning, but our other desires can distort that.

Some people desire to make a difference, but a distorted desire for money makes them choose a career they hate because it pays more. We all desire love, but a distorted desire for affirmation and comfort causes people to settle in a relationship rather than waiting for someone who can truly offer them the love they seek. We want to know our purpose, but our desire to know it quickly can cause us to stop looking.

But our desires, even if they are distorted, can become redirected. Our wants and needs can be fulfilled. We can know our purpose, but we have to first recognize that there is something more than our temporary desires. And that "something" is not a something at all; it is a someone — and that someone has a big plan for each of us.

REASONS_

Faith & Reason

Catholics are often accused of being opposed to science and reason. A recent survey revealed that the biggest reason people leave the Catholic faith is because they see it as incompatible with science. If you were to open up the Bible to a random page right now, you might not blame them. Throughout Scripture, there are several narratives and stories that seem way too crazy to believe. When we read the first chapters of Genesis, we may feel like the creation narratives contradict scientific theory about the Big Bang that created the universe or the theory of evolution. If we flip through some other chapters, we encounter talking donkeys and incredible visions of heaven. As we get to the New Testament, we read about Jesus and miracles and we start to ask, "What is real and what is not? Is any of this real?"

If we do not understand how Catholics comprehend Scripture, we can easily fall into thinking that we read every part of the Bible literally — but the way we understand the inspired Word of God is much bigger than that. Everything in the Bible speaks truth, but how it presents that truth covers more literary genres than just history.

Think about the last book you read. What genre was it? If we read a history book like it was fiction, we would think events that actually happened simply came from the mind of an author. Conversely, if we read a fiction book like it was history, we might think that wizards and dragons really existed somewhere in New Zealand. In either case, we would miss the main point of the text because we read it in the wrong genre. The books of the Bible are very much the same. Each was written in a different genre in order to speak truths bigger than history.

The Bible is not a single book, but a small library. There are 73 books of the Bible, each written under different circumstances, by different authors, and for different reasons. When the Holy Spirit inspired the authors to write these books, they made use of their specific gifts and talents.



King David made use of his talent for music and poetry when he wrote the psalms. Saint Paul made use of his gift for instruction when he wrote his letters. Other authors made use of symbolism and short stories to convey truth. But just because the truth is conveyed in a non-literal or non-historical way does not make it untrue.

Perhaps the most helpful thing to remember when reading Scripture is that the Bible is never trying to teach us scientific truths. Looking in the Bible for science is like looking in a chemistry book for evidence of World War II. The Bible is meant to help us know and love God and direct our lives to Him. This is why God inspired the authors to write their messages. To read it looking for anything else besides a revelation of God's identity and what He desires for us is to set ourselves up for failure.

The way we, as Catholics, read and understand Scripture is a perfect example of how we ought to use both faith and reason to come to know the truth. God created us to know Him. He slowly revealed Himself to us over time and gave us the gift of faith to be able to accept that divine revelation, so we could know Him. But God also gave us the gift of reason. He revealed Himself in a way that makes sense to our reason so there might not be a conflict between faith and reason.

The Church sees the two as connected intricately. As a result, the great intellectual activities and scientific advancements that have been made throughout history are due to the Catholic Church, especially Catholic monks. Monks during the Middle Ages were instrumental in developing new farming and agricultural technologies and practices.

The Church has so greatly advocated for a sharpening of the intellect that the modern university system owes its existence to the Catholic Church. The earliest universities sprang up near the end of the 12th century. They developed out of the so-called "cathedral school" system, which had

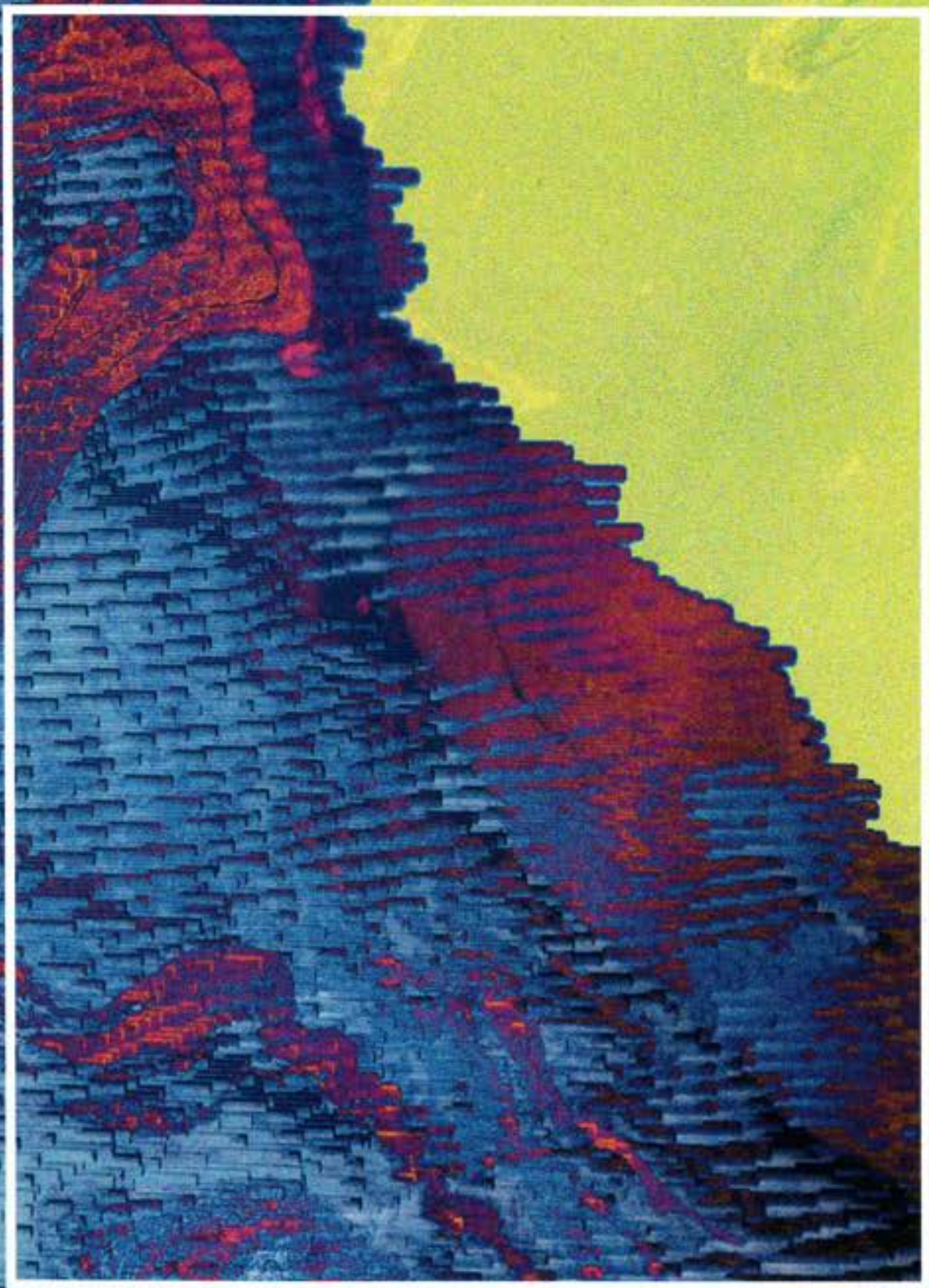
been operated by the Church during a time when virtually no one else was interested in education.

But perhaps more the point, there have been many Catholic scientists and philosophers who have carried on the intellectual tradition of the Church. Father Gregor Mendel's work served as the basis for modern genetics. Roger Bacon was a Franciscan friar whose refusal to embrace blind acceptance of natural realities laid the groundwork for the modern scientific method. Father George LaMaitre was a Belgian priest and developed what we call "the Big Bang theory." Albert Einstein called LaMaitre's work "the most satisfactory explanation" of the origins of the universe.

These are just a few of the many members of the Catholic Church who have furthered our understanding of science.

Unfortunately, we constantly hear that faith and reason are on opposite spectrums and cannot be reconciled, and that lie causes some people to lose their faith. God did not create this world with competing truths. Rather, He gave us both science and reason so we could grow in our knowledge and love of Him. Whenever we investigate the natural world around us, which is created by God, we learn more about Him. As Psalm 19:1 tells us, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork."

There's a God who loves me



REVEAL



One of the most profound questions we will ever ask is whether or not God exists. It has been a question that almost every person in history has tried to answer, at least in a personal way. For most people in history, the answer has been "yes, God does exist," even if they have disagreed on who or what God is.

In 2011, a study was completed at the University of Oxford. Called the Cognition, Religion, and Theology Project, this study lasted three years and was the culmination of more than 40 different studies that took place in 20 different countries. The researchers who led the project concluded that to believe in God and the afterlife is a part of our human nature.

This is a big deal. It means that, as humans, we are hard-wired to believe in a higher power and life after death. This alone does not prove God exists, but it supports the existence of God. Ultimately, God's existence will not be proven by studies, history, or even science, but will be verified by philosophy.

You may be wondering why science will never be able to prove God's existence. The reason is that science can only examine and give answers regarding the physical and material universe. In that way, science is limited. But God is not physical. Nor is He a part of our material universe. If God were a part of the universe, He would not be God.

There are things that are real even though they are immaterial — things like love, beauty, and goodness. When we attempt to define and explain these immaterial realities, we engage in philosophy. Philosophical proofs, though, are less like mathematical proofs and are more like reasonable arguments. Even the best philosophical proofs, because they cannot give physical evidence, rely on the use of sound reason.

When it comes to a philosophical proof of God's existence, we are saying that we are going to develop logical arguments for God's existence. Someone who hears these arguments, using reason, could determine that it is reasonable to believe in God — even though we will never be able to use scientific proofs to know that for sure.

There are many philosophical proofs for God, some more popular than others. One of particular interest that relates to our desires comes from Christian author, C.S. Lewis.

Lewis said that all of our natural human desires are able to be satisfied. When we experience hunger, we know that food will satiate our hunger. Likewise, when we are thirsty, we can find something to drink that will satisfy our thirst. But he also said that humans have some desires that cannot be satisfied on Earth. We desire things like beauty, goodness, truth, and justice. There has never been anyone who has said, "I have seen enough beauty. I do not want to see any more."

Lewis concluded, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Saint John Paul II echoed this idea when he spoke to young people at World Youth Day and said, "It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; CCC 33)

When we look at any proof though — whether it is a classical proof from a saint like St. Thomas Aquinas or a proof from another Christian philosopher like C.S. Lewis — we need to accept that we still need to make a "leap of faith." We cannot ever know for certain that God definitely exists the way we know that gravity exists. But we cannot disprove it definitively either. An atheist and a believer both make the same jump, just in opposite directions. Looking at proofs, though, can help us realize that it is actually more reasonable to believe in God rather than against God.

If we can reasonably believe that God exists, we must proceed to ask the next logical question: What can we know about this God? Because God loves us, God chooses to reveal Himself to us in a variety of ways. One of the ways is through our human reason. Another is through creation. The most profound is through the ways that God reaches out to us and interacts with us throughout history.

This relationship began with Abraham and the Israelites in the Old Testament and culminated in the person of Jesus in the New Testament. The Church continues to be a sign of God's presence in the world.

God's revelation of Himself to us is an invitation. God reveals His love for us in and through His Son, Jesus, and invites us to love Him in return — not because He needs our love or because He gains anything by our love, but rather, because He knows that loving Him is that for which we were created. Ultimately, we will only find true joy and fulfillment when we do that for which we were created.

But God does not merely reveal Himself to us and then abandon us and wait for us to figure it out. God is a patient teacher, who walks with us step by step and sends the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds, so we might better understand Him. He sustains us and holds us in existence, so we might enjoy the beauty of the created world and through it, come to a deeper knowledge of Him.

We are utterly dependent on God. We did not create ourselves nor can we keep ourselves in existence. We can stay healthy, exercise, and eat well, but even then, tomorrow is not guaranteed. This is the goodness of our God: He continues to hold us in existence moment to moment, even when we turn our backs on Him and doubt His existence. And as He holds us in existence, He constantly seeks to remind us of His undying love for us. The question is, will we open our hearts to encounter the God of the universe?

Is Good Real?

BREATH_

Does a Relationship with God Matter?

“God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:7

Take a breath. That simple action is life. The moment you stop breathing, your body quickly shuts down. In the first few chapters of the Bible, a big truth is spoken and much of it revolves around breath. The first lines of the Book of Genesis talk about the creation of the world; they outline “why” God created all that is (but remember, they are not science so they do not tell us exactly how). We read that nothing existed in the beginning, but God’s Spirit was moving. The Book of Genesis was written in Hebrew, and the Hebrew word for “spirit” is ru’ah (pronounced “roo-ACH”). It can also be translated as “breath.”

This “breath of God” is creative. It brings life. The authors of Genesis want to emphasize this connection. God breathes life and creates the world; God creates people and breathes His life into them. In both cases, the ways that God breathes life into the world are intentional — they are not accidents. God deliberately wills creation. God deliberately creates humanity.

Since God intentionally willed creation, God wants to have a relationship with it. God desires to have a special relationship with humanity because we are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-28).

God wants to draw close to us, but we often forget how close God really is to us and how much our existence depends on Him. We forget how well He knows our hearts and lives. We forget that we must depend on Him. God is closer to us than our own breath, but we often fail to notice.

God loves us in a profound, life-changing way. He loves us in a way we can only gradually understand, which is why He desires that we spend our lives getting to know Him and falling deeper in love with Him. We cannot fully live unless we acknowledge God’s love and entrust ourselves to Him. We can fill our lives with lots of great things — we can travel, we can fall in love, we can see the wonders of the world — but none of these things

can be experienced in their fullness unless we receive and return God’s love.

God asks two things of us: to love Him above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He asks us to put things in order. Saint Augustine would say, “to order our hearts rightly.”

When we do this — when love of God is first in our lives — we open ourselves to fullness of life. God does not desire a relationship with us to boost His popularity or number of followers. He desires a relationship with us for our own good.

An encounter with God, a relationship with Him, changes us because His love is so powerful, so good, and so beautiful that it shapes how we see and know the world. And here is the crazy thing about God: even though He knows He is right, even though He knows that His way is the best way, He lets us choose. He lets us choose how to “order our lives.”

This is the free choice God presents us with. We can choose life in its fullest form by choosing to put God in His rightful place, or we can choose death by putting God aside and living only for ourselves.

And the great paradox is this: The fullest life sometimes means death to self. In choosing life, we have to die to our sins and will. This is where many people walk away or decide they do not want to be in a relationship with God. When they see the decision laid before them, they choose themselves over God. There will always be a tension in our lives between desiring to enter into a relationship with God and choosing ourselves. The moment we step away from God, though, we start holding our breath. We might be able to last for a while but eventually we will start to struggle and, if we continue to hold out, face dire consequences. Our relationship with God is not simply an afterthought in our lives but should be something basic to our whole existence — something as routine as breathing in and breathing out.

BROKENHEARTED_

Why Is There Evil & Suffering

What does love look like and what does love do for another person? If we recognize that God created us and realize that God is sustaining us, we can reasonably conclude that God must love us. Why else would God hold us in existence? In our world, God's love is put to the test.

To love God and believe that God loves us means we trust God in every circumstance. This can be the most difficult part of our faith. It is easy to trust God in good moments and in moments when everything is going well. It is much more difficult to trust God when our lives feel like they are falling apart, when we suffer, or when we witness the suffering of others. It can be hard to trust God in a world filled with evil.

The question of evil and suffering in our world is a big one. It does not seem fair. When we think about the challenges we face in our world, it is easy to think that, if God is the master of the world, God should just remove the challenges, suffering, and evil we face. Would that not be the loving thing to do?

The problem of evil is a challenge to our faith because there is not a simple answer. If you have experienced suffering or the effects of evil in your life, it may seem like there is not an answer that is good enough. Many people lose faith because of evil and suffering in our world.

There is a response to suffering and evil, though it is not a short answer. The story of Christianity is the response — it is a story of the creation of the world as good, but the fall of the world due to human pride. It is a story about God, who does not give up on us, and the ways in which some people choose to follow God and others reject His law. The story culminates in Jesus, God's Son, who saves us by suffering on a cross.

To accept that answer, we need to enter into a relationship with God based on our faith that God is good and always wills our good. God is powerful — He is the master of all creation — but in His goodness, He allows us to determine our will. This, in itself, is a sign of how good God is.

in a World with a Good God?

There are two kinds of evil that cause suffering in our world: natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is only evil in the sense that it causes human suffering, but there is nothing "evil" in the sense that something sinister is being chosen. Natural evil is the result of the natural realities of our world. We are biological beings who live in a world where viruses, bacteria, and disease exist. We can get sick. Nobody caused the illness, but it still causes suffering.

Similarly, our bodies can develop diseases on their own because of a genetic predisposition or because they simply wear down. Natural disasters occur as a normal part of our weather patterns and the development of our planet.

This does not make these realities more bearable and it is simple to ask, "Well, why does God refuse to stop those things?" God created the world in a state of journeying — the world is not perfect but is moving toward perfection and will not be perfect until the end of time when God unites heaven and Earth for eternity.

The reality that we suffer in a world that is not perfect comes from the introduction of original sin into human history. The natural realities that can end our mortal life are a reminder that we are not made simply for this world; it is not our final home.

Moral evil is far more devastating than natural evil because we choose it. We cannot determine when the next storm will strike or if we will develop a chronic illness, but we can choose to sin against others and others can choose to sin against us.

God allows for this kind of evil out of love. That may seem like an odd sentence but think about the nature of love. Love requires a free choice. God could make us slaves to His will, but instead, He allows us the freedom to choose our own will. Since God is love, to make us slaves would go against His very nature.

While God permits moral evil to exist, He is never the direct or indirect cause of it. There is never a point where God enacts evil; this would go against who God is. God does, however, permit evil in order to allow our freedom of choice to exist. God, in His infinite goodness, can bring good out of evil.

When we look at the cross hanging in our church, we understand this reality. The Crucifixion of Jesus, God's only Son, is the greatest moral evil committed. Yet, God brings resurrection and new life out of that evil. However, evil never becomes a good thing, even if God can bring good out of it.

Suffering is a reality we must face and even if God can bring good out of it, it is not always easy. Many saints and holy men and women lived lives that included suffering. Saint Paul experienced suffering and persecution in his life, ultimately being martyred, and yet still wrote, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

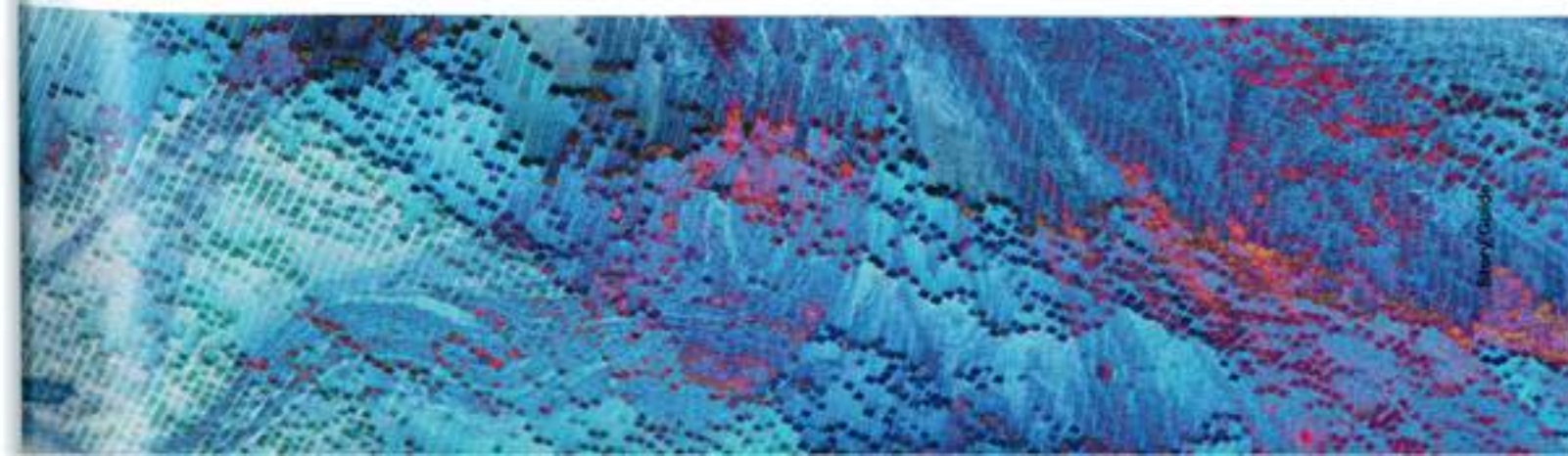
God does not will our destruction, but only wills our good. That said, God is close to us when we suffer. In the Book of Psalms, we read, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

There is no way to escape the reality of suffering. All of us are going to experience it. The difference between Christianity and all other world religions is that we worship a God who suffers with us and desires to bring good out of it. We worship a God who is brokenhearted when we are brokenhearted.

We also believe that God will one day triumph over all of these injustices and restore what has been broken. Our response to suffering and evil is faith and a resolve to act to remedy injustice and evil where we see them.

There is no simple answer to suffering, but there is a response. Our first response is faith that God has not abandoned us. Our second response is to work in whatever way we can to combat injustice and evil and to eliminate evil and sin from our lives.

God wants to heal where we have been hurt and walk with us. God wants to offer hope that our suffering and pain in this world are not the end of the story but are one way God can be present to us and ultimately make us whole. What does love do in the face of suffering? God's promise of love is not to shield us and take it away, but to walk with us and continue to bring healing until God one day leads us to our final home.



FAULT_

“Death spread to all men because all men sinned.”
Romans 5:12

Every. Single. Person. No one is free from sin; no one is better than another. We all stumble and fall, but we all must get back up and continue to seek righteousness, over and over and over again. The one constant in life seems to be our human ability to mess things up and make bad decisions. In reality, the constant is our need for God's grace and mercy because we are all fallen and caught in a cycle of sin.

We were created to be in union with God. We all have innate yearnings and desires that are rooted in how and why we were created. “The

desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for” (CCC 27).

The Book of Genesis reveals the story of the first sin, and really it is the story of every sin to be committed after it. When faced with a choice to obey God's law, humanity chose themselves over God. Sin is a rejection of God and God's plan for our lives. When sin entered the world and humanity rejected God, our divine union was shattered. We cut ourselves off from God's grace and the original holiness with which we were created was shattered. The repercussions reverberate throughout history.

As a result of sin, we spend our lives combating temptation and resisting the urge to selfishly choose other things over God. We try to hide from God, keeping our darkest secrets locked away.

Our Goodness & Fall

Our sins sometimes have immediate consequences and other times, do not seem to have any consequence at all. We may lie and never be found out. We could be unfaithful but never be uncovered. Other sins are brought to light and we feel the grave damage they cause. Every sin causes a rift in our relationship with God and with others. So, beyond the earthly consequences, our actions also have an eternal impact. Everything we do, big or small, leaves a mark on our eternal soul. The weight of sin is enormous and is not something we can remove ourselves. Nothing we do can make up for our sins.

God loves us, so sin is not where the story ends. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. God, even from the moment of the first sin, enacted a plan to restore us and make us

new. That plan took thousands of years to come to fulfillment, because the restoration of the relationship needed time, but also because God wanted us to really understand what He was doing for us. Jesus is God's response to sin and the means by which we are saved. If we want to understand why Jesus is so important, we need to first understand sin.

The truth of sin is this: We cannot redeem ourselves — the weight of our sin is too great. No amount of good deeds, sacrifices, or prayers can make up for the ways we fall short of God's calling. But the beauty of who God is lies in the fact that God does not leave it up to us. God loves us too much to abandon us to try (and fail) at our own salvation. Instead, God makes the first move.





PRODIGAL

Why Jesus?

pt. 1

One of the most well-known of Jesus' parables is "The Prodigal Son." It is the story of a father with two sons. The younger takes half of his father's money and leaves, but then loses all of the money and becomes destitute. The younger son reasons that it is better to become a servant to his father rather than die of starvation. When he returns home, instead of becoming a servant, the boy's father rejoices and throws a party. The father restores the son to the same dignity he had before he left and spent all of his father's money.

The story is our story. Through our sin, we take the gift of life that God the Father gives us and reject it. We end up losing everything to sin. Instead of leaving us destitute or making us slaves, God restores us. God never rejects us when we return to Him. We are never too far gone to turn around and be received by God; this is the amazing truth that we understand when we enter into salvation history. When we talk about "salvation history" we are talking about a love story — one of conflict, struggle, and ultimately redemption.

Our story begins with creation. God made mankind in His image and likeness, a phrase we hear often without really comprehending it. In biblical times, to say that you were made in someone's image and likeness was to say that you were their son or daughter. Let that sink in for a moment. We were meant to be God's sons and daughters. We were meant to be the royal heirs of God's heavenly Kingdom. We were destined to perfectly love Him and be loved by Him for all of eternity.

Sin entered the world and, just like when the prodigal son left his father, we too, through original sin, abandoned our Father and can no longer call ourselves His children simply because we were born. But like a loving father, God desires to welcome us back to His family. He wants to include us in the familial relationship with Him for which we were created. And thus, the rest of salvation history is the story of God trying to gather us back into — and keep us as members of — His family.

God began to gather the family together when He called Abraham to leave his mother and father and go to the land that He would show him. Abraham did as God asked, so God promised to make his descendants numerous and abundant. God blessed Abraham and his wife, Sarah, with a baby boy, who they named Isaac. Even today, we can trace our Christian heritage back to Abraham, which is why we call him our "father in faith."

Isaac had a son named Jacob, who God renamed Israel. Israel had 12 sons who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel and are the reason why the Hebrews are often referred to as the Israelites in Scripture. Israel's 12 sons eventually moved to Egypt to avoid a famine, which led to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt.

And so, God called Moses to set the Israelites free from their bondage and lead them to the Promised Land. God was delivering them from slavery and yet, they rebelled against Him, questioning Him and speaking out against Him. Like the prodigal son, they wanted to do things on their own and God, in His goodness and love, gave them what they wanted.

When the Israelites eventually made it to the Promised Land, God helped them conquer their enemies and settle in the land. They were still afraid and did not trust God, so they once again rebelled and sinned against Him. They even threatened to kill Moses and return to slavery in Egypt. They wandered in the desert for 40 years until God brought them back to the Promised Land.

Even though the Lord was on their side and delivered their enemies into their hands, the Israelites turned away from Him again and again, worshipping false idols and forgetting all He had done for them. Like the prodigal son, they were ungrateful for the many gifts the Father had given them and became greedy, wanting more. But when they abandoned God, they found that their enemies had the upper hand. They were once again enslaved and suffering.

So they called out to God and He delivered them with mighty warriors and amazing wonders. Despite the people continuing to reject God, over and over again God forgave them for their sins and welcomed them back into His family.

The Israelites eventually demanded a king for their new kingdom and God provided. The most famous of these kings was David, who killed the giant Goliath and delivered victory to the Israelites, thus winning their favor and admiration.

The Kingdom of David was overthrown shortly after David's death. Invaders conquered God's people and sent them into exile to be slaves in foreign lands, but God did not forget His people. God sent them prophets who reminded them of His faithfulness and proclaimed the coming of a savior who would restore the Kingdom of Israel. It is out of that line that Jesus is born.

The main characters in the story were not just nobodies; they all were all great sinners, as well. God always chose the unexpected and imperfect people to do His work. In Jesus, however, we have someone unexpected but perfect. God sent His own Son who had been with Him since the beginning, who had witnessed the many times God's people turned their backs on Him.

So, God became man. He became man to save us and deliver us from our bondage, but not from physical bondage and slavery. He came to free us from something much more sinister and deadly: our bondage to sin and death. He came to establish a kingdom, but not a physical, political kingdom. He came to establish the Kingdom of heaven on Earth and to make us all citizens of that Kingdom.

Jesus was not what anyone expected. He grew up in a small, dull town called "Nazareth." When Philip told his brother Nathanael that he found the promised Messiah, a Messiah from Nazareth, he responded, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Even when we look back on the Incarnation today, we feel like Jesus should have come as someone powerful and authoritative. Instead, He came as someone meek and humble.

In this humility — and truly in everything — Jesus is our model of holiness. He shows us how to live and how to love. By His Incarnation and death, He made it possible for us to once again enter into God's family, to be God's adopted sons and daughters through Baptism. He is the culmination of God's centuries-old plan and work. He is the love of God the Father that runs to meet us when we are still far off, caught in sin, and struggling to get back home. He is the first move of God the Father — the next move is ours.

MORE_



Why Jesus? pt. 2

Imagine the scene: Jesus is hanging on a cross, beaten and seemingly defeated. All but a few of His followers have left Him. The rest of the crowd mocks Him as He slowly dies.

Some people looked at Jesus on the cross and saw a criminal. Others saw a zealous revolutionary. Still others saw the one who loved them. How did it come to this and did the ministry of Jesus need to end this way? The whole life of Jesus pointed toward this one, important moment. Everything that Jesus taught and did was to help us not only understand what His death and Resurrection would mean, but was given to show us how to live, as well.

Jesus' public life began with His proclamation of the Kingdom of God. His first teaching was to "repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). He wanted us to return to God, to return to His love and plan for our lives.

Jesus' proclamations were followed by teachings. He taught in synagogues and public places. He taught us to pray — to ask, seek, and knock — and to trust the Father with our needs. He taught us not to judge or retaliate, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He also taught us to love our enemies. He spoke with authority and those who listened were amazed. He developed a reputation and crowds began to follow Him.

Jesus' teaching was different than what anyone had heard before. The Beatitudes communicate Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God — an extraordinarily upside-down Kingdom. The Kingdom of God does not favor those in power — religious, political, and civil leaders — but rather, favors the poor in spirit, people who mourn, those who are meek, those who are merciful, those who make peace, and even those who are persecuted.

Jesus not only taught about the Kingdom of God; He also made it manifest through His miracles. The Scriptures are full of accounts of Jesus healing people with all kinds of illnesses and disabilities.

Jesus' words not only speak of peace; they are also accompanied by actions that bring about peace. What was once broken is made whole. What was once tragic is rejoiced over. Panic and discord are brought to peace and restoration.

Jesus' miracles were not limited to the physical world as He also cured those suffering from spiritual ailments. Jesus cast out demons that tormented people and even raised the dead (three different times). If all of that was not audacious enough, Jesus even forgave sins. Interestingly, this is the thing that upset people the most because it was blasphemous.

If only God can forgive sins, is Jesus God?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus wonders if the crowds are understanding His teaching on the Kingdom of God. He asks His disciples who people say He is. His disciples inform Him that some think He is a prophet, teacher, or miracle worker. None of these answers are fully correct. Then He asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter declares, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:13-20). Peter is right. Jesus is the Savior: the one who teaches, heals, delivers, and saves us from the greatest evil of all, sin.

Jesus asks for a response from each of us to the revelation of His identity as Savior. Who do you say that Jesus is? How would you respond to this question?

Have you tuned Jesus out? Have you heard so many inconsequential facts about Him that you simply pass by the idea that He might be everything you are searching for? That He might be the one you desire to see you, notice you, and make you whole?

Does the idea of Jesus threaten your status quo, security, comfort, and preferences? If Jesus is God, does that mean you will have to change?

Have you been so deeply hurt or ostracized that you do not believe there could be a God who favors you?

Jesus asks for a response to the revelation of His identity as Savior. If we acknowledge that He is God, our lives have to change. Jesus wants to bring peace, healing, and resurrection into our lives, which is why He allowed Himself to be crucified.

Jesus' final and definitive action was to die a gruesome death on the cross and save humanity from the bondage of sin. His life leaves no room for misinterpretation of His identity and definitive action: Jesus is God, a God who saves.

NEW_

Why Jesus?

pt. 3

We receive news on a daily basis from all kinds of places. A friend sends us a message to update us on a big promotion. We scroll through a "newsfeed" online. We check our e-mail for an update at the office or from school. We see news on television networks. Unfortunately, much of the news we receive is not "good news." We see a lot of struggle and suffering. Sometimes we wonder if there is any good news at all.

After Jesus was crucified and buried, the disciples hid. The worst news ever came to pass — Jesus' ministry and mission was over. But then, several weeks later, the disciples reappeared and began preaching something different — Jesus was raised from the dead. This was a new Gospel. This was good news.

Jesus was the divine Savior and liberator people waited for. Some people thought He came to overthrow the Roman government, but Jesus did something much bigger: He defeated death itself and paved the way for anyone who belonged to Christ to be victorious over sin and death. This was news the disciples could not keep to themselves. But how were the disciples so sure that Jesus was the one they waited for?

Jesus died during Passover for a reason. The original Passover took place during the Exodus. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, but God wanted to set them free. God appeared to Moses and sent him to Pharaoh to demand that he let the Israelites go into the wilderness for three days to worship their God.

When Pharaoh stubbornly refused, God sent plagues upon Egypt, each corresponding to a perceived "power" that only Pharaoh had. The meal of unleavened bread shared the night of the final plague became the Passover meal. The Israelites took a lamb and sprinkled some of the blood of the lamb on their doors, and then ate the lamb as part of the meal. It was the blood on the doors that kept the Israelites safe from the final plague, which was death itself.

The Israelites celebrated this meal every year to remember how God freed them from slavery in Egypt, so they could be free to worship Him in the wilderness. The liberation from Egypt was the most significant event in the history of Israel, and one that the Jewish people commemorate every year.

Jesus and His disciples celebrated Passover, but before His death, Jesus did something new. He became the new Passover lamb and died on our behalf. His blood is what saves us from the plague of death.

The prophets of the Old Testament constantly condemned Israel for failing to live up to their vocation. They constantly fell into idol worship and sin, and yet, the prophets promised that there would come a day when God would accomplish what we cannot: our salvation. This is accomplished through Jesus on the cross. He was not simply taking our punishment; He was battling against the powers of darkness that held us captive. His death on the cross defeated sin and death. We are no longer slaves to sin. Hell has no victory. Death has no sting.

All of this is confirmed by Christ's Resurrection on the third day. Without the Resurrection, Jesus' death on the cross would simply be another tragedy of a wise teacher or failed revolutionary. On that third day when the women came running to the apostles with news that Jesus had risen, they realized everything had changed. The world became a different place. Nobody had ever died and risen from the dead of their own power. This was not supposed to happen.

This news was life changing, and every one of the apostles (except John) was brutally martyred for sharing this good news. Every one of the martyrs in the early Church went to their gruesome deaths proclaiming Jesus resurrected. If they had been lying, it is doubtful they would have so willingly been beheaded, burned, stoned, crucified, or eaten by lions.

Why die for this kind of news? Because it is news that saves souls. Christ secured our victory through His death at Passover and Resurrection on the third day. We have been freed from our slavery to sin by Christ's blood on the wood of the cross, just as the Israelites were saved by the blood of the Passover lamb on the wood of their doorposts. We can now live in the freedom of Jesus, which is exactly what the apostles and early Church did and what the Church continues to do today.

TRANSFORMATION_

For the apostles, the death and Resurrection of Jesus changed everything. To them, Jesus was not just proposing a new philosophy. They saw Jesus — through His Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension — as inaugurating a new reality.

Everything about life had changed for the early Church. Not only had the powers of evil, sin, and death been defeated, but even earthly powers were also subject to this Christ who defeated death.

For the apostles, nothing was more important than Christ. They changed everything about their lives: their relationships, their occupations, their worship, and their interactions with the world. They wanted to bring this message of salvation to everyone.

The "good news," or "Gospel," of Jesus was not a new philosophy like many others were proposing at the time. It was not like stoicism, which said you will be a better, happier person through detachment from the world. It was also not hedonism, which said that the physical world is the only reality, so your only goal in life is to do things that give you pleasure. The apostles were not saying, "This is a better way to look at the world." They proclaimed that something had happened, and the world was different because of it. People could find fulfillment for their desires without succumbing to sin and could embrace joy in their lives because Jesus had died for their sins so they could have abundant life.

That message changed the lives of the disciples and they wanted it to change the lives of others. They encountered Christ, resurrected, in a powerful way. Nothing could ever be the same for them. They chose to follow Christ and share that message.

We can choose to live our lives trying to be "good people" who go with the flow of the world around us and avoid suffering, or we can choose to live lives of discipleship. We can choose to take up our crosses every day and follow Jesus. When we do this, we reflect God in the world. This is not a meaningless action or something that simply makes us happy. Being a disciple of Jesus and proclaiming the Gospel like the apostles did will change the world. Be who you were made to be — choose to be a disciple.

Acts of the Apostles & the Gospel Message

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Sherry Gaudin

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Sherry Gaudin

FOUNDATION_

Why the Church?

Have you ever been on a tour before, one where you needed a guide to show you the way or help you see things you may have missed on your own?

We are on a journey to heaven, but we need help getting there, which is why we have the Church as our guide. Jesus gave us the Church because He knew that — due to our sinful nature — we needed help to get to heaven. We need to be constantly reminded and beckoned toward Him.

The Church has a mandate to uphold, a mission that was given to her by Christ. She stands as the "universal sacrament of salvation." We learned in our first session that a sacrament is a sign that gives grace, a sign that points to something else. The Church, as a sacrament of salvation, points to something else: heaven. The Church gives us what we need to get to heaven.

In Matthew's Gospel, there was a moment when Jesus was speaking to His followers, asking them who they thought He was. Peter exclaimed in that moment, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

What an answer. Think about it for a moment. The Jews had been longing for a messiah. He was going to set them free from oppression and slavery. Peter confessed that Jesus was (is) the Messiah they were waiting for.

Jesus is God's Son.



Once Peter confesses, Jesus changes his name from Simon to Peter, which means "rock," and tells him, "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." The Church Jesus is speaking of is the community He will gather, a community that will have Peter as its foundation — its rock. Peter becomes a witness to that community that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He is the reminder to the Church, the guide who leads us home.

Jesus goes on to give Peter the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, which gives the Church authority and credibility. Credibility is important if people are going to listen to the Church and follow her teachings. The keys show that Peter, the pope, is the one who has authority over the Church, the people of God.

Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide the Church in truth and remind her of all that He taught. He also promises to never leave the Church orphaned. Why is this important? So that we "may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Ephesians 4:14).

In other words, Jesus knew that we are not perfect. He knew there would be corruption and sin because He was entrusting the Church to broken, imperfect humans, so He put a fail-safe in place: the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit, who speaks for the Father, guides the Church until Jesus returns.

We mentioned that the Church has a missionary mandate: to make disciples. This mission

came from Jesus Himself and is the reason why the Church exists. The Church exists to save people and show them Christ.

The most tangible way the Church makes Christ present to the world today is through the sacraments; and through the sacraments, Christ makes known His holy and sanctifying Spirit. It is through the sacraments that we, the Church, come to know the Holy Spirit, who reminds us what Jesus taught. And it is through Jesus that we have salvation.

Jesus thought it was important enough to make Himself known to people 2,000 years after He died, so He established a Church to pass down who He is through the generations. He loved you enough to give you the Church so you would know and experience His love.

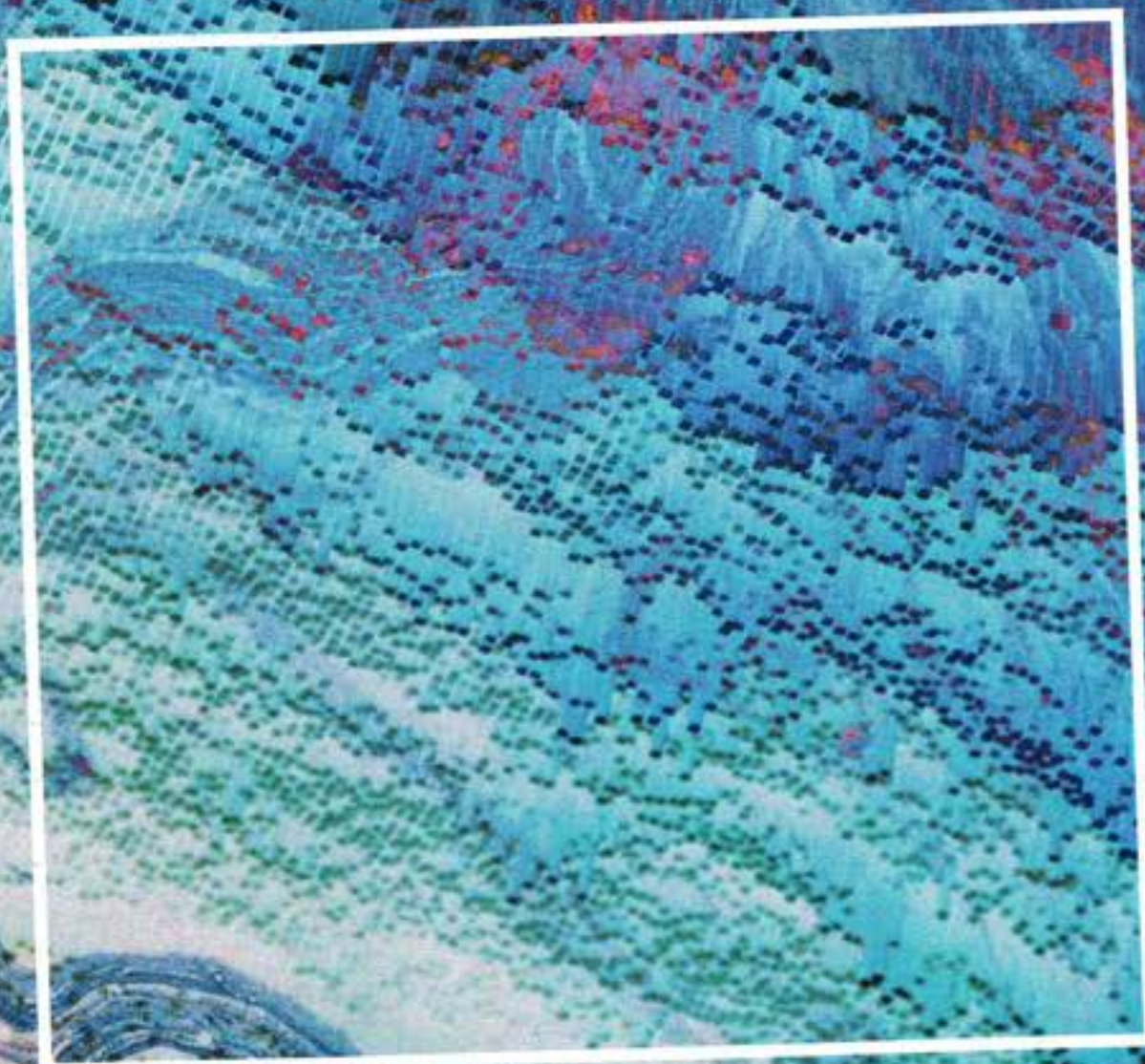
The Church, as the Body of Christ, reveals Christ through the sacraments. The sacraments give us what we need to come to know Christ as the Son of God, sent to save us from death and free us from sin.

The Church helps us embrace our identity as children of God. Trust the Church. Make use of the sacraments, mainly the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. These sacraments, if you will allow them, have the power to change your sinful nature.

We cannot make this journey on our own, so Christ gave us the Church to guide us, sustain us, pick us up when we fall, and put us on the right path toward heaven. Living in the Church is not restrictive; it is true freedom.



BURN



The Holy Spirit in the Church

p. 33

Superman is the quintessential superhero. He was so fast, powerful, perplexing, and gravity-defying that people were unsure of what to make of him. They trusted that he would come at the right moment to save them from danger, even though they did not fully understand him. Was he more like a bird or a plane? What could they compare Superman to that would help them make sense of him?

Due to our limited and often misguided understanding of the Holy Spirit, it can be easy to compare the Spirit to a superhero — He comes to our aid, gives us power, is mysterious, and is even likened to a bird (like Superman). But in making these comparisons, we lose some of the recognition of the reality, authority, presence, and Godliness of the third person of the Trinity. Comparisons can be helpful, but they do not capture the full picture.

The Holy Spirit is a "who," not a "what." He is not an "energy" or "force" coming from God, but a person who is God Himself and part of the Trinity. We know that God is not three separate gods, but rather, one indivisible God of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as professed in the Nicene Creed.

The Holy Spirit has many titles and symbols attributed to Him. These are a glimpse of who He is and how He interacts with us and the Church. Some of His titles are: The Lord, the giver of life; Paraclete; and Spirit of Truth. We encounter the Holy Spirit powerfully in two places: in the sacraments and in prayer.

The active presence of the Holy Spirit can be found in each of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Concentrating on the Sacraments of Initiation, we learn that the Church cannot be separated from the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is the beginning of life in and with the Holy Spirit. We are free of sin, made co-heirs of the Kingdom with Christ, receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and are ready to receive and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmation is the necessary completion of the Sacrament of Baptism. In this sacrament, we are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are increased in us and are strengthened in our responsibilities to spread the Gospel.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our Catholic faith. It is where we come together as a Eucharistic assembly to be the Church. It is through the words of Jesus and the invocation, or "calling down," of the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.

We need the sacraments to strengthen us in our daily walk with God, which is a relationship that is manifested through prayer. Prayer is our relationship with God, but for many of us, it is a daunting or boring chore. Oftentimes we impatiently and half-heartedly pray, asking for immediate answers and failing to recognize that prayer is not solely our response to God; rather, it comes from the Holy Spirit. Thankfully for us, the Holy Spirit is the "master of prayer" and in our weakness, advocates on our behalf and brings us to the source of life-giving water: Jesus.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit might be more than we can ever fathom or fully know, but that which is revealed should spring up in us gratitude and a desire to know, love, and serve God. We can do this in union with the Church by partaking in the sacraments, cultivating a strong prayer life, and sharing our faith — the Good News — with others.

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Story Guide

SOURCE_

The Mass & the Eucharist

What does your life "revolve" around? The expression is used when there is something that is the focal point of all that we do, so much so that anything that happens in our lives seems to happen in relation to that one thing. When a teen begins dating someone new, there is usually a phase where their life seems to revolve around that person.

We all have something that is our focal point. It may not be completely obvious, but for each of us there is something we make time for and that, when push comes to shove, we always give priority. It is important that we identify what that thing is because it is not just what our life seems to revolve around — it is our foundation.

As Catholics, our lives are supposed to revolve around the Mass. The Church calls the celebration of the Eucharist the "source and summit" of our lives. Many of us, thinking about some of our experiences of Mass, may laugh at this idea. Unfortunately, our understanding of Mass is far from something that our lives are supposed to revolve around. If we dive more deeply into what the Mass and Eucharist are, though, we may see that there is good reason why the Church gives them such a lofty title and how we can engage more deeply in the most important thing we can do as Catholics.

Mass is important because we encounter Christ at Mass; it is a place where we both hear God's Word and receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

The term "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving." It is meant to be an act of thanksgiving for all that God has done for us: our creation, redemption, and sanctification. It is a praise of the wonderful works of God, the beauty of the Savior sent for us. At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist — the tool for our salvation — as a memorial of His death and Resurrection until He returns at the end of the age.

The Eucharist is much more than a memorial, though. Jesus tells us at the Last Supper that the Eucharist is actually His body and blood and since then, the Church has maintained this incredible reality. When we receive

the Eucharist, we are receiving the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus. This means that Jesus is powerfully real and present to us, humbly veiled under the form of bread and wine.

We know this to be true for a couple of reasons beyond what Jesus tells us at the Last Supper. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells His disciples that they need to eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life. Aside from this being shocking, people may have dismissed what Jesus was saying because He often used analogies when He spoke. Perhaps this one was just poorly chosen. But Jesus never explains the analogy; if anything, He doubles down on it. He is so committed to this point that He allows thousands of people to walk away from Him. The reality is that Jesus was not speaking in an analogy at all but was explaining the Eucharist.

The second is in the number of miracles associated with the Eucharist. We often believe miracles only happened when Jesus lived, but since the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, miracles still occur today. These miracles are easy to find online and include miraculous healings, hosts that turn to flesh, and hosts that never decay. If nothing else, this should at least make us stop to ask if there is something more happening during every Mass.

As with anything we are exposed to too often, it is easy to overlook how beautiful and special it is. When we always have food to eat and clean water to drink, we tend to take them for granted. We, as Catholics, have the bread of life and living water, and it is easy to come to Mass each week and forget the awesome power of the Sacrament. Not only does it bring us into closer union with Christ, but it has the power to forgive venial (small, non-mortal) sins and protect us against grave sins. Every time we receive the Eucharist, the grace we received at our baptism increases.

Our encounter with Christ at Mass in the Eucharist is the source and summit of our week and all that we are called to be. It is what we should revolve our lives around because it is not simply something we do, but someone we encounter.

ENTER_

Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism

Water changes matter. Sometimes it takes time, but a river will erode the Earth around it — the movement of water can destroy even the strongest rocks. A person that is weak from dehydration is revived after consuming water. Hot water can melt materials, and cold water can chill it to near freezing. Water can be a source of life, but if we are submerged in water for too long, it becomes dangerous.

There is a reason why we use water for Baptism. When a person is submerged under water, for those brief seconds, there is a danger. Stay under water too long and your air will run out. When we come out from the water, we are no longer at risk for drowning. We have been saved.

John the Baptist put people through this ritual as a way of repenting. People entered the Jordan River and John sank them into the water. When they rose out of the water, they left their old way of life behind. They repented of their sins and made a promise to change. Perhaps this is why so many people went into the desert to see John. They wanted to start over and his baptism was a tangible way to do that.

When Jesus arrives, John does not quite know what to do. Jesus does not need to repent or become new; Jesus is sinless. But Jesus has a bigger plan for Baptism. Jesus wants to elevate it beyond a promise we make to become new and a symbol that goes along with it. Jesus wants Baptism to actually make us new, so He shows us what that looks like.

Baptism is the first sacrament we can receive and we cannot receive any of the other

sacraments without it; it is the "gateway" sacrament. When a person is baptized, they make a commitment to live their life for Christ and grow in the faith. If an infant is being baptized, parents make these promises on behalf of the child and later on the child restates them when he or she is confirmed.

Baptism makes us adopted sons and daughters of God. We enter into the water and are washed from original sin — we die to our old selves. When we are raised up, we are actually made new in Christ. It is more than a symbol. We become part of God's family and at that very moment, we are given sanctifying grace. This is the kind of grace that allows us to enter heaven one day when we die, which is why a casket is overlaid with a white cloth at a Catholic funeral. It is a reminder of the day we were baptized in Christ and that, if we have preserved that grace, we will be raised with Him.

Baptism is performed by a bishop, priest, or deacon because it represents a person not only coming into Christ but also becoming part of the Church, so one of those offices represent the entire Catholic and parish community. However, baptism is such an important sacrament that, in emergencies, any baptized person can baptize another one. It is that big of a deal.

Water changes things, but in the Sacrament of Baptism, water changes us. It makes us new. It creates the potential for eternal life for us and allows us to confidently call God, "Father." Many of us may not remember our baptism, but that day changed everything. It was the day that we were not simply "made Catholic" but were made new.

SIGNATURE_

Sacraments of Initiation

Confirmation

Of all the persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit may be the most under-appreciated. The Sacrament of Confirmation, though, is all about growing in familiarity with this person of the Trinity. Without the Holy Spirit, we would be lost. In fact, the Holy Spirit was crucial to the work of the early Church.

After St. Peter receives the Holy Spirit, he converted 3,000 people with just one speech. Scripture does not record Jesus converting that many people at one time. Peter went on to heal many people, but the most surprising healings happened while he was still in Jerusalem: people laid their sick friends in the streets so Peter's shadow could touch and heal them. Jesus healed people with words, spit, even His own hands, but we do not ever read about Jesus healing with merely His shadow. This is the Holy Spirit active in St. Peter's life, and this is the same Holy Spirit offered to all of us today.

We first receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism. He comes into our lives, inspires our faith, and gives us strength. The spiritual gifts we receive at our baptism are renewed, strengthened, and completed in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In fact, Baptism and Confirmation are so closely linked that they used to be celebrated together as a "double sacrament." Although these sacraments have been separated into two different celebrations in the West, the Eastern Catholic Church continues to celebrate them as one.

Receiving the Holy Spirit has always been a sign that one is embarking on a mission. Isaiah prophesied that when the Messiah came to deliver God's people, the Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him. Jesus began His public ministry by being baptized in Galilee, during which the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and rested upon Him. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles at Pentecost, they finally embarked on their mission to evangelize the whole world.

Ever since Pentecost, Catholics have been passing down the grace of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. This tradition continues

today in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop, or a priest whom he delegates, lays hands on the one who is to be confirmed, anoints them with sacred chrism oil, and prays, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." This is the seal of God that marks us as God's adopted son or daughter and unites us more fully with the mission of the Church.

Being sealed as God's adopted son or daughter is earth-shaking in a world where we often struggle to find our identity. We are not simply our job or our accomplishments and failures; we are God's children, and nothing will ever change that. In Confirmation, God deepens our relationship with His family, the Church, so we never have to be alone — no matter where we go, we will have brothers and sisters in Christ to support us.

Being a part of the mission of the Church through Confirmation comes with responsibilities. As confirmed members of God's family, conformed more perfectly to Jesus Himself, our prime responsibility is to live out this identity. We must live in a manner worthy of being called God's sons and daughters. Certainly, this means a moral life, but it also means a life dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel, to evangelization. As confirmed members of the Church, it is our solemn duty to continue to grow God's Kingdom on Earth.

Since we are called into the mission of Christ and the Church, a bishop administers the Sacrament of Confirmation. Since bishops are direct successors to the apostles — the first people who received the Holy Spirit — they have the authority to continue to pass the Holy Spirit on through the Sacrament in a full way that completes what began at our baptism.

Receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation should never be confused with a graduation or seen as a mark of "adulthood" in the Church, but it is a step further on the journey of being a disciple of Christ. After Confirmation, there are no more excuses about how we engage and live our faith. We are empowered with the Holy Spirit and are called to go live boldly.

CALLED_

Foundations of Discipleship

Sometimes as we read the Bible, we think about the people as storybook characters. It can be hard to imagine them as real men and women, but the truth is that when we read the Gospels, we are reading about people who lived and walked this Earth. However, we do not take this simply on faith, as there is historical evidence that Jesus and His disciples walked and preached over 2,000 years ago.

The men and women we read about in the Bible are just as real as you and I. They chose to follow Christ, they fell short, they had fears and anxieties. They also were courageous in living out their call to follow Jesus, even if it meant suffering and dying for Him. To be a disciple means to live like the person you follow; Jesus' disciples wanted to be like Him.

We are each called to be disciples, just like Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, and the other apostles. As you read the Gospels, it is clear that people knew of Jesus. Lots of people gathered to hear Him preach or waited among the crowd in the hope of catching a glimpse of Him. It would be hard to find somebody in the United States who has never heard of Jesus, but simply knowing of Jesus does not make you a disciple.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John immediately followed Jesus, even though they did not know Him well. They did not have that intimate friendship with Him that they would later have. And yet, they went with Him. They spent time with Him and got to know Him. This is how all relationships begin.

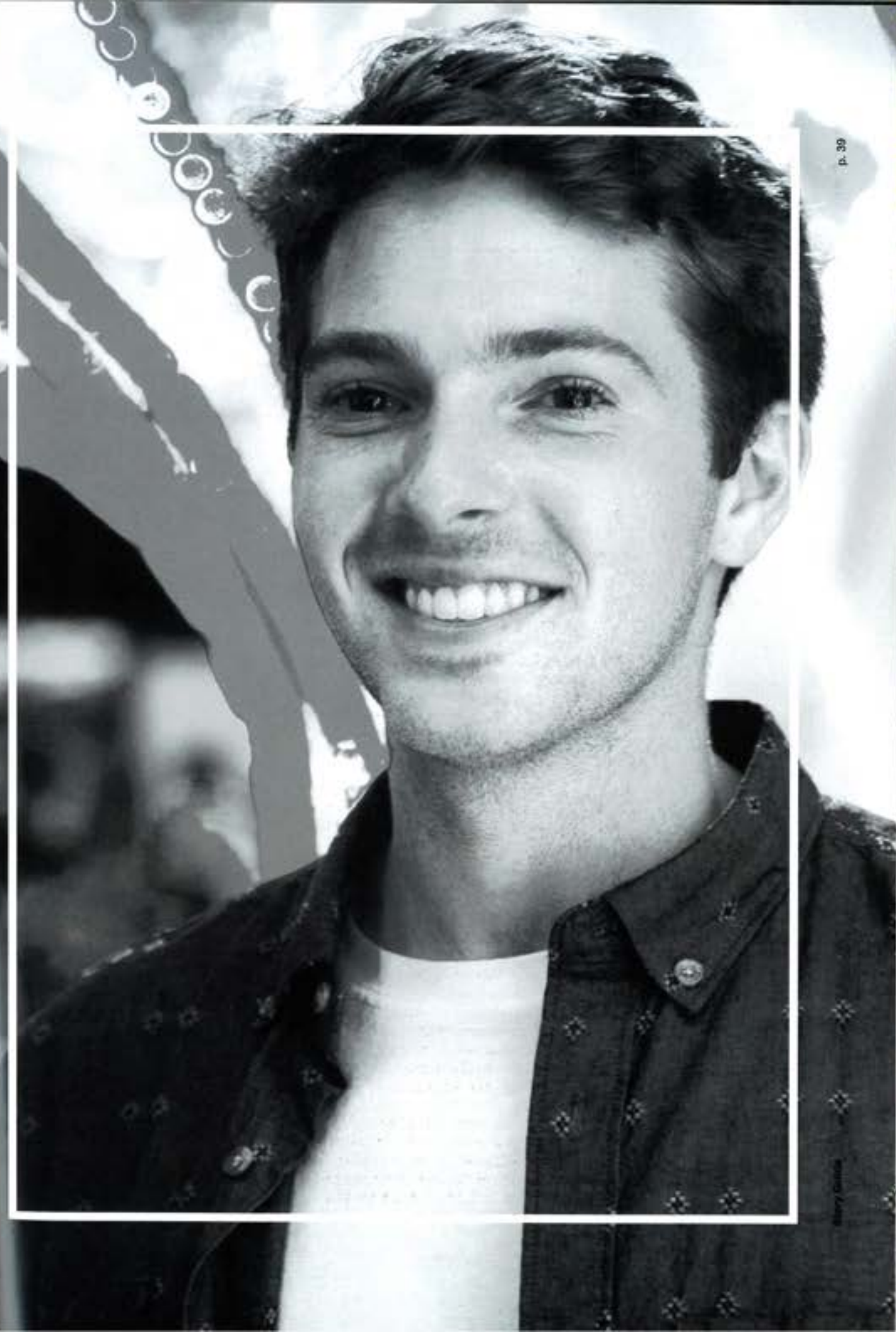
Think about your best friend. You most likely did not become best friends at first sight, as deep friendships take time to form. We are also called to spend time with the Lord, especially through prayer — putting ourselves in the presence of the Lord. That is what prayer is, putting ourselves in the presence of the Lord. A regular prayer life is one of the most essential elements of discipleship. Our discipleship must begin with this time with the Lord. As we get to know Him more, we will become more like Him. Our hearts and lives will be converted to His own.

As the disciples got to know Jesus, they heard His teachings, asked questions, and ultimately had to decide if they believed Him. Some of Jesus' teachings were hard for the disciples to accept, but ultimately, they believed He spoke the truth.

The disciples continued to grow in their relationship with Jesus. They were no longer following a strange man, but their intimate friend. The more Jesus taught them, the more they learned what it meant to love and worship God.

Discipleship is not easy. Following Jesus sometimes means that we stop following something else. Oftentimes, the things we leave behind were not good for us, anyway. It is important to remember that discipleship never makes us less; Jesus is not going to take away the good things we have in our lives. Instead, Jesus is going to amplify the good things and make them even better.

This can be challenging, but it is far from impossible. The best way to start following Christ and diving deeper into what it means to be a disciple is to make prayer a part of your daily routine. Turn off your cell phone and sit in silence, read your Bible, or pray the rosary. It does not matter what your prayer looks like as long as you put yourself in the presence of God. As you commit to prayer, you will come to know Jesus more intimately. You will develop a greater understanding of His teachings, learn to listen to what He says, and begin to see Him not just as a historical man, but as a man alive and calling you to be more than you ever imagined you could be.



Prayer is critical in the life of a disciple because it connects us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the "master of prayer"; it is actually the Holy Spirit who empowers us to pray at all. Without the Holy Spirit, our prayer would be impossible. The Holy Spirit is irreplaceable in the life of discipleship and we received the Holy Spirit at our baptism.

Our baptism is the beginning of our lives in Christ. It is also the starting point of our relationship with the Holy Spirit. At our baptism, we are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to sustain and help us as we walk through life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit grow as we grow. When we receive Confirmation, these gifts are sealed in us.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit can be challenging to understand, at first. They are gifts in the truest sense; God gives them freely for our benefit. We can continue to pray for the gifts and for an openness to them, but we also trust that God will give them to us when we need them. We cannot just call down a particular gift or demand it in a moment. The gifts are always given for our good.

There are seven identified gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, piety, counsel, fortitude, and fear of the Lord. Each gift strengthens a quality that we need in order to be a disciple.

Wisdom helps us be attracted to what is good and of God. It helps us discern what will lead us to heaven and what will lead us away from it, and then allows us to act upon that discernment.

Knowledge allows us to see the world from God's perspective. Our mind is conformed to the mind of God, whereas understanding helps us recognize divine truths present in our world, especially within our faith.

Piety is a gift of reverence where we recognize how much we rely on God, so we can direct our hearts accordingly with a love of God. Fear of the Lord, on the other hand, gives us a healthy fear of ever being separated from God's love.

Counsel helps us judge rightly in difficult situations and fortitude gives us courage to act boldly when our faith is attacked, or when we need to be Christ in the world.

These are the gifts we need in order to act as disciples in the world, and each is strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation. To be ready to use these gifts, though, we need to know who the Holy Spirit is and continue to dive deeper into a relationship with Him.

The Holy Spirit in the

Life of Discipleship

The Holy Spirit is already present to us through our knowledge of God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit helps us know God, love Him, and live in His grace. We can also know the Holy Spirit through prayer, Scripture, the Church, and the sacraments. The foundation for knowing the Holy Spirit is prayer. In prayer, we can easily begin invoking the Holy Spirit, inviting Him into our lives.

"Come, Holy Spirit." The Church instructs us to call upon the Holy Spirit before we do anything important. The Holy Spirit acts in all forms of prayer and is the "master and source" of prayer. If you find yourself feeling frustrated or do not know where to start in prayer, simply ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide.

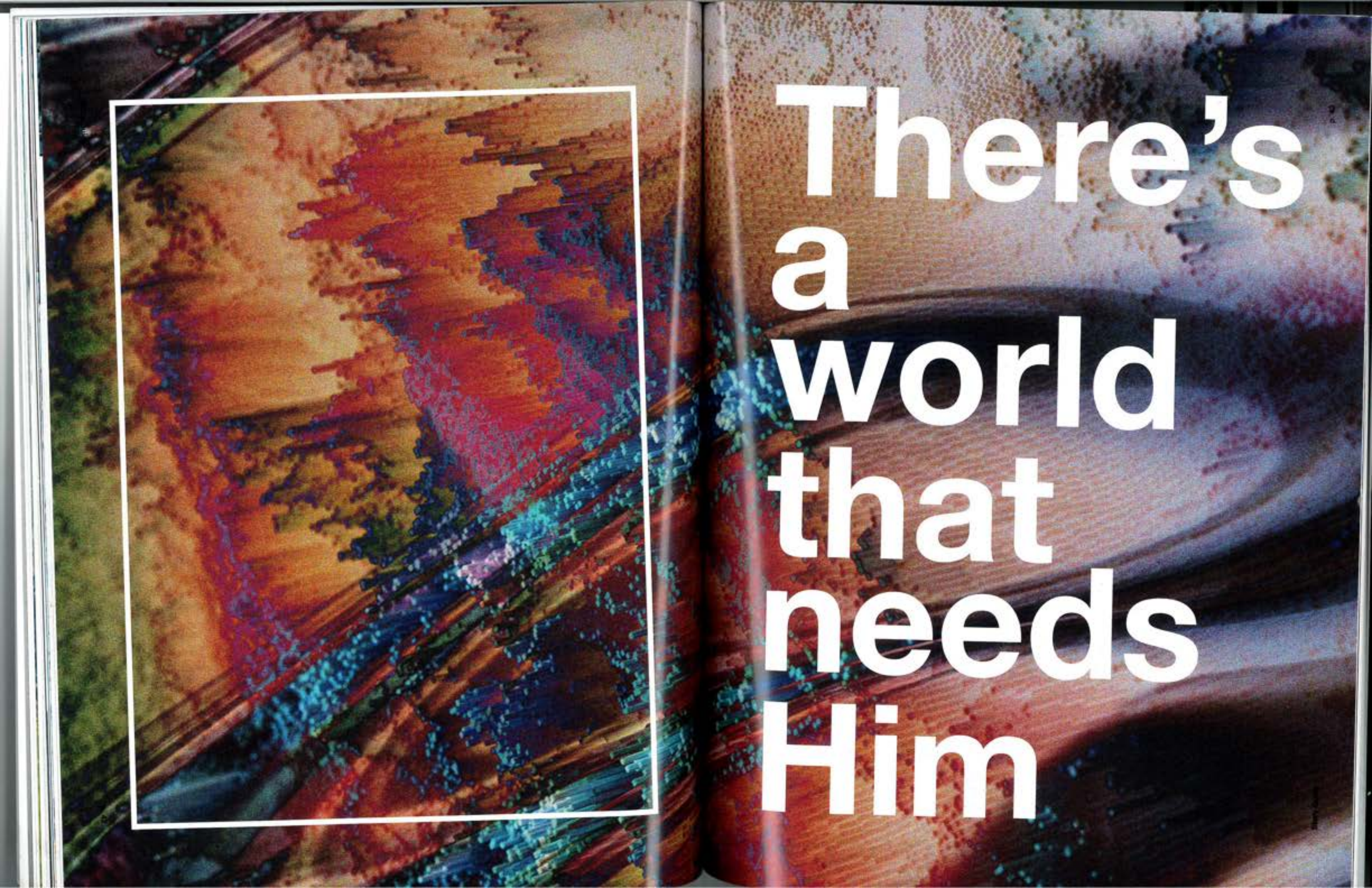
We can also come to know the Holy Spirit through Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the principal author of Scripture and enlightens us, so we can better understand the richness that God has given us in Scripture. We can ask for the help of the Spirit to read Scripture more often, more ardently, and with greater understanding.

As our relationship with the Spirit grows, so does our appreciation and love for the Church. The Holy Spirit works in all aspects of the Church, even the ones we do not agree with. It is OK to wrestle with or struggle with Church teaching as long as we are open to the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding the Holy Spirit is imparting to us regarding those teachings. Ultimately, we need to be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in helping us understand, love, and affirm these teachings.

The Holy Spirit is alive in the sacraments, specifically in the Mass, during which the Holy Spirit brings us into communion with Christ. In Reconciliation, after we have been cleansed from sin, the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and helps us become more like Christ.

For us to grow in relationship with the Holy Spirit we must be more consistent in our prayer, listen for His promptings in silence, allow Him to move, have an openness to God's will, and regularly return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to prepare our hearts as His dwelling place.

The call to discipleship is an important call and can seem challenging, but when we are in a relationship with the Holy Spirit and receive the gifts of that Spirit, we are empowered to do great things and live the call to discipleship boldly.



**There's
a
world
that
needs
Him**

MEANING_

Vocation

One of the biggest questions a young person is asked as he or she gets close to high school graduation is, "What do you want to do?" The full questions that are actually being asked in this seemingly simple question are: What are you going to do with your life? What is your direction? What are you going to dedicate yourself to? What is your purpose?

A lot of people believe that once they figure out those questions after high school, they will never need to ask them again, but anyone on the other side of graduation knows that this is far from true. We continually ask and evaluate our purpose, direction, and call in life. While our professions may change, God has a big call for each of our lives and a purpose for each of us, and it is far less specific than we might think.

The call each of us has from God is called a "vocation." Every person has the same "universal vocation," which is a call to be holy. This is the big purpose God has for each of our lives. The call to holiness is that God "calls man to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him with all his strength" (1 Peter 1:15).

This is a call that we respond to or reject daily. Our call to holiness is something we live daily, and all of our other directions and calls relate to it. Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that God has an ultra-detailed plan for our lives that we need to discover. The problem with this thinking is that it causes a lot of anxiety; if we fall off the path, how do we find it? What if we do the wrong thing? Could we screw up God's plan for our happiness?

The only way to really forgo happiness is to stop living our call to holiness. God has numerous ways to help us be holy — from the jobs we work to the particular vocation we may have toward marriage, holy orders, or consecrated life — but the end goal is always the same. God wants us to be holy, and God is going to make all things work toward that end.

We are all called to live out our universal vocation, but we are also called to live out our particular vocation. This is the second large calling we each have, and it revolves around the way we reveal God to the world. There are three particular vocations: holy orders, consecrated life, and marriage. Once we choose one of these vocations, our mission on Earth becomes bound up in it. When a man enters holy orders, his mission is to serve and bring Christ into the world as a member of the clergy. When a person is consecrated, they dedicate their life exclusively to Christ in service and prayer. Married individuals are dedicated to growing the holiness of their spouse and, if they have children, to the rest of their family.

When all is said and done, our goal is still heaven through whatever path life takes us. If we make holiness our highest goal, the rest will fall into place. God's call in our lives is always for our good, but that does not mean that there will not be twists and turns along the way. In all of these moments, God is with us, calling us to greater holiness, joy, and peace through our universal vocation and whatever particular vocation we have discerned.

SPEAK_

Witnesses of Faith

One of the most challenging parts of discipleship is living as a witness of faith in our world. Our faith is very personal, and many people worry that sharing our faith will come off as pushy or offensive. Yet, if we believe that Jesus can make a powerful difference in the lives of those who encounter Him, we have an obligation to share our faith. But how can we be a good witness of faith, even when it is uncomfortable?

While Jesus was on Earth, the apostles were witnesses of faith. They brought people to Christ, learned from His teachings, and watched as He performed miracles. At Pentecost, the apostles became witnesses of faith in a totally new way. Receiving the Holy Spirit turned the apostles into leaders in faith rather than followers. The Spirit's graces enabled them to boldly proclaim the Gospel themselves.

When someone is a "witness of faith," they share the faith in their words and actions. In writings from the earliest days of the Church, the words "witness" and "martyr" were used interchangeably. Martyrs are those who are faithful to Christ to the point of dying for their faith.

It is unlikely — though not impossible — that we will be asked to die for Christ. But fearlessly speaking about and living our faith may cause us to suffer at times. The grace we receive from the sacraments allows us to endure the suffering. While being a good witness of faith may induce anxiety when the prospect of rejection or suffering exists, think about the benefits of being such a witness. Our witness can speak volumes to people who need Christ and, if we

have children, is critical for them to see. Still, living as a witness of faith can be challenging. Thankfully, we are not alone.

Christ knew we could not live the faith on our own, so He established the Church to unite all of the faithful and enable us to support one another as we grow in holiness. For our faith to flourish, it is vital that we surround ourselves with people who live the Catholic faith well.

Christ and the Church have established the framework for living an authentic Catholic life. But even within that framework, being a witness of faith looks slightly different for each person. Teens being confirmed have sponsors and parents to help them understand what this witness looks like. As adults, we need to surround ourselves with a community of people who live their faith as well so we can be supported in our mission, a mission that many witnesses before us have been a part of.

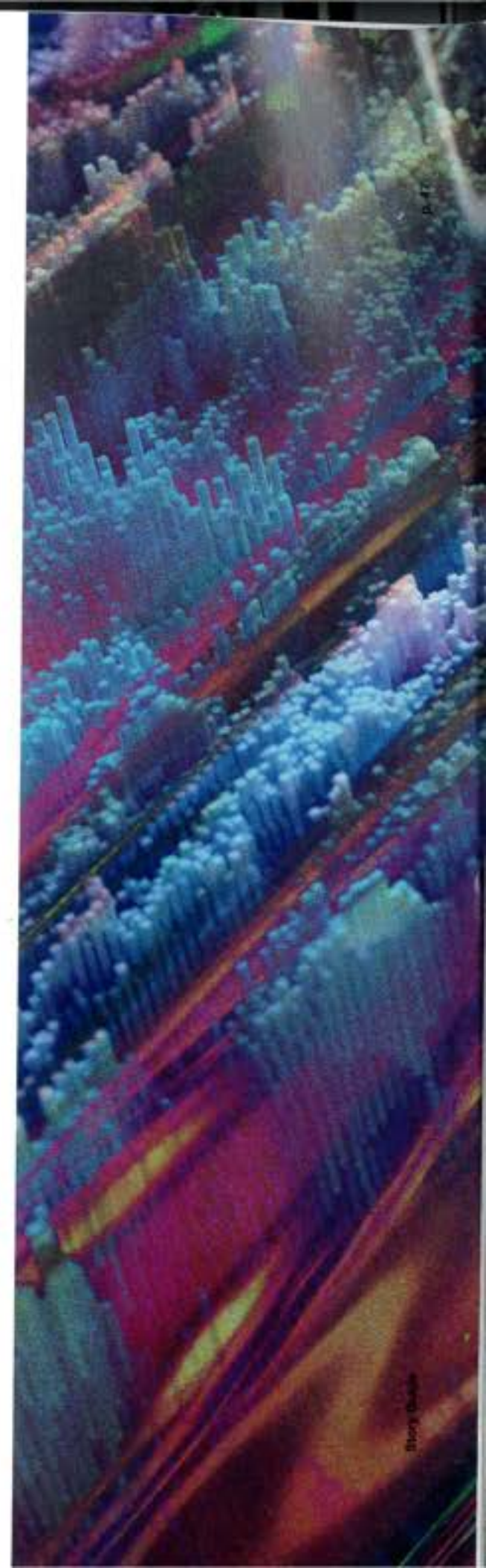
As Catholics, we know that death is not the end. When we die, we hope to be with Christ in heaven; the Church is not just those on Earth, but also those who are in purgatory and in heaven.

Those in heaven — the saints — offer us something incredibly precious. The saints are the ultimate witnesses of faith. They have faced the challenges of this life and remained faithful to Christ and the Church through it all. But the saints offer us much more than just their example. Of all of the members of the Church, the saints are the most united to Christ, as they are joined with Him in heaven. They want to spend eternity praising God and helping the Church on Earth.

Constantly present before God in heaven, the saints continually intercede for us and share God's graces with us as we face our daily struggles. Just as the members of the Church on Earth can help us grow closer to Christ, the saints — who have an even deeper connection to God — want to help us grow in friendship with the Lord. This is why a person chooses a saint name when he or she is confirmed — they choose a saint to be a special intercessor and example.

If we have been confirmed, taking time to get to know our confirmation saint is a great way to be empowered to be a better witness of faith. Ask for his or her intercession. Learn about his or her life and what challenges the saint faced on Earth. Use the saint as an example in your walk of holiness.

Our faith is personal, but if it is something we believe is life changing, we have an obligation to share it with people who may need that same faith. We can be witnesses in our world by our words and actions, but one thing we cannot do is live as a different person when we are outside of the church. As part of the mission of Christ, we need to make sure our lives are always proclaiming that we are changed and made new and that, if others choose to follow Christ, they can be made new, as well.



PATHWAY

How do you determine what is right and wrong?

When we are presented with a decision that has some weight to it, we rely on an internal set of rules to determine how we act. We call these rules our "morals." When we talk about how we determine "right" and "wrong" more broadly, we call it "morality." The moral code that people follow might be impacted by all kinds of things — we may keep the same moral code as our parents because we admire them or actively go against their moral code because we want to rebel against them. Life experience may have formed our morality, and we may share the same morals as our friends.

Is there a right and a wrong, though, when it comes to morality? We use various standards to judge each situation and sometimes they lead us to the same action, while other times they lead us to a different action. Is any person wrong in their decision?

Some decisions have no right or wrong answer; when we talk about our preferences, there is not a right answer — everyone can be "right" in their own way. But when we talk about more important things like how we treat other people, ways in which we respect life, and what laws are good and just and what ones are not, there is a right answer and a wrong answer.

Morality increasingly seems to be something we believe we can "personally define," and to be clear, we do need to personally choose how we live. The question is not if we can choose our own moral code; the question is how we determine the best way to live. This is a big question. Our morality determines how we act and the kind of person we are. If we want to live well, our morality matters.

As followers of Jesus, we have a morality that we can choose and that was defined and given to us by Jesus Himself. Our moral code as Christians is written throughout the Gospels and is clarified and applied by the Catholic Church. Our job, as disciples, is to understand that moral teaching and apply it to our lives.

There is no small number of people who question why we should live the moral teaching of Christ and the Church, especially when it seems contrary to what is culturally acceptable. Jesus, as the Son of God, has the authority to make definitive teaching about the best way for us to live. This teaching is guarded by the Church, which Christ gives authority to interpret His teachings for each era of human existence.

Jesus' teachings are the foundation of the Church's moral teaching. The Church does not have the authority to change the teachings of Christ; the Church only has authority to apply them as new social and moral situations arise.

Morality

There are many moral situations the Church speaks in to. The Church also identifies broad areas of positive and negative moral living. We call positive moral behaviors "virtues" and negative moral behaviors "vices." There are seven classic virtues and seven classic vices that can help us understand Christ's teachings and the ways in which the Church calls us to live.

The seven virtues are love, hope, faith, justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence. The seven vices are pride, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed, envy, and anger. We can view much of our morality through these vices and virtues.

Virtue is a moral quality that we work on with God's grace. When we live the virtue of love, loving God and our neighbor, we make decisions that bring us in alignment with Jesus' teaching. One way we would practice the virtue of love is by serving those who experience poverty. Love is self-sacrificial, so by giving up time on a Saturday to serve at a shelter for people who are homeless, we love our neighbor well. At the same time, we also combat the vice of greed — instead of being selfish, we are self-less.

Vice often happens when we become deficient in an area of virtue. When we fail to love, we can become greedy, lustful, envious, or angry. When we fail to have hope, we become slothful. When we fail to practice temperance, we become gluttonous.

Vices and virtues are practical ways we can view morality. We need to remember, though, that all virtue is rooted in the grace that Jesus gives us and is clarified by Church teaching.

So, take the virtue of love. If someone is doing something sinful but we do not want to call them out on it because we think it would not be loving, we are not living the virtue. Likewise, in our romantic relationships, we can confuse the virtue of love with the vice of lust by telling ourselves that sexual intimacy with our partner is morally OK because we "love them." When we examine that feeling against Church teachings, though, we see that we are actually engaging in a vice rather than a virtue.

Jesus calls us to live moral and upright lives. He calls us to be disciples who follow Him and His example. The Church guides us along that path, which is ultimately freedom. Each person here is called to that same freedom, but it is up to us to cooperate with God's grace in order to truly find it.



UNITED

Justice

Jesus cared for those in need and was dedicated to serving the last, lost, and least. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus begins His ministry with a message of justice. He goes to the synagogue and announces He is God's anointed, who brings freedom and light to those bound and in darkness.

The word "justice" can be thrown around rather carelessly: the justice system, social justice warrior, the Justice League. Justice has become quite a buzzword. But there is a place for justice in our faith; it is a crucial piece of Catholic morality. Sadly, the "justice" our society values usually does not fit the justice our Catholic faith demands.

Justice is a human virtue, a virtue that can be acquired through human effort. As justice is fundamental to moral goodness, it is also a cardinal virtue — one of four virtues from which all other human virtues flow.

Justice is the virtue by which we constantly and firmly desire to give God and our neighbor what is due to them. True justice means having right relationship with God and one another — knowing and loving God for who He is and loving all human beings as His children.

The virtue of justice is not simply a theological idea. It requires actively serving God and neighbor so naturally that it is second nature. This is radically different than the revenge that society calls "justice." How can we bring God's justice to our broken and hurting world? Our first step must be prayer.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta, a saint who served the poorest and most destitute in India said, "I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that He will guide me to do whatever I am supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I am praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things."

We sometimes hear that prayer does not affect the wrongs in the world. As Catholics, we know this is not true. We know that God can and does act toward our good in ways we cannot see. But, as with all things in our faith, God asks for our participation. We are Christ's hands and feet in the world. He calls us to work toward justice and fight the sins that create injustice wherever and whenever we can.

We must be especially mindful of justice toward the poor, of which the Church has a special preference because Christ showed a preference for the poor. In one of his letters, St. John says we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, without caring for those with us (1 John 4:19-21). The Eucharist reminds us that the poor are our brothers and sisters who help us imitate Christ in giving to those who can give nothing in return. Saint Paul sharply condemned those who received the Eucharist without being mindful of how they were

serving the poor or who flat out rejected giving bread to those who were hungry.

As we grow in justice, the Church also gives us practical guidance, explaining how to act justly. The Church encourages us to pursue social justice — a society where everyone knows what is good, works toward that good, and helps each other along that path. After all, we are not individuals but social beings — we live in communities.

Social justice starts with a fundamental respect for the human person. Living justly means respecting others and their rights — not the rights bestowed by a country or institution, but the rights that flow from our dignity as children of God.

When speaking about rights, it is easy to think politically, but Christ calls us beyond politics. We must try to wipe away our prejudices and love others as we love ourselves. We must especially care for the disadvantaged and those who think and act differently than us, as we can easily feel they are less deserving.

Social justice also requires acknowledging our equality and differences. As children of God, we all have equal dignity and equal, God-given rights. But despite our equal dignity, our lives do not play out equally. Some face natural inequalities — age, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, and more — that are a part of God's plan. Others face inequalities that are the consequences of sin. Whether or not these sinful inequalities impact us personally, we must fight against them for the sake of those affected.

Solidarity is another vital part of social justice, totally changing whom and why we serve. When we serve those in need, we sometimes see them as projects rather than people. We sometimes help simply for the sake of helping. Solidarity teaches that we are one human family. Remembering this, we realize nothing in this world is truly our own — everything is a gift from God. Solidarity allows us to freely, unselfishly share material and spiritual goods with one another.

God made us unique and gave us unique callings. We all have different passions when it comes to social justice. Look at your deepest concerns about our world and learn how you can help. We must remember, though, that we are working toward the common good: a just society for all.

Christ and the Church show us, both in word and action, that caring for those in greatest need is not optional. Justice is a main mission of Christ and the Church and must become one of our main missions as well.

NATIONS_

In the midst of our day-to-day lives, we meet a lot of people. We meet people who share our faith, but we also meet people who disagree with our faith. We meet people who are joyful and filled with life, and we also meet people who are sad and angry. Each of these people, wherever they come from and whatever they have been through, have been created in the image and likeness of God and therefore, have an inherent dignity. They deserve to know Christ as we do, but we cannot count on someone else to share the faith with them. We need to assume that God wants us to be that person.

The process of sharing the Gospel is called "evangelization"; evangelization means to share the Good News. The Church exists to evangelize. From the time of the Great Commission, the Church has always understood this as a central part of her identity; she exists to preach and to share the Gospel. Each of us, as members of the Church, are called to share in this mission in a real and intimate way.

Evangelization is the sharing of the basic proclamation of the Gospel over and over again. As we move forward in our lives as disciples of Christ, we must place the desire to share this proclamation at the center of our lives and trust in the fact that it is the very Good News of the Gospel for the world.

First and foremost, we must receive the mission of the Church in our lives. The Church's mission is to preach Christ to the whole world and bring Him into relationship with all people. If we are going to live out the faith we have received, we must first accept that gift into our hearts. This is the central principle throughout our entire time of preparation for this moment: Before all else, we must encounter Christ and be loved by Him.

Once we have encountered Christ, we have no choice but to share Him. When we receive good news, we should automatically have a desire to share it with others; it is our natural response. In the Gospel, we receive the best news we could ever imagine: Each of us has been saved from sin and death by the life, death, and

Resurrection of Jesus. In Him, we have been reunited to the Father and now have the chance to invite others into that same relationship. As long as we have received from God in personal relationship and are continually returning to Him in prayer and the sacraments, we are ready to go forward and bring the joy of the Gospel to the world.

People will know our encounter with the Gospel by our lives. The way that we love those around us — through service, friendship, and giving — is the main way we can preach to those around us. When we encounter someone, they will first take note of the way we act. Do we want to interact with them? Do we have genuine concern for those around us? If we are not genuine in our encounters, we will lack credibility. We must be doers of the Word and not simply hearers, meaning we love all of those we encounter.

As important as the witness of our lives is, it is vitally important that we do not stop with our actions, but rather, continue the process by sharing what God has done in our lives. We are meant to not simply use our actions to preach the Gospel but, in many circumstances, to share the Gospel with our words.

Our testimony is simply the story of what God has done in our lives. Throughout our lives, each of us will have many different moments that we can share as testimony of what God has done. God is active in our world today and if we are continually seeking a relationship with Him, we will have many moments to encounter Him. In sharing these moments, we have the chance to share Jesus, whom we have encountered and know, with a world that desperately needs Him.

The goal is simple: to proclaim Christ to the person we encounter. In sharing our story, we have the chance to proclaim the person of Christ, testify to what He has done in our hearts and lives, and invite the person to encounter the living God. No matter what we do, we must remember this fact: Jesus is alive and well, and we have the ability to bring Him to those we meet in our daily lives.

Evangelization



An abstract painting with vibrant colors of red, orange, yellow, and blue. The background is a swirling, textured composition of these colors. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a white-bordered rectangular inset. Inside this inset, a figure is depicted, possibly a person or a spirit, rendered in a similar abstract style with blue and red tones. The overall mood is dynamic and spiritual.

MY PURPOSE_

Ongoing Relationship with the Holy Spirit

Faith is not a destination but a journey toward a destination. Our mission to live faithfully, share Christ, and grow closer to Him is not over until the day we pass from this life into the next. There will never be a point where we know it all, have it all figured out, or reach a perfection in faith. Until we meet Christ face to face, there is still growth that needs to happen for each of us. Even the greatest saints were still growing closer to Jesus up until the moment they passed away into eternal life. We are no different.

The disciples, when they reached the end of their journey with Christ, probably had a lot of fears. After Jesus died and rose, He spent time teaching and revealing more to the disciples and working more signs for them. Then, Jesus ascended into heaven and the disciples were left looking up toward where Jesus had disappeared from their sight. Can you imagine this moment and how terrified the disciples must have been? What happens next?

Jesus promises and sends the Holy Spirit to be with the disciples, and that Holy Spirit is with us on the journey, as well.

The Spirit of God lives within each one of us. This is the Spirit that inspired the Word of God, the Spirit that allows each of us to hear God's voice, and the Spirit that gives us the grace to follow God and pray to God each day.

As we live in the Spirit — first learning to see Jesus as Lord and worshiping Him — we are able to become the people we are called to be. We are given the gifts and fruits of the Spirit and are empowered to continually call out to God as Father. Even when the journey gets difficult and we do not know how to pray, the Spirit prays for us.

Faith is a journey toward eternity in the firm trust that this world, despite the suffering and setbacks we may experience, is not all there is. At the same time, faith in Christ calls us to share Jesus, the healer, with a world that is broken. Our faith compels us to love God and our neighbor. It draws us closer to the sacraments and gives us confidence in the grace we receive there. Our faith allows us to be powerful witnesses to the saving power of Jesus. It is a provocative reminder that there is something bigger than money, fame, success, or worldly affirmation. Faith transforms us and makes us new in Christ.

It is through the Holy Spirit that we make this journey of faith well. Every day our story continues, and God wants to do great things in and through us. The next steps of the story, a great story that has been told since the beginning of human history, belong to us. With the Holy Spirit, we will not simply walk them but will make them moments of grace and impact for all those we meet.



So He

Sent Me

to Them