



SYMBOLON[®]

THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

PART 1 KNOWING THE FAITH

LEADER'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION SESSIONS 1-10

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What does *Symbolon* mean?

In the early Church, Christians described their Creed, their summary statement of faith, as the *symbolon*, the “seal” or “symbol of the faith.”

In the ancient world, the Greek word *symbolon* typically described an object like a piece of parchment, a seal, or a coin that was cut in half and given to two parties. It served as a means of recognition and confirmed a relationship between the two. When the halves of the *symbolon* were reassembled, the owner’s identity was verified and the relationship confirmed.

In like manner, the Creed served as a means of Christian recognition. Someone who confessed the Creed could be identified as a true Christian. Moreover, they were assured that what they professed in the Creed brought them in unity with the faith the Apostles originally proclaimed.

This series is called *Symbolon* because it intends to help bring people deeper into that communion of apostolic faith that has existed for 2,000 years in the Church that Christ founded.

SYMBOLON

THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Welcome to *Symbolon*. In these first ten sessions of *Symbolon*, your participants will be led through the “big picture” of the Catholic faith, and the Creed will be their guide. This foundational study on God’s plan of salvation will prepare participants for the next ten *Symbolon* sessions that focus on living the faith through the sacraments and moral life. The Leader’s Guide, Participant’s Guide, and video videos are the three components you’ll be using for each of the *Symbolon* sessions. All three work together to enable the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist to help the participants to receive the Catholic faith and apply it to their everyday lives.

We’ve found that when these resources are used along with your personal witness to the faith, all the participants grow together in knowledge of the Catholic faith and in relationship with our Lord. Journeying deeper into the Church becomes so much more than following a set of teachings or customs as lives are transformed by God’s truth and grace.

SOME OF THE WAYS SYMBOLON IS BEING USED TODAY

- **Men’s & Women’s Groups:** For groups of men and women within the parish to grow in the faith through study, discussion, prayer, and service
- **Bible Study Groups:** To explore more the profound connections between the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- **RCIA:** As a comprehensive overview of the Catholic faith that helps catechumens and candidates discover what it means to believe in and live out the Catholic faith.
- **Before/After Masses:** To enrich people’s understanding of the faith they profess and the mysteries of the liturgy in which they participate each Sunday.
- **Advent & Lent:** To enhance efforts for ongoing conversion, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent.

- **Catechist Training:** For those who teach the faith throughout the parish, to help them have a more complete and cohesive understanding of the Catholic faith and to help them express it more clearly to those whom they teach.
- **Parent Sessions:** To help parents fulfill their role as the first educators of their children in the faith, especially in preparation for Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation.
- **Small Christian Communities:** To deepen the growth of parishioners as they participate in a variety of subgroups and apostolates within the parish.
- **Families:** As an in-home tool to help parents raise their children to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.
- **Individuals:** As a resource for anyone who wants to understand the Catholic faith better and be equipped to live it out and explain it to others better.

LEADING A SYMBOLON SESSION

Everything you need to lead a *Symbolon* session is found in the Leader's Guide. The resources are carefully crafted to lead participants through an opening of their hearts and minds to God's Word, into the key truths of the particular doctrine that is the focus of the session, and ultimately to make a response of faith by turning more fully to the Lord with each session.

The Leader's Guide for each session begins with a one-page overview of the doctrine and the key points that will be covered in the lesson. This is a way to get the "big picture" of the session firmly in your mind.

The rest of the Leader's Guide takes you step by step through each session. Each step has a script, which you can use verbatim or as a guide for what you would like to say in your own words. If you choose to use the script, it will help if you take the time to become very familiar with it so that it will have a natural feel as you read it. If you use your own words, you'll want to study the script so that you don't leave out an important idea.

Here are the Key Steps recommended for an effective *Symbolon* session:

- 1. Opening Prayer:** Your Leader's Guide gives an opening prayer along with Scripture suggestions for an optional Celebration of the Word of God (see using Symbolon in the RCIA Process below). The opening prayer is also found in the Participant's Guide, so participants can read along in order to focus their attention more during the prayer.
- 2. Introduction:** The leader gives a brief overview of the topic, including the key points for the session. This helps contextualize the topic, show its relevance for daily life, and inspire participants to delve into the particular aspect of the faith that is being presented.
- 3. Video Part I:** The first video introduces the topic and shows its relevance to someone seeking a relationship with God and the Church. This will help the participants open themselves to the truths that will be explored more in-depth in the next video.
- 4. Proclamation:** A summary statement of the doctrine that is the focus of the session is provided in the Leader's Guide. It is a statement of faith in what God has revealed, which can touch the hearts of the participants who are now open to hear his Word. This prepares participants for the more in-depth teaching that comes in Video Part II.
- 5. Video Part II:** The second video goes into more depth on the topic and gives a brief but thorough explanation of the essential truths that can unlock our understanding of the doctrine. It also includes a section on life application, calling participants to a deeper conversion and inviting them to give their lives more to Jesus through the particular aspect of the faith being presented.
- 6. Break:** A 10-minute break is recommended.
- 7. Discussion:** Discussion questions are included in both the Leader's and Participant's Guides. The questions are designed to help participants retain the key points by engaging with the doctrine through discussion. The questions also help to make the teaching more personal by asking the participants to apply what

they have heard to their own daily lives. If you have a large group, consider forming smaller groups for the discussion, with team members facilitating and keeping each small group on track.

- 8. Summary and Exhortation (Optional):** As a small group leader or catechist, you are ultimately God's instrument to transmit the faith to the persons participating in this program. The videos and other materials can help you do this in an engaging and articulate way, but they can't replace you as a living witness. You may, therefore, want to give a brief summary of some of the key points from today's session. Your Leader's Guide includes a summary of the key points to include, along with references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for each key point. You might choose to include a brief personal witness, a compelling quote from a saint, or a relevant Scripture in your exhortation. All of these resources can be found in your Leader's Guide or the corresponding *Catechism* citations.
- 9. Call to Conversion:** The climax of a *Symbolon* session comes when participants take time to prayerfully reflect on all they've learned and consider how it affects their lives. Direct people to their Participant's Guides, where personal reflection questions are provided. You may want to read through the meditations and questions with them from your Leader's Guide. Allow quiet time for them to reflect, to talk to God in prayer, and to respond by writing down their thoughts.
- 10. Closing Prayer:** End the session with a prayer that verbalizes our response to what has been presented. The closing prayer in your Guide has been specifically chosen to reflect back to God an appropriate response to his loving action in the session.

Both the Leader's and the Participant's Guides have references for further reading and study. The participants are encouraged to memorize and reflect on a Scripture Verse of the Week with every session. These resources will help them throughout the week to nurture the faith that has been deepened through your catechetical session.

HOW TO LEAD SMALL GROUPS

The *Symbolon* Leader's Guide provides opportunities for small group discussion, and the success of any small group begins with a leader. Leading a small group discussion doesn't mean you have to lecture or teach—a successful small group leader facilitates, getting group participants to interact with each other as they make new discoveries. Here are some tips to help you get started as you lead and facilitate your small group:

ENVIRONMENT

- **Discussion-Friendly**—Set up your meeting space so discussion and conversation happen naturally. Avoid sitting at tables or desks; instead arrange chairs in a circle or meet in a living room environment that encourages casual, friendly conversation. Choose a meeting space that's free of distractions and offers a fair amount of privacy.
- **Prep Ahead**—Because your study includes video segments, set up and test equipment ahead of time. Cue videos so they're ready to go to avoid losing valuable discussion time.
- **Snacks**—Depending on your meeting time, consider offering a light snack so participants won't be distracted by a growling stomach. If you don't offer any food items, always have water available for participants.

LOGISTICS

- **Name Tags**—Especially when you first begin meeting, have participants wear name tags so you can easily address them by name and other participants don't have to worry about trying to remember everyone's names.
- **Supplies**—Always have extra pens on hand for people to take notes. Also consider having highlighter pens, paper, and extra materials or Bibles available for participants to use.
- **Be Prompt**—While you can encourage a time to mingle at the beginning of your meeting time, don't let it get out of control so you have to rush through materials and discussion. If people know you're dedicated to starting on time, they'll begin to arrive a little early to socialize. Likewise, reserve your meeting space for 30 minutes after you're scheduled to end so people can mingle afterward. Be diligent to start and end on time.

BEFORE YOU MEET

- **Prepare**—Look over discussion materials and preview video segments before your meeting time. Go through the questions yourself to make your own discoveries about how they apply to your own life—this will help you be more credible as a leader.
- **Pray**—Take time to pray for group members individually and lift up any needs they've expressed during previous meetings. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open participants' hearts to spiritual growth, renewal, and new discoveries.
- **Evaluate**—As you get to know the needs of individuals and your group's dynamics, evaluate your discussion materials and highlight information or questions that you think would be particularly helpful and insightful for your group.

DURING THE MEETING

- **Set the Tone**—Let group members know from the beginning that your time together is meant to be for discussion and discovery, not lecture. Also remind participants that every question and answer is welcomed and worthy of discussion.
- **Encourage Involvement**—Work to invite all participants to engage in discussion. Don't be afraid of periods of silence, especially during your first few meetings. If one person begins to dominate the discussion time or gets off track from the topic, kindly acknowledge the person and invite him or her to explore that topic more after your group time. Ask questions such as "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" to encourage several people to respond.
- **Open-Ended Questions**—Use questions that invite thought-provoking answers rather than "yes" or "no," "true" or "false," or a one-word, fill-in-the-blank answer. As leaders, your job is to get participants to think about the topic and how the Scriptures and reflections can be relevant and applicable to their daily lives.
- **Affirm Answers**—People are often reluctant to speak up for fear of saying something wrong or giving an incorrect answer. Affirm every participant by saying things such as "Great idea," "I hadn't thought of that before," or "That's a great insight." These types of phrases communicate that you value everyone's comments and opinions.

- **Avoid Advice**—Remember, you're acting as a facilitator—not a college professor or counselor. Instead of giving advice or lecturing, when appropriate, offer how a Scripture passage or something in the video spoke to you personally, or give an example of how you've been able to apply a specific concept in your own life.
- **Be Flexible and Real**—Sometimes your group time may veer off-track due to something that's going on in our culture or community (for example, a natural disaster strikes your area or a group member is experiencing a family tragedy). Use relevant topics as a time to model for participants how God is always with us and that we can seek guidance from Scripture and the Church's Tradition and also how the Holy Spirit is always present guiding us to know God's truth. If you model relevant discussion and transparency, your group participants are more likely to do the same.
- **Transitions**—As you get close to ending your time together, transition discussions toward a time to share how participants will apply what's been discussed to their lives in the upcoming week. Close your time together in prayer each time you meet. Invite participants to share requests, either verbally or in writing, so you know how you can pray for them throughout the week.

AFTER THE MEETING

- **Stick Around**—As the leader, make yourself available after your meeting time for questions, concerns, or further discussion that a participant may have been hesitant to discuss during the scheduled time. If a question arises that has you stumped, admit that you don't have the answer but you'll contact someone who may be able to provide an answer, such as your parish priest, your deacon, or your diocese.
- **Follow-Up**—Throughout the week you may have an opportunity to follow up with group participants, especially when it's relevant to send an email or make a phone call for things such as a prayer request, question, or significant life event like a birthday or anniversary. Making contact with group members during the week to see how they're doing, how they are making lessons relevant in their own lives, or giving a quick encouragement to engage in daily Scripture reading and prayer will only strengthen the relational connections between you and your group participants.

SYMBOLON IN THE RCIA PROCESS

Though *Symbolon* is used for all kinds of adult faith formation settings, it was designed with the RCIA process in mind—which is fitting because the Church teaches that the process of the baptismal catechumenate is the model form of evangelization and catechesis.

For those using *Symbolon* for RCIA, the ten sessions on the Creed (*Symbolon*—Knowing the Faith) and the ten sessions on the Sacraments and Moral Life (*Symbolon*—Living the Faith) are ideal for the period of the Catechumenate because they provide a systematic and organic presentation of all the essential dogmas and doctrines of the Catholic faith which are to be presented during this period.

Each *Symbolon* session is also designed in such a way that the catechumens or candidates are not only provided this “complete” and “suitable” catechesis (RCIA, 75.1), but they are also guided through a process of discovery and conversion to Jesus Christ. Each session provides discussion questions that help apply the teaching they have received to their lives; then the catechumens and candidates are led into to an explicit call to conversion—a prayerful encounter with Christ and his Church, and then a firm resolution on how to live out their call to discipleship in their daily lives.

Also, each *Symbolon* session provides suggested Scripture readings to be used for a Celebration of the Word of God. The RCIA liturgical text calls for special celebrations of the Word of God to be held during the period of the Catechumenate, especially at the beginning of catechetical sessions. “These celebrations of the word are...celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction” (RCIA 81).

The model for how to conduct a Celebration of the Word of God using the Scripture reading suggested in the Leader’s Guide can be found in the RCIA ritual books paragraphs 85-89.

Augustine Institute partners with dioceses across the country to offer comprehensive on-site leadership training for RCIA directors, team members, sponsors, and clergy. For more information, visit Formed.org.

SAMPLE 90-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for an hour-and-a-half *Symbolon* session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

Time	Steps	Section Overview
5 minutes	STEP 1: Opening Prayer/ Celebration of the Word	Situate the session in the context of prayer.
4 minutes	STEP 2: Introduction of the Theme	Provide a brief outline of the session's key points.
10 minutes	STEP 3: Video Part I	Play the video.
10 minutes	STEP 4: Proclamation	Summarize the doctrine that is the focus of the session.
20 minutes	STEP 5: Video Part II	Play the video.
10 minutes	STEP 6: Break	
15 minutes	STEP 7: Discussion	Facilitate discussion in large or small groups.
5 minutes	STEP 8: Summary and Exhortation	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to surrender their lives more fully to Jesus through what they have learned.
10 minutes	STEP 9: Call to Conversion	Allow participants time to respond to the session with reflection and journaling.
1 minute	STEP 10: Closing Prayer	Close in prayer.

SAMPLE 120-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for a 2-hour *Symbolon* RCIA session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

Time	Steps	Section Overview
10 minutes	STEP 1: Opening Prayer/ Celebration of the Word	Situate the session in the context of prayer.
4 minutes	STEP 2: Introduction of the Theme	Provide a brief outline of the session's key points.
10 minutes	STEP 3: Video Part I	Play the video.
5 minutes	STEP 4: Proclamation	Summarize the doctrine that is the focus of the session.
20 minutes	STEP 5: Video Part II	Play the video.
10 minutes	STEP 6: Break	
25 minutes	STEP 7: Discussion	Facilitate discussion in large or small groups.
25 minutes	STEP 8: Summary and Exhortation	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to surrender their lives more fully to Jesus through what they have learned.
10 minutes	STEP 9: Call to Conversion	Allow participants time to respond to the session with reflection and journaling.
1 minutes	STEP 10: Closing Prayer	Close in prayer.

Session 1



THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE JOURNEY OF FAITH:

Trinity, Faith, & the God Who Is Love



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

An old proverb says the longest journey begins with a single step. This week your participants enter into a journey of faith development that will last for a lifetime and will, hopefully, end in Heaven.

Like all journeys, this one begins with a single step—the step of faith. Without that first step, the journey would simply be an intellectual exercise into the teachings of the Catholic religion. With faith, the journey becomes the foundation for deepening a loving relationship with God.

Whether you are a small group facilitator, parent, or catechist, you undoubtedly want to give your best in guiding and teaching the people God has entrusted to you in this faith formation process. But you should also realize that God is the one who is drawing his people near to him. Trust that he goes before you, and will continue to go before you as you travel in faith and prayer with the participants in this program. As you watch the participants grow in faith, trust also that he is taking you deeper into your faith and relationship with him, for in the words of St. Paul, “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

Over the next weeks, you and your participants will be delving deep into the heart of the teachings of the Catholic Church and exploring many of the great and beautiful mysteries of the faith. We begin today with a brief mention of some fundamentals like the Creed and the Trinity—because all great journeys must begin with a first step.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The God who is Love—the mystery of the Holy Trinity**
- **Why God made us and the relationship he wants to have with us**
- **How faith is our response to God’s invitation**
- **How to live our relationship with God: three practical tips for prayer**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our opening session.

Have participants turn to page 9 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week we are starting our journey into the heart of the Catholic faith. Like pilgrims of old, we are embarking on a sacred excursion. Over the next several weeks, we will be learning about many aspects of Catholicism—such as the Bible, the person of Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Blessed Virgin Mary—but before we begin, let us pray in the words of Psalm 139.



“O LORD,
you have searched me
and known me.
You know when I sit down
and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts
from far away.
You search out my path
and my lying down,
and are acquainted
with all my ways.
Even before a word
is on my tongue, O LORD,
you know it completely.
For it was you who formed
my inward parts;
you knit me together
in my mother’s womb.
I praise you,
for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made.”

—Psalm 139:1–4, 13–14

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader’s Guide)

Hebrews 11:1–3, 32–40

Ephesians 3:12

Hebrews 10:22

1 John 3:23

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Why are you here now, taking time to learn more about the Catholic faith? Some of you may be thinking, “It’s because my spouse or my friend brought me here!” Others of you may be curious regarding what Catholicism is all about. Still others may be seeking to deepen the faith you’ve had since childhood. Whatever may be the case, know that the real reason you are here is because God has brought you here. God desires to take you deeper into relationship with him and the Catholic Church. So I welcome each of you as we begin this sacred journey, a pilgrimage of faith.

Here are just a few of the many topics we’re going to explore in today’s session:

- The God who is Love—the mystery of the Holy Trinity
- Why God made us and the relationship he wants to have with us
- How faith is our response to God’s invitation
- How to live our relationship with God: three practical tips for prayer

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: OUR PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 10 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We heard in the video how we are all on a journey of faith. Let us now consider the importance of this spiritual pilgrimage by reflecting on who God is, why he made us, and the purpose he has for our lives.

God, who is perfect and happy on his own, did not create us for his own happiness, but he freely chose to create us so we can share his blessed life. We are created by the God who is love and we are made for his love. God calls each of us to draw near to him, to love him and seek him. God, in fact, is the Holy Trinity, a communion of love. God has only one divine nature, but that divine nature is expressed in the communion of three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II

FAITH: OUR RESPONSE TO GOD



SAY: In our second video segment, we will explore three fundamental questions:

- Why did God make us?
- Who is God?
- And, what is our appropriate response to God?

Let's listen now to the presenters as they address these questions.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 20 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After the video is finished,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we will discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.

STEP #7

DISCUSSION

Have participants turn to their Guide to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Faith is our response to the God who longs to make himself known to us. How do we make that response and how is faith in God more than just believing in God?

(Faith is both an assent of the mind as well as a personal commitment to God. We respond in faith by hearing the invitation of Jesus, who says, "Come, follow me" and saying "Yes" to that call to discipleship. That "Yes" to Jesus involves assenting to all he has revealed, and lovingly entrusting our lives to him and following his commandments. Therefore, faith is much more than just simply believing that God exists; it is having and continuously developing a personal relationship with God.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

The Holy Trinity is revealed to us through Jesus Christ. In other words, God wanted us to know, as the *Catechism* says, that “God is one but not solitary” (CCC 254).

Why do you think God wants you to know that he is not solitary?

(The inner life of God is a communion of self-donating love. God, out of his sheer goodness, has created us to share in this love. He invites us into his inner life. Each of us has the opportunity to be transformed by his love and to love as he loves.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

According to the video, what are three key elements of prayer?

(Jesus gave us the model for prayer in the “Our Father.” The first element is praise and thanksgiving. We focus on God, expressing our love and gratitude, acknowledging that God loves us and is in control of our lives. The second element consists of asking God for the things we need. Although God already knows our needs, he desires that we express them to him. Finally, we ask his forgiveness for the ways we have failed, the ways we’ve sinned, and at the same time, we forgive those who have offended us.)



STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- God, who is infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, did not create us to increase his own happiness. He freely chose to create us out of his own love and goodness, so that we could share in his blessed life (CCC 1, 293).
- We were created by the God who is love and we are made for his love. As St. Augustine says, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in him” (CCC 27–30).
- At every moment of our lives, God draws near to us, calling us to seek him, to know him, and to love him (CCC 1).
- There is only one God (CCC 200–202), but this one God has revealed himself as a communion of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (CCC 221).
- By sending the Son and the Holy Spirit to us, God has revealed his “inmost secret”—that his very being is a communion of love. As the *Catechism* teaches, “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC 221).
- The Holy Trinity is Three Persons in One God. As the *Catechism* teaches, “We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son’s is another and the Holy Spirit’s another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal” (CCC 266).
- Faith is our response to God who has made himself known to us. Faith has two key aspects. On one hand, it is an assent of our minds to all that he has revealed. On the other hand, it is a personal adherence to God in which we entrust our lives to him (CCC 150).



DIGGING DEEPER

Why Two Creeds?

We normally say the Nicene Creed at Mass, although The Apostles’ Creed is often used during Baptisms. So why do we have two creeds or basic statements of faith handed down from the early Church, since both proclaim belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? It has to do with clarity. The Apostles’ Creed is one of the earliest creedal statements of Christian belief originally used in Rome for Baptisms. By 325 AD, the Nicene Creed in its original form was written to address questions that arose about the Holy Trinity and Christ’s divinity. The Church preserves both of these traditions, using the Apostles’ Creed at Baptisms and the Nicene Creed ordinarily at Sunday Masses and major feasts.

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments asking Jesus to help you accept God's invitation of love. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Jesus says in the Bible, "Come, follow me." Envision Jesus saying that to you right now. How would you respond? What fears or hesitations might you have about following Jesus in your life? Remember that Jesus repeatedly said, "Do not be afraid."
2. As in any relationship, a relationship with God involves conversation. What can you do this week to make more time for prayer—for talking to God—in your life? Choose a time of day that you will reserve for getting to know God better. You may want to put it as an appointment in your calendar so that you don't forget.
3. Reflect on the following quote about prayer from St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the order of Jesuits:

"We must speak to God as a friend speaks to his friend, servant to his master; now asking some favor, now acknowledging our faults, and communicating to Him all that concerns us, our thoughts, our fears, our projects, our desires, and in all things seeking His counsel."

What is your experience with prayer? Have you ever spoken to God as a friend? Do you feel comfortable sharing all of your thoughts, even your fears and desires, with God? Write down one fear and one desire that you could share with God this week.

4. Jesus called those who came to him to believe in him, that they might have life abundant. Not everyone, however, answered the call to follow him. How will you respond?



STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on this journey of faith we are beginning.



Let's close our time together today by praying Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd,
there is nothing I lack.
In green pastures he makes me lie down;
to still waters he leads me;
he restores my soul.
He guides me along right paths
for the sake of his name.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff comfort me.
You set a table before me
in front of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me
all the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of the LORD
for endless days. —Psalm 23:1–6



FOR FURTHER READING:

For more in-depth reading about the journey of faith,
see the following *Catechism* passages:

Why God made us: CCC 294

The Trinity: CCC 238–248

Faith as our response to God: CCC 166

Prayer: CCC 2725, 2737, 2742–2745

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 1, 5, 35, 36

Time for God by Jacques Philippe

Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales

Praying Scripture for a Change by Tim Gray

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Session 2



DIVINE REVELATION



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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DIVINE REVELATION: God Seeking Us & the Compass for Our Lives



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Today, many people tend to think they can decide for themselves what is true, and what is morally right or wrong, and ultimately decide on their own what God wants for their lives. But in this week's lesson, we will see that God loves us too much to leave us to our own devices. Instead, he lovingly revealed himself and showed us the truth and his plan for our lives by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, as the fullness of his divine disclosure. This Divine Revelation has been passed down through the centuries by means of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Scripture and Tradition have been entrusted to the teaching authority (Magisterium) of the Catholic Church—the Church established by Christ himself.

Think of God's revelation, handed on by the Church, as a sort of sacred compass comprised of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. When we submit our lives to the compass of God's revelation, we are led out of the confusing currents and fads of the modern world, and liberated from our own selfish desires. As that happens, we will be pointed to the true path for human happiness, for God's revelation leads us into a relationship with the One who is our true North Star—Jesus, the Christ.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **Divine Revelation: why and how God reveals himself to us**
- **Jesus as the fulfillment of God's revelation**
- **The transmission of Divine Revelation through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition**
- **The Magisterium as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture and Tradition**

STEP #1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our session on Divine Revelation.

Have participants turn to page 17 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week, we are going to talk about how God, the all-powerful Creator of the Universe, loves us so much he wants to make himself and his will known to us. How astonishing it is that God is so in love with each of us that he not only sent his Son to redeem us, but he has promised that the message of Jesus will be preserved until the end of time!

Before we get into how this is accomplished, let us begin by praying together for the ability to accept God's guidance for our lives.



Father in Heaven,
Give us the power of your grace
that we might always walk
in the way you have revealed
through your Son, Jesus Christ.
Free us from the darkness of our own desires
and bring us into the light of your truth.
Form our lives according to your will,
mold our hearts by your love.
And grant that we might always be open and receptive
to the guidance of your Church.
We ask this in the name of the One who has promised
to be with us always,
now and forever. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

Suggested Scripture readings for a Celebration of the Word of God

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

Matthew 16:18-22

Matthew 10:1, 6-10

Hebrews 1:1-2

John 3:16

John 1:14-18

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Do you believe God is a personal God who wants to have a relationship with you?

Today, people have many different impressions about God. Some view him as a vague spiritual "force." Others may believe he exists but view him as an absentee God—a God who created the universe but doesn't interact in this world and in our daily lives. Still others don't think about God much at all, claiming to be "spiritual, but not religious."

None of these is the Christian view. For us as Christians, God is Love. And because God so loves us, he comes to find us. He wants us to know him so much that he reveals himself to us. We don't have to look for an elusive and evasive god, because God is looking for us.

How amazing it is that God seeks us out just so that we can know and love him!

Here are just a few of the many topics we're going to explore in this session:

- Divine Revelation: why and how God reveals himself to us
- Jesus as the fulfillment of God's revelation
- The transmission of Divine Revelation through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition
- The Magisterium as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture and Tradition

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: GOD'S SEARCH FOR MAN



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 11 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just heard how God revealed himself and his loving plan for all humanity through his Son, Jesus. We then learned how Jesus established the Catholic Church and why we need the Church to know what God has revealed. Now we are going to explore this plan of Divine Revelation in more depth.

God revealed himself and made known his loving plan of salvation so that we can know him and love him. This unveiling of God culminated in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who is the fullness of Divine Revelation. This revelation of Jesus Christ was handed on in the Church orally (through Sacred Tradition) and in writing (through Sacred Scripture) and was entrusted to the teaching authority of the Church, the Magisterium, for its authentic interpretation.

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: HOW WE KNOW GOD'S REVELATION: SCRIPTURE, TRADITION, AND THE MAGISTERIUM



SAY: In our second video segment, we will hear how we come to know and understand God's revelation through Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. Let's see how these three work together by watching this video.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 21 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After the video is finished,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we will discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

Sacred Tradition is the handing on through the apostolic preaching and witness of all that Christ did and taught through the doctrine, life, and worship of the Church (CCC 76). The Bible contains that part of Divine Revelation that the Holy Spirit ordained to be committed to writing, and the fullness of truth is contained in both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Therefore, nothing in Sacred Tradition can contradict Sacred Scripture, and Sacred Scripture can only be understood and interpreted in light of Sacred Tradition.

STEP #7

DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guide to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on Divine Revelation. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

What is inconsistent with this line of reasoning: "There is a God, God is love, but we can't know with confidence who God is and what his will is for us"?

(If you come to the conclusion that there is a God and that God is love, then you believe that God created you and loves you. If God created you, then there must be a purpose and plan for your life. If God loves you, then he wants you to know who he is and what his purpose and plan is for your life. It would not be very loving for God to have created you for a specific plan and purpose and then leave you guessing as to what that is.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Why do you think the Church from earliest times chose to use the word revelation, or unveiling, to describe how God has communicated to us?

(God, who is All Holy, unveils himself to us for one purpose: covenant love. He wants to enter into an eternal loving relationship with each one of us. So God allows us to see into the mystery of his inner life and communicates his will for our lives. In other words, he wants us to know him and his expectations for a loving relationship with him.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

In the video, the presenter used the imagery of a three-legged stool to describe how Divine Revelation is handed on. What are the three "legs" of the stool?

(The three legs of the stool in this analogy are Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church. If one or more of these legs is removed, God's revelation will not be known and understood, and the entire stool will collapse.)



DIGGING DEEPER

"Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others. Under the action of the one Holy Spirit, all of them together—and each in its own way—contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."
—Dei Verbum, 10



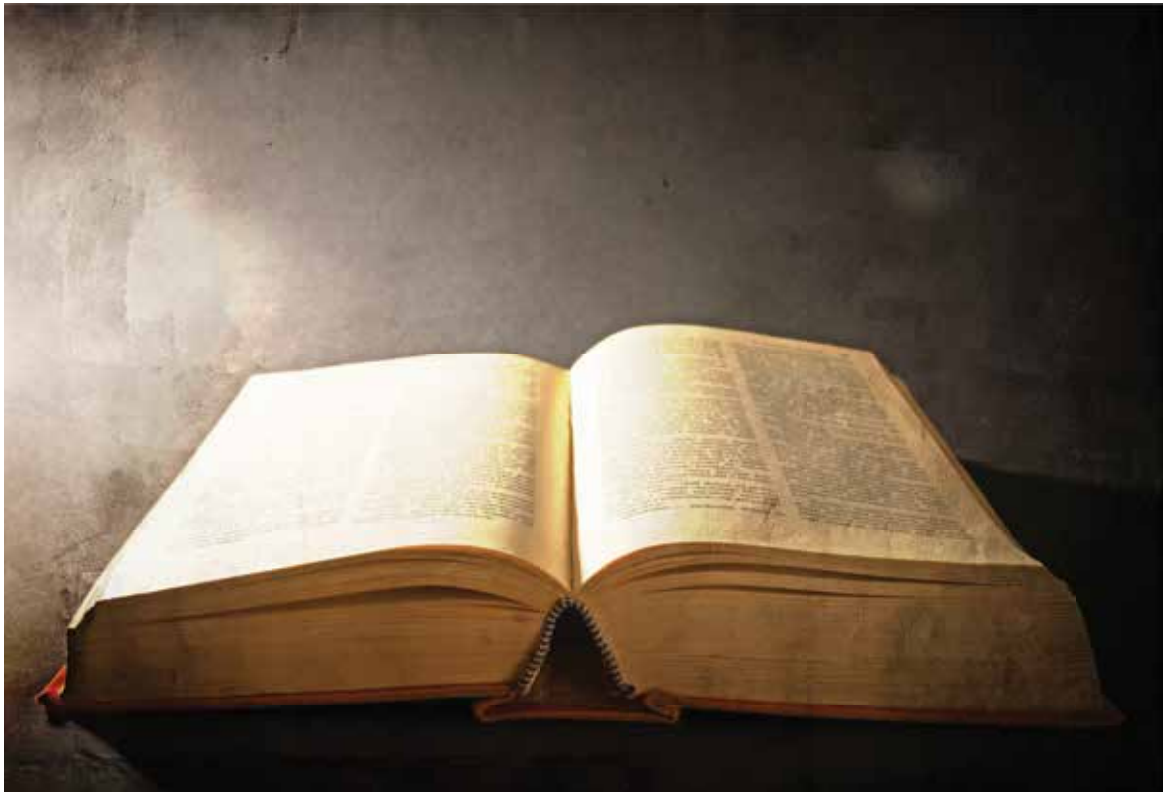
DIGGING DEEPER

Problems with Sola Scriptura

It is unbiblical: The belief that the Bible is the only source of Divine Revelation is not found in the Bible. Second Thessalonians 2:15 says that the followers of Christ hold fast to the traditions that were given to them, both orally and by written letter.

It is unhistorical: For the first 1,500 years of Christianity, Christians understood that Sacred Tradition and the teaching authority of the Church went hand in hand with the Bible. It was only after the Protestant Reformation that sola scriptura emerged as a widespread belief among some groups of Christians.

It is unworkable: The Bible was never written to be a stand-alone teacher. Without the authority of the Church, everyone interprets the Bible his or her own way. This is one of the reasons that there are more than 30,000 Christian denominations.



STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- God has chosen to reveal himself and make known to us his loving plan of salvation so that we can know him and love him (CCC 50-52).
- God gradually communicated himself and his will through deeds and words in salvation history culminating in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who is the fullness of Divine Revelation (CCC 53-65).
- The revelation of Jesus Christ was handed on in the Church orally through Sacred Tradition and in writing through Sacred Scripture (CCC 75-79).
- This “deposit of faith” contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition was entrusted by the Apostles to the teaching office of the Church, called the Magisterium, for its authentic interpretation (CCC 84-85).
- To know and understand God’s revelation, a Christian needs Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium. Each are so connected in the transmission of Divine Revelation that one cannot stand without the others (CCC 95).



STEP #9**CALL TO
CONVERSION**

SAY: Spend a few moments in prayer asking Jesus to help you to be more receptive to his revelation as handed on through the Catholic Church. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Do I really accept Jesus’s revelation as the standard of truth for my life, or do I tend to make up my own moral and religious truth? Do I believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ measures my life, or do I view myself as measuring him, picking and choosing what I want to accept from Christ’s teachings and setting aside what I don’t want to follow?
2. What can I do this week to allow God’s revelation to guide me more in my life—in my moral decisions, in my prayer, in my relationships, and in what I consider most important in life? How can I entrust my life more to Jesus and follow God’s ways more?
3. Reflect on the following quote about the teaching authority of the Catholic Church from George Weigel, biographer of Pope St. John Paul II, in your Participant’s Guide:

“The Catholic Church believes that the truths it has been given by Christ free us as well as bind us. They are liberating truths. To accept the Church’s teaching as authoritative and binding is only a ‘restriction’ on my freedom if I imagine freedom to be an unbridled exercise of my imagination and will. (And in that case, I have chained myself to my own willfulness.) If freedom has something to do with learning what is genuinely good, for myself and for others, then the truth about what is good for me and others isn’t a restriction. It’s a means of liberation” (George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic*).

According to this quote, how can the teaching authority of the Church be a means of freedom for my life, rather than something restrictive that limits my freedom?



STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on what we learned about Divine Revelation and to incorporate God's revelation more into your daily life.



Let's close our time today by praying together a part of Psalm 119, which thanks God for his revelation to us.

Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;
And I will keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law
And observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of thy commandments,
For I delight in it...
How sweet are thy words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through thy precepts I get understanding...
Thy word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

—Psalm 119:33–35, 103–105



FOR FURTHER READING:

For more in-depth reading about the journey of faith, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Revelation and the Plan of Salvation: CCC 50–53

How God has revealed himself in the Old Testament: CCC 54–64

Jesus, the fullness of Revelation: CCC 65–73

How this Revelation is handed on to us: CCC 74

Apostolic Tradition and Authority: CCC 75–79

The Magisterium CCC 84–95

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 2 and 3

The Bible Compass by Dr. Edward Sri

For additional information on Apostolic and Authority, see the following Scripture passages:

Matthew 10:1–6, 10, 40

Matthew 16:18–22

2 Thessalonians 2:15

1 Corinthians 11:23–24

1 Corinthians 15:3–5

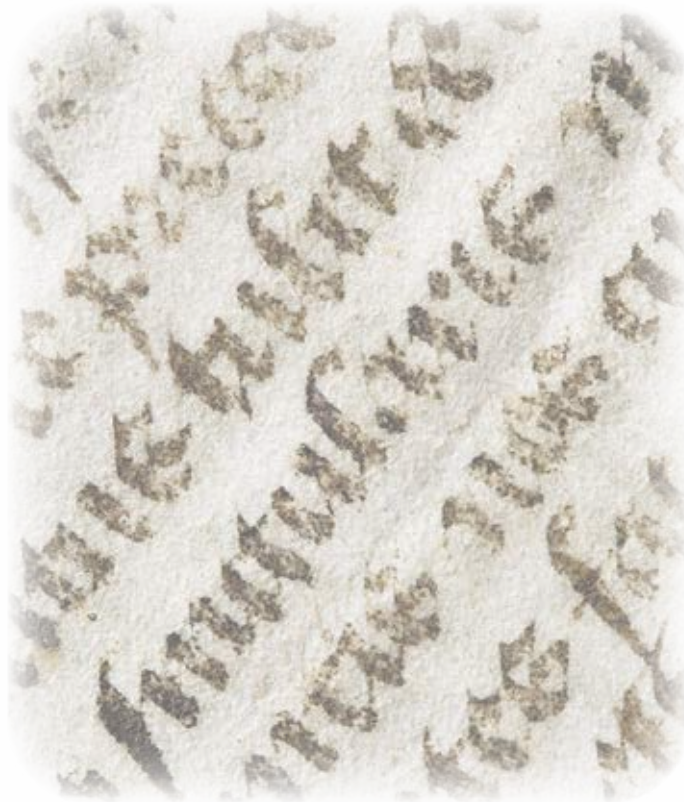
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Session 3



THE BIBLE



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Nihil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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THE BIBLE:

God's Love Letter to Humanity



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Most people know what a Bible is, even if they have never read a word of it. If you ask them what it contains, they probably will say that it is full of a lot of rules and moral teaching, and maybe some stories they learned as children, like Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark.

But the Bible is much more than that. The Bible is God's love letter to humanity.

In the Sacred Scriptures, our Father in Heaven reaches out to lovingly talk to his children. Through the words of the Bible, God speaks to us in a deeply personal and intimate way. Within its 73 books, the Bible outlines God's plan for salvation, starting with Creation, moving through his interaction with his Chosen People Israel, and finally culminating with the story of how his Son, Jesus, entered into time and put a human face on the Divine.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, in the Bible "God speaks to man in a human way" (CCC 109) through the work of human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Sacred Scripture, God wants to guide our daily lives, so that we can come to know and love him on earth and be with him in Heaven for eternity.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The Bible as God's loving communication with each of us**
- **What we mean when we say the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit**
- **The Catholic approach to interpreting Scripture correctly**
- **How the Church discerns which books are part of the Bible (the canon of Scripture)**
- **How we can know with confidence that the Bible contains God's revelation for our lives**
- **How to start studying the Bible and praying with God's Word**

STEP #1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our session on Sacred Scripture.

Have participants turn to page 23 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week we are going to talk about God's love letter to humanity—the Bible—and how God reaches out to us and seeks to initiate a conversation with us. When you think about it, it's astonishing that God wants to lovingly talk with each of us about our lives. But before we get into how this happens, let us begin by saying together the prayer of St. John Chrysostom before reading Sacred Scripture.



O Lord Jesus Christ,
open the eyes of my heart,
that I may hear your word
and understand and do your will,
for I am a sojourner upon the earth.
Hide not your commandments from me,
but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law.
Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.
On you do I set my hope, O my God,
that you shall enlighten
my mind and understanding
with the light of your knowledge,
not only to cherish those things
which are written, but to do them;
that in reading the lives and sayings
of the saints I may not sin,
but that such may serve for my restoration,
enlightenment and sanctification,
for the salvation of my soul,
and the inheritance of life everlasting.
For you are the enlightenment of those
who lie in darkness,
and from you comes every good deed
and every gift. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

2 Timothy 3:14–17

Deuteronomy 11:18–23

Psalms 119:105

Joshua 1:8

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: What do you think of when you hear the word “Bible”? A big book that was written thousands of years ago? A set of rules and regulations? Stories like Adam and Eve or Noah’s Ark?

Or do you think of the Bible as one of the ways God communicates his will and gives us guidance for our daily lives? That’s how we, as Christians, are supposed to view Sacred Scripture. In fact, as one of the presenters in this week’s video segment says, the word “Bible” might be thought of as an abbreviation for “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.”



Because the Bible is so important to our lives, in this session we are going to learn:

- The Bible as God’s loving communication with each of us
- What we mean when we say the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit
- The Catholic approach to interpreting Scripture correctly
- How the Church discerns which books are part of the Bible (the canon of Scripture)
- How we can know with confidence that the Bible contains God’s revelation for our lives
- How to start studying the Bible and praying with God’s Word

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: GOD’S INSPIRED WORD



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 10 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We have just heard how the Bible is different from any other book ever written. Every other religious book is the story of man's search for God, but the Bible is the only sacred book that is God's revelation to us. It alone is inspired by God, who breathed forth his Divine Word through the words of the human authors. In the Bible, God himself speaks to us and reveals who he is, and what his plan is for humanity.

In order to reveal himself to us, God communicates in a human way through Sacred Scripture, which contains the words of God expressed in the words of men. God is the author of Sacred Scripture. He inspired human writers to compose the sacred books and gives assurance that they teach his saving truth without error. There are 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, which together tell one story of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. In order to interpret Scripture correctly, we must pay attention to what God wants to reveal through the sacred writers. The Catholic Church has always considered Sacred Scripture, along with Sacred Tradition, as part of God's Divine Revelation (CCC 96–100, 134–141).

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: GOD'S COMMUNICATION WITH US



SAY: In our second video segment, we will hear how we come to know and understand how the Catholic Church discerned which books to include in the Bible, how we interpret Sacred Scripture, and what the Bible should mean in our lives.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 22 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Scripture

"The Bible, an instrument 'by which God speaks every day to the faithful' (Ep. 133, 13), thus becomes a stimulus and source of Christian life for all situations and for each person...Through meditation on and knowledge of the Scriptures, one 'maintains the equilibrium of the soul' (Ad Eph., Prol.). Only a profound spirit of prayer and the Holy Spirit's help can introduce us to understanding the Bible: 'In the interpretation of Sacred Scripture we always need the help of the Holy Spirit.'"

—Benedict XVI, General Audience, 14 November 2007

STEP #6 BREAK

After the video is finished,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



STEP #7 DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guide to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on the Bible. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Why is it true that “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”?

(The Bible is God's revelation to mankind—it is a compilation of God's interaction with mankind throughout history. God has been trying to teach us about himself throughout human history. If we don't understand the Scriptures, we don't understand the truths about God that he has been trying to teach us.)



DIGGING DEEPER

Sola Scriptura

Most Protestant denominations adhere to *sola scriptura*, which means “scripture alone.” This is the mistaken doctrine that the Bible, outside of any other tradition or authority, contains all that is necessary for salvation and holiness. According to this view, which was made popular in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the Church cannot teach through Sacred Tradition, but only through Scripture. But Jesus, the Apostles, and the early Christian Church never intended the Bible to be read in this way. The Scriptures always were meant to be read in light of tradition (2 Thes. 2:15) and the teaching authority Jesus gave his Church (see Matt. 10:1, 7-8, 40; Matt. 16:13-19). *Sola scriptura* is considered one of the founding principles of the Protestant Reformation.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

According to the video, what does it mean that Catholics don't interpret the Bible in a literalistic way, but they do read the Bible literarily? What examples does the presenter give?

(The Catholic approach to Scripture is different from the fundamentalist view, which reads Scripture in a literalistic way. To discern the truth God put in Scripture, we must interpret the Bible literarily, remembering that God speaks to us in a human way, through the human writers of Scripture. That means that we examine the context and intent of the author for any given passage. For example, when the author of the Song of Solomon stated, "You are beautiful; your eyes are doves," he did not intend for the reader to think his beloved literally had doves in her eyes, but that her eyes were as captivating as doves (Song of Solomon 1:15). However, when the writer intended to convey historical truth, such as reporting that Jesus's tomb was empty, indicating the reality of the Resurrection, we interpret those passages as literal fact. As the Catechism explains, to interpret the Bible correctly, one must consider the historical context, the culture, the literary genres, and the modes of expression and narratives common to the biblical writers' time (CCC 109-110). When we interpret the Bible correctly, considering the human writer's intention and what the Holy Spirit wishes to reveal through the human writer, we will come to know the truth God reveals in Scripture.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Let's say a friend of yours, while speaking about a passage she was reading in the Bible, states, "It was like God was speaking directly to me—directly into a situation in my life—when I read the passage." How is this possible?

(The Bible is a compilation of testimonies and records of God speaking throughout history. God is without time; his words are not in the past, but rather they speak through time. Reading the stories of God's revelation to mankind is a great way to allow God to use his words to speak into our lives.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- Sacred Scripture contains the Word of God in the words of man (CCC 101).
- God is the author of the Sacred Scriptures. He inspired human writers who wrote as true authors, using their own language, style, and powers. But God worked in them and by them so that they consigned to writing “whatever he wanted written, and no more” (CCC 105-106).
- Because God is the divine author and everything affirmed by the human writers is affirmed by the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures always teach the truth (CCC 107).
- The Bible is not to be read in a literalistic way, but literarily, with attention to what the human writers intend to affirm and to what God wants to reveal through them (CCC 108-114).
- All Scripture tells a single story—the story of salvation that culminates in Jesus. The Old Testament prepares for the New, and the New Testament fulfills the Old (CCC 101-102, 122, 128-129).
- The Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Spirit, has discerned which books are included in the list (or canon) of authentic Scriptures (CCC 120).
- The Church has always seen the Scriptures as essential to nourish and govern Christian lives (CCC 131).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments in prayer asking Jesus to help you learn to love Sacred Scripture and use it on your journey of faith. Use your Participant's Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path." What does this passage mean to me? Am I willing to read God's Word in Scripture with an open heart and mind, expecting that God will give me insights for my life?
2. What can I do this week to make the reading of Scripture a greater part of my life? (Consider reading the Bible, perhaps starting with the Gospel of Luke as suggested in the video.)
3. Reflect on the following quote from Pope St. Gregory found in your Guide about the role of Scripture as we grow in faith:

"The Holy Bible is like a mirror before our mind's eye. In it we see our inner face. From the Scriptures we can learn our spiritual deformities and beauties. And there too we discover the progress we are making and how far we are from perfection."

How might thinking of the Bible as a mirror and as a way to learn about my spiritual progress make a difference in how I listen to the readings at Mass? What can I do to be better prepared for the Scripture readings each week?

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on what we learned about the Bible.

Let's close our time together today by praying.

A Prayer Before Reading Scripture

We praise and thank you
glorious Lord Jesus Christ,
for being present among us
and in us.

In us you praise the Father
with the voice of the Spirit,
whom you have given us.
Lord, may this voice of the Spirit
be roused in us as we listen to the words
of Scripture in a manner
that is worthy and fitting,
appropriate to the meaning
of the text and in harmony

with what is revealed to us.
Make us ready to recognize
how we can correspond
to the teaching and example
proposed to us, for you are God,
living and reigning
for ever and ever. Amen.

—Carlo Maria Martini, SJ



FOR FURTHER READING:

For more in-depth reading about Sacred Scripture, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Christ as the Word of God: CCC 101–104

Inspiration and the truth of Scripture: CCC 105–108

The Holy Spirit and Sacred Scripture: CCC 109–119

Books of the Old Testament: CCC 120–123

The New Testament canon: CCC 124–127

Scripture and the Church: CCC 131–133

If you don't have an approved Catholic translation of the Bible, such as the New American Bible or the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, in your home, obtain one or find online at www.ignatius.com

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 3

A Father Who Keeps His Promises: God's Covenant Love in Scripture by Scott Hahn

Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible by Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins

Catholic Bible Dictionary by Scott Hahn

Where is THAT in the Bible? by Patrick Madrid

The Bible Compass: A Catholic's Guide to Navigating the Scriptures by Dr. Edward Sri

The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible series by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch

NOTES

NOTES

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Session 4



THE STORY OF SALVATION

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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THE STORY OF SALVATION: Creation, Fall, & Redemption



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Humans are natural-born storytellers. From the nights when primitive peoples gathered around a flickering campfire to discuss the tribe's mammoth hunt, to today's blogs about our cats and dinners, we share the stories of our lives with almost anyone who will listen. We do so for many reasons, but one of the most important is that we want to know that our lives have meaning and significance. We tell our stories so that we can feel like our existence is not in vain.

The story of salvation, which we profess in the Creed, is, as the famous movie title says, "The Greatest Story Ever Told." That great story assures us that there is a purpose to life and a reason for our own lives. It tells us that we aren't merely spectators to the passage of time. From the beginning of history when our first parents rebelled against God, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus, God has been writing his plan of salvation. We each have God-given roles to play in that story and if we refuse God's loving invitation, the entire world is poorer. The reality is that God's story of love isn't complete without each one of us.

What's your role in this great story? Are you ready to accept it? These are some of the important questions you will explore with your participants in this week's session on the story of salvation.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The three major parts in the story of salvation: Creation, Fall, and Redemption**
- **How originally we were united with God and experienced harmony within the human family**
- **How sin broke our unity and left us with an inclination toward sin, called concupiscence**
- **How Jesus came to restore us to the Father, but also to establish the Catholic Church to gather the broken family of humanity into the united family of God**

STEP #1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our next session in *Symbolon*. This week we are going to be looking at the “Greatest Story Ever Told,” the story of salvation from the Creation to the present day. As we begin, let us pray in the words of St. Albert the Great, whom we call a Doctor of the Church:

Have participants turn to page 29 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.



We pray to you, O Lord,
who are the supreme Truth,
and all truth is from you.
We beseech you, O Lord,
who are the highest Wisdom,
and all the wise depend on you for
their wisdom.
You are the supreme Joy,
and all who are happy owe it to you.
You are the Light of minds,
and all receive their understanding
from you.
We love, we love you above all.
We seek you, we follow you,
and we are ready to serve you.
We desire to dwell under your
power for you are the King of all.
Amen.



CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

Genesis 3:15

Ephesians 1:3–10

Romans 8:31–34

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Every time we turn on the news, we hear about all the horrible things that are happening in the world. We get the message that life is a meaningless struggle and that we have no purpose, no reason to be here except to get as much as we can before we die. How sad is that? As Christians, however, we know that God does have a purpose for each of us and for our lives.

Here are just a few of the many topics we're going to explore in today's session:

- The three major parts in the story of salvation: Creation, Fall, and Redemption
- How originally we were united with God and experienced harmony within the human family
- How sin broke our unity and left us with an inclination toward sin, called concupiscence
- How Jesus came to restore us to the Father, but also to establish the Catholic Church to gather the broken family of humanity into the united family of God

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: CREATED FOR A PURPOSE



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 11 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

Concupiscence

According to Catholic teaching, as a result of Original Sin, human nature is "wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin." Catholics also believe that through the graces of the Sacrament of Baptism, Original Sin is removed and we are filled with God's life, but concupiscence, the tendency toward sin, remains throughout life. As the Catechism states: "Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle" (CCC 405).

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We have just listened to the presenters talk about how God has a plan for our lives. But in the world today, many people have lost a sense of meaning and purpose. The modern world has lost its story. Let us now consider how God's plan of salvation (as summed up in the Creed) gives us the true plot to our lives.

God created us to know him and love him. In the beginning, humanity lived in perfect harmony with God and each other. But man and woman sinned by disobeying God and refusing to give themselves in love. This "Original Sin" not only broke the harmony with God, but also within humanity, and left us with an inclination toward sin (called concupiscence). God sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins and offer the perfect gift of love that restores us to the Father. And he sent the Holy Spirit to fill us with his very life. The Catholic Church passes on the teachings of Christ and, through the sacraments, dispenses the graces he won for us on the Cross.

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: THE STORY OF SALVATION



SAY: In our second video segment, we will look at the three basic parts of the story of salvation. We will learn how that story began with Creation and continues up until today. Let's listen now to the presenters as they explain what this means and how it affects our lives today.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 22 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.

STEP #7 DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our *Symbolon* session on the story of salvation. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.



DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Dr. Sri talks about the story of salvation and how this story plays a role in each of our lives. What does it mean that “our modern world has lost its story,” and why does that matter?

(Secularization is the process in which religion loses social and cultural significance. It creates an environment where God is no longer welcome, whether in politics, education, or even the arts. We are living in an increasingly secularized world, and this is the reason the world has lost its story. It would appear that many people no longer take Christianity seriously and therefore Christianity no longer provides a meaningful narrative for their lives. This is tragic because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Only in Jesus do our lives make sense and have purpose. In Jesus we know where we have been—dead in our sin; where we are—loved and redeemed; and where we are going—everlasting glory.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Dr. Sri speaks of a timeline that demonstrates how salvation history is the growth of God's family as he draws mankind back to himself. Here is the process by which God's family grows:

*One Couple → One Family → One Tribe → One Nation → One Kingdom → One Church
(Adam & Eve) → (Noah) → (Abraham) → (Moses) → (David) → (Jesus and the Apostles)*

Consistent throughout salvation history are covenants. How does entering into a covenant “define the relationship” between God and his people?

(God established a covenant with each one of these people in the Bible. Covenant comes from the Latin word convenire, which means “to come together.” Covenants make families. They are more than an exchange of property [contracts]; they are an exchange of persons. For example, in the marriage covenant the spouses are saying to one another, “I am yours and you are mine until death do us part.” Covenants are more than just a promise because they involve oaths. In a covenant, you are swearing to God that you will fulfill your promises. Violating a covenant oath triggers curses because an oath has no power if there are not consequences for violating that oath. Jesus established the new covenant. He made it possible, through his paschal mystery, for us to no longer be creatures but sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Even

though we broke our covenant with God, he demonstrated his faithfulness to his covenant by sending his Son to take upon himself the covenant curses that rightfully belonged to us.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

In the video we were reminded that we all have an inclination toward sin. As St. Paul says in Romans 7:15, “For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.” Recall sometime in the last week when you didn’t do something that you knew you should or did something that you knew you shouldn’t. Ask God to help you make a better choice the next time a similar circumstance arises.

(Original Sin is the first sin of the human family, contracted by our first parents, who disobeyed God. Their sin resulted in humanity’s inclination toward evil and wrongdoing, called concupiscence. Concupiscence is something every human experiences. This pull toward sin and evil persists throughout our lives and becomes one of humanity’s ongoing struggles (CCC 2520). You may want to give a few examples from your own life, such as not getting up on time or eating an extra piece of cake, to show that this inclination toward sin, while it doesn’t always result in actual sin, is something we have to battle all our lives.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- God, who is infinitely perfect and happy in himself, freely created man to make him share his own goodness and love (CCC 1).
- Originally, we were united with God (on the vertical level) and experienced harmony within the human family (on the horizontal level). Humanity was the united family of God reflecting the unity of God himself (CCC 376).
- Man and woman sinned, disobeying God and refusing to give themselves in love (CCC 397–398).
- This sin broke our relationship with God and broke the harmony between man and woman (CCC 396).
- This Original Sin also brought death into the world and wounded our human nature, leaving us with an inclination toward sin, called concupiscence (CCC 400, 404–405).
- God sent his Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, offering on our behalf the perfect gift of love that restores us to the Father, and to send the Holy Spirit to fill us with his very life (CCC 457–460).
- Jesus established the universal “Catholic” Church to gather the broken family of man into the united family of God (CCC 830).
- The Catholic Church passes on the teachings of Christ and, through the sacraments, dispenses the graces he won for us on the Cross to enable us to live like Christ on earth and with him forever in Heaven (CCC 774–776, 849).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Now that we've had a chance to look at the story of salvation and our part in it, let's spend a few minutes in prayer and contemplation. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Now is your time to enter the story of salvation. What might you be putting off with regard to your faith? Is God asking you to do something right now? If you have been reluctant or afraid to commit your life to Jesus, spend some time writing about the reasons why. Are you afraid of what your friends or members of your family might say? Pray with the father who asked Jesus to cure his son: "Lord, I believe. Help my disbelief!"

2. Read the following quote from Pope Benedict XVI:

"Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary."

List two or three roles that you play in your life, such as parent, worker, or friend. Now consider what would happen if you don't live those relationships well. Who would suffer? What wouldn't be accomplished? Say a prayer of gratitude that you have been, in the words of Psalm 139:14, "fearfully and wonderfully made" and ask God for the grace to help you fulfill your responsibilities with the people and missions he has entrusted to you.

3. In his "Meditation on Two Standards," St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, challenges us to see the real struggle between good and evil in the world today. Following the spirit of his meditation, prayerfully imagine a battlefield with Jesus, the commander-in-chief of good, on one side calling all people under his standard (his flag). He calls men and women to follow him with humility, patience, generosity, purity, poverty, and sacrificial love. Next, imagine on the other side of the field Satan, the chief enemy of all that is good, inviting people under his flag. He entices people away from Jesus through the lure of riches, the pursuit of worldly honor and success, pride, and lust, and he distracts them from the true meaning of life with constant busyness and amusements. Finally, put yourself on that field and honestly consider: Which side attracts you the most? In what ways are you pursuing the standard of Christ? In what ways do you find yourself lured by the standard of the devil? What ways can you live more for Christ's kingdom and not Satan's?



DIGGING DEEPER

Catholic

The word *Catholic* has become so closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, most people forget that its original meaning was *universal*, pointing to how Christ's Church is the worldwide family of God, welcoming people of all nations, languages, economic levels, and social statuses into communion with Christ. St. Ignatius of Antioch first used the term "Catholic Church" in his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, writing about the year 107, "Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the story of salvation and your part in it.



Let's close our time together today by praying:

We give you praise, Father most holy,
for you are great and you have fashioned
all your works in wisdom and in love.
You formed man in your own image
and entrusted the whole world to his care,
so that in serving you alone, the Creator,
he might have dominion over all creatures.
And when through disobedience
he had lost your friendship,
you did not abandon him to the domain of death...
And you so loved the world, Father most holy
that in the fullness of time you sent
your Only Begotten Son to be our Savior...
To accomplish your plan, he gave himself up to death,
and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life.
And that we might live no longer for ourselves
but for him who died and rose again for us,
he sent the Holy Spirit from you, Father,
as the first fruits for those who believe,
so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world,
he might sanctify creation to the full.

—From the *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer IV



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading about story of salvation, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Created in the image of God: CCC 356–358

Before the Fall: CCC 376–379

Original sin: CCC 396–405

The gift of Jesus: CCC 457–460

The Catholic Church: CCC 830–848

Sending of the Holy Spirit: CCC 731–737

The Last Judgment: CCC 1038–1041

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 6–10

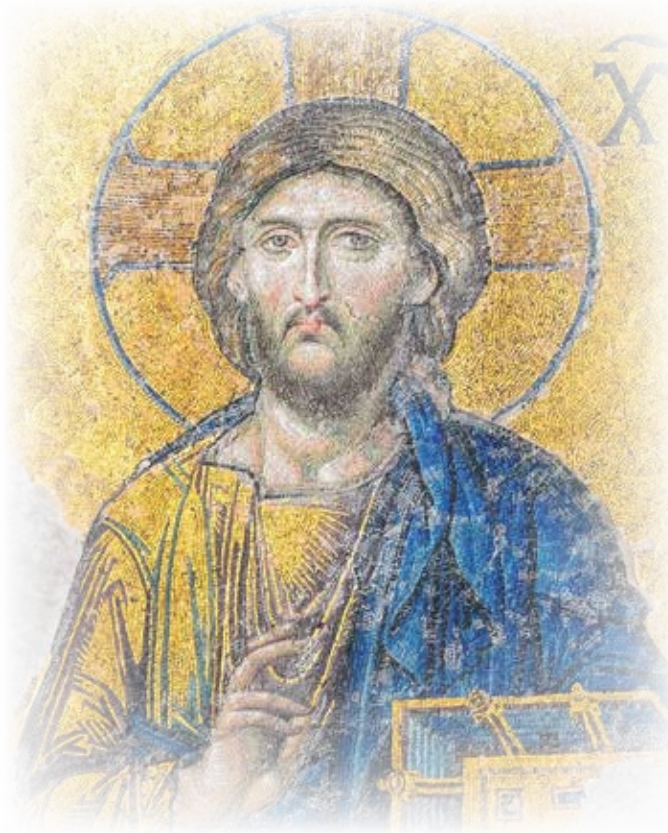
Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith by Bishop Robert Barron

Creed and Catechetics by Eugene Kevane

NOTES

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Session 5



WHO IS JESUS?

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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WHO IS JESUS?

Just a Good Man or Lord of Our Lives?



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Who is Jesus? Today most people agree that Jesus was a historical figure, a first-century Jew who was crucified by the Romans in the city of Jerusalem. Many would even agree that he offered some good moral teachings such as “love your neighbor,” “turn the other cheek,” and “don’t judge.” However, the idea that Jesus is not just a moral or spiritual teacher, but God himself, is as controversial now as it was in Jesus’s own time. It’s much easier to put Jesus into the same category as Buddha, or Mohammed, or Confucius—a spiritual messenger, a prophet, a philosopher, but certainly not divine.

However, that is exactly what Christians profess in the Creed—“I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.” Jesus is not just someone sent from God; he himself is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.”

This is not just something the early Christians invented. Jesus himself made the claim to divinity. If Jesus is not God, then, as C.S. Lewis famously noted, he is either a liar or a madman. But the fact that he did say that he was God, the I AM of the Old Testament, means that each of us is challenged to make a decision about what we believe. The question Jesus asked the Apostles, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29) is the same question he asks each of us throughout the centuries. How we answer his question makes all the difference for our lives. It is the fundamental decision each one of us must make—a decision that will last throughout eternity.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **How, in the fullness of time, God has spoken to us through his Son, Jesus**
- **How Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on human nature without losing his divine nature**
- **That Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man**
- **That Jesus is one divine person who possesses two natures**
- **Why Jesus became man so that we can be reconciled to God and to know God’s love**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our session on “Who is Jesus?” This week we are going to talk about Jesus. No one who has ever lived has had a greater impact on the world than Jesus of Nazareth, and the question of Jesus’s identity is central to our faith. Before we look more deeply into that question, let us begin by saying together the prayer of St. John Gabriel Perboyre, a French priest who died as a martyr in China on September 11, 1840.

Have participants turn to page 37 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.



O my Divine Savior,
Transform me into yourself.
May my hands be the hands of Jesus.
Grant that every faculty of my body
May serve only to glorify you.
Above all,
Transform my soul and all its powers
So that my memory, will, and affection
May be the memory, will, and affections
Of Jesus.
I pray you To destroy in me
All that is not of you.
Grant that I may live
But in you, by you, and for you,
So that I may truly say, with St. Paul,
‘I live—now not I—
But Christ lives in me.’
Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader’s Guide)

John 14:10

John 17:5

Philippians 2:6

Luke 5:22–24

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Many people today view Jesus as just one of the many great moral and religious teachers the world has offered. But Jesus himself claimed to be much more than that. He claimed to be God. As Christians, we profess that each time we say the Creed. But what does it really mean to say that Jesus is true God and true man?

In this session we are going to explore that question, as well as:

- How, in the fullness of time, God has spoken to us through his Son, Jesus
- How Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, took on human nature without losing his divine nature
- That Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man
- That Jesus is one divine person who possesses two natures
- Why Jesus became man so that we can be reconciled to God and to know God's love

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: WHO IS JESUS?



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 12 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus Christ

We use the word “Christ” after the name of Jesus so often some people may think that was his last name, like Smith or Jones. But “Christ” isn’t a name; it’s a title, meaning “anointed one.” It comes from the Greek word *Christos*, which is a translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah. So, when we say Jesus Christ, we are really saying “Jesus, the Messiah”—the one anointed by God to accomplish his plan of salvation. It is a mini-statement of faith, an acknowledgement that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just heard how viewing Jesus merely as a good man or a great moral teacher isn't a logical option. As the presenter pointed out, Jesus claimed to be God. And that means we have to make a decision about him. Either Jesus is who he said he was—God, or he was knowingly trying to deceive people about his identity, in which case he is a liar. Or he was crazy and confused about his identity, and hence a lunatic. But simply saying Jesus was merely a good man or just a good teacher does not make much sense.

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, the divine Son of God, became incarnate, meaning he took on human flesh. In doing so, he assumed human nature without losing his divine nature. This means that Jesus is truly God and truly man. Because of this, he is the only mediator between God and humanity. The Son of God became man in Jesus Christ so that through his life, Death, and Resurrection we might be reconciled with God, know God's love, have the perfect model for holiness, and share in God's life. This mystery of Christ, the God-man, lies at the very heart of our Christian faith.



DIGGING DEEPER

The God Who Is One of Us

Although today more people might deny Christ's divinity rather than his humanity, the opposite was true in the early years of the Church. Several early heresies (false teachings) claimed that Jesus only seemed to be human. Because belief in Jesus being both God and man is the cornerstone of our faith, the first Church fathers knew they had to clearly state the incredible mystery that Jesus is truly, fully human; that he is the God who is one of us in all things but sin.

STEP # 5

VIDEO PART II: JESUS—BOTH GOD AND MAN



SAY: In our second video segment, we will hear what it means when we say that Jesus is both God and man and what that means in our lives today.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 19 minutes.

STEP # 6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we will discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.

STEP # 7

DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on Jesus. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

According to the video, what are the three things Jesus did during his public ministry that point to his being truly God?

(We can know that Jesus is truly God because: he does what only God can do, such as rebuke and calm the storm [Mark 4:39]. Most importantly, Jesus was raised from the dead. He knows what only God can know. He reads people's hearts and minds and recounts their life stories [John 4:17-19]. He tells us he is God by using the phrase "I AM" [John 8:58; see also: John 6:51, John 11:25, and John 14:6], which, in the original biblical language, is God's own name [Exodus 3:14].)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What do you think it means for Jesus, the divine Son of God, to be truly and fully human? Can you imagine Jesus being tired, hungry, or angry? How does seeing Jesus as having all the same feelings and experiences you have (except for sin) change the way you tell him your needs and desires in prayer?

(It is sometimes easier to think of Jesus in his divine nature, and not his human. It can be hard to imagine the divine Son of God being tired (even though he took a nap—Matthew 8:24), or hungry (even though he looked for ripe figs—Mark 11:12), or angry (even though he tossed the money changers out of the Temple—Matthew 21:12–13). Realizing that Jesus had similar feelings and experiences as the rest of us should give us the courage and confidence to approach him in prayer, knowing that he really will understand what we are going through. You may want to share Philippians 2:5–11, which describes how Jesus, though he was equal with God the Father, “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” and “humbled himself” to experience “even death on a cross.”)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Dr. Sri explained to us the meaning of the painting of Jesus in the Basilica of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Rome. How does that painting confront us with a decision we all have to make?

(The toga Jesus is wearing, and his raised arm, signify that he is a teacher. However, the light emanating from Jesus’s robe signifies that he is not just any teacher but a divine teacher. Secondly, Jesus standing on the fiery clouds signifies his second coming to judge the living and the dead. The painting asserts who Jesus claimed to be—the Lord God who will judge us all. He has not given us the option of believing that he was anyone else, like a good moral teacher, for example. So we are confronted with the decision to accept him as Savior, Lord and God or to reject him.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- God spoke to his people through the prophets during the Old Testament times, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1–2; CCC 65).
- In the fullness of time, the divine Son of God became incarnate, meaning that he took on human flesh. In doing so, he assumed human nature without losing his divine nature (CCC 479).
- Jesus Christ is not part God, part man. He is truly God and truly man, in the unity of his divine person (CCC 464).
- Because Jesus is both God and man, he is the one and only mediator between God and man (CCC 480).
- The Son of God became man in order to save us by reconciling us with God, so that we might know God's love, to be our model of holiness, and to make us partakers of the divine nature (CCC 457–460).
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is one divine person who possesses two natures. He has a divine nature and a human nature, which are united in the one divine person. This mystery of Christ is the profound union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Son (CCC 483).
- “After the Council of Chalcedon [451 AD], some made of Christ's human nature a kind of personal subject. Against them, the fifth ecumenical council, at Constantinople in 553 confessed that ‘there is but one hypostasis [or person], which is our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity.’ Thus everything in Christ's human nature is to be attributed to his divine person as its proper subject, not only his miracles but also his sufferings and even his death: ‘He who was crucified in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, is true God, Lord of glory, and one of the Holy Trinity’” (CCC 468).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Jesus asks each of us, “Who do you say that I am?” Let’s take a few minutes to consider how we can more fully welcome Jesus and his Lordship in our lives. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Prayerfully read the following quote from C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, which was mentioned in the video and is found in your Guide.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (C.S. Lewis was an Oxford professor and a famous 20th century defender of the Christian faith. He is also the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.)

Now, prayerfully imagine Jesus standing before you and asking you the question he asked his Apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” How would you answer him?

2. Jesus tells us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). What do you seek first in your life? Do you truly put Jesus first in your life? Or do you seek other things to fulfill you, and have God as just a part of your life?
3. Allowing Jesus to reign over our lives as Lord requires submitting our will to his. It means following his teachings, living the way he wants us to live, and trusting that he knows and desires what is best for us. Write down one or two areas in your life where the way you are living now could be more in line with Jesus’s teachings. What can you do this week to begin living more with Jesus as Lord of your life?

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on who Jesus is and what he means in your life.



Let's close our time together today by praying a prayer of self-dedication written by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty,
my memory, my understanding and my whole will.
All that I am and all that I possess you have given me:
I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to your will.
Give me only your love and your grace;
with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more.
Amen.



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading about Jesus, see the following **Catechism** passages:

Jesus Christ: "Mediator and fullness of all revelation": CCC 65–67

True God and true man: CCC 464–469, 479–483

Jesus reconciles us with God: CCC 457–460

The two natures of Jesus: CCC 470–478

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 7

Jesus of Nazareth (three volumes) by Pope Benedict XVI

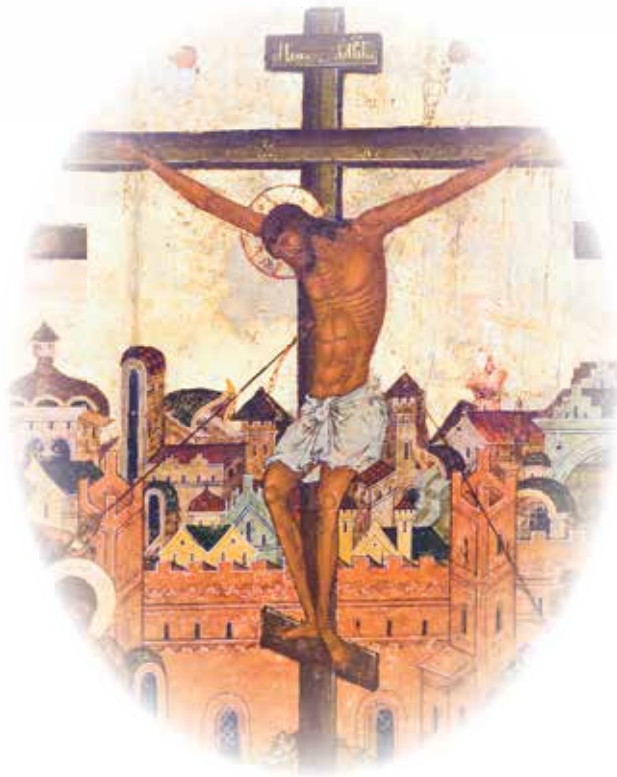
Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

The Life of Christ by Venerable Fulton Sheen

To Know Jesus Christ by Frank Sheed

Made for More by Curtis Martin

Session 6



THE PASCHAL MYSTERY



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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THE PASCHAL MYSTERY: The Mystery of Jesus's Death & Resurrection



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Perhaps the Cross of Jesus has become almost too familiar. Some of us might see images of crosses and crucifixes so often, we may not realize that in the ancient world, the cross was a horrifying image. An ancient Roman wearing a cross around his neck like jewelry would be like us wearing a little electric chair around our necks. It would not only be bizarre; it would be shocking and appalling to the people around us. Yet the cross is the primary symbol of our faith. It is through Jesus's Death on that instrument of torture that he gave us the gift of salvation and eternal life.

We call Jesus's work of redemption, accomplished principally through his Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, the Paschal Mystery. The word *Paschal* refers to Jesus's offering of his life as the new Passover (or Paschal) lamb for our salvation. We express this in the Mass when we say, "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again." Underlying the Paschal mystery is one fundamental reality: Jesus gives himself completely in love to the Father on our behalf to restore our relationship with God. And Jesus, through his Death on the Cross, also reveals to us that we are all called to the sacrificial love that leads to true happiness here on earth and eternal joy in the next life.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **How the Cross "works"—how it brings about our salvation**
- **How Christ, being fully human and fully divine, was able to heal our relationship with God through his sacrificial Death**
- **The meaning of Jesus going to the realm of the dead and opening Heaven's gates**
- **That by his Death, Jesus liberates us from sin**
- **That by his Resurrection, he opens us to new life**
- **How Jesus invites us to unite our entire lives with his self-giving love on the Cross**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our session on the Paschal Mystery.

This week as we learn more about the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord, let us open our hearts and minds to the Mystery of Jesus's Death and Resurrection in prayer:

Have participants turn to page 45 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.



Hail, sweet Jesus!
Praise, honor, and glory be to you,
O Christ, who of your own accord
did embrace death,
and, recommending yourself
to your heavenly Father,
bowing down your venerable head,
did yield up your spirit.
Truly thus giving up your life for your
sheep, You have shown yourself
to be a good shepherd.
You did die, O only-begotten Son of God.
You did die, O my beloved Savior,
that I might live forever.
O how great hope,
how great confidence have I reposed in your death and your Blood!
I glorify and praise your Holy Name,
acknowledging my infinite obligations to you.
O good Jesus,
by your bitter death and Passion,
give me grace and pardon.
Give unto the faithful departed rest and life everlasting.
Amen.

—Dom Augustine Baker, 1575–1641

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

Philippians 2:6–11

Ephesians 2:1–8

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

Romans 5:9–17

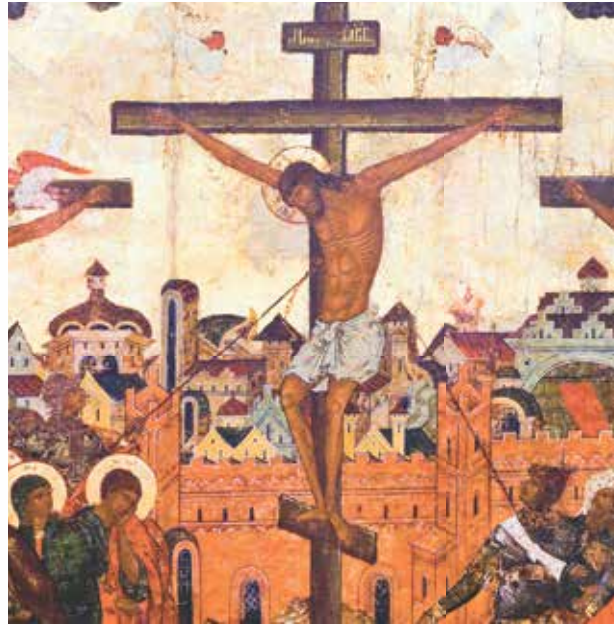
STEP #2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Have you ever seen people wearing a cross or a crucifix? Have you ever stopped to consider just how shocking and appalling it would have been in ancient times to wear the symbol of capital punishment around one's neck? And yet, it is through that cross that we are saved. It has become a sign, not of death, but of eternal life.

In this session we are going to explore some of the central mysteries of our faith:



- How the Cross “works”—how it brings about our salvation
- How Christ, being fully human and fully divine, was able to heal our relationship with God through his sacrificial death
- The meaning of Jesus going to the realm of the dead and opening Heaven's gates
- That by his Death, Jesus liberates us from sin
- How Jesus invites us to unite our entire lives with his self-giving love on the Cross

We will start by watching a short video.



DIGGING DEEPER

Crucifixion

Because crucifixion is so far removed from our experience, it may seem that Jesus was the only person to be crucified. Nothing could be further from the truth. Thousands were killed in this manner, because crucifixion was the standard means of executing criminals from about the 6th century BC until 337 AD when the Emperor Constantine the First forbade its use in the Roman Empire. In 1968, the bones of a crucified man were discovered in Jerusalem, in a stone box used to preserve bones. Archaeologists were able to determine the man had been crucified because his heel bone still had a nail driven through its side. In addition, his legs were broken to hasten death, just as John 19:31-35 describes happening to the people crucified next to Jesus.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 10 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just heard how the Gospel message of Jesus's crucifixion would have been appalling and shocking to citizens of the Roman world. We also learned that Jesus's last words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" were not a cry of despair, but a prayer of hope that God's will for all of humanity was being accomplished. And finally, we explored some of the reasons Jesus had to die in order for us to be saved.

No human being, even the holiest, could take on the sins of all humanity and become a sacrifice for all. Only Jesus, the divine Son of God who became man, could offer his life as a redemptive sacrifice that liberates the human family from sin. Jesus is able to do this because he is both fully human, and thus able to offer an act of love on our behalf, and fully divine, making his act on the Cross a perfect, infinite gift of love that restores our relationship to God. By his Resurrection, he opens the way for us to become sons and daughters of God. By his Ascension, Jesus precedes us into his Father's kingdom.



DIGGING DEEPER

Sheol, the Place of the Dead

Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, "hell"—*Sheol* in Hebrew or Hades in Greek—because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God. Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous, while they await the Redeemer...Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the Hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him....The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus's messianic mission, a phase that is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ's redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption (CCC 633–634).

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: GOD'S SACRIFICIAL LOVE



SAY: In our second video, we are going to look at what Jesus's Death and Resurrection mean in our lives today.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 23 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.

STEP #7

DISCUSSION



SAY: Welcome back to our session on the Paschal Mystery. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Scripture tells us that the Son of God humbled himself to become man, and was obedient to the Father even to his Death on the Cross (Philippians 2:5-11). What does God's willingness to enter our world, embrace our humanity, and die for our sins tell us about God's love for us? How can Jesus's self-sacrificial love be an example for our lives?

(Because the importance of Jesus's self-sacrifice and Death are so essential to building a foundation of faith, allow time for participants to consider these questions in some depth. Some points that you may want to bring out include: God's love is so profound, he would do anything—even die—so that we might be with him. Jesus shows us that dying to our own selfish desires is the key to true love. When we love as God loves, we are willing to accept whatever cross God desires to give us, trusting that it is all part of his plan for our salvation.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

Generally people try to avoid suffering. In the news we might even hear about some people with terminal illnesses who have committed suicide in order to avoid their suffering. But let's consider for a moment this quote from John 12:24: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Here's another way of saying that: "Every death presents an opportunity for a resurrection. Every suffering can be a tremendous gift." How can suffering or carrying a cross be a great gift?

(Sacrificial love—which is the greatest kind of love—requires suffering. It requires that you choose to do something that is difficult. In doing the difficult thing, you become a witness to another and you choose the good of another over even your own self. In this way, every cross that you carry presents a great opportunity to choose to do an act of love for another. Every death in your life can become a resurrection.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Dr. Sri says that there are two ways to live your life: the way of self and the way of the Cross. Why is there more joy and fulfillment found in the way of the Cross?

(The way of the Cross leads a person to discover sacrificial love, which is the greatest way to love another person. This leads a person to Christ and to eternal happiness.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)**SUMMARY & EXHORTATION**

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- No mere human being, even the holiest, would ever be able to take on the sins of all humanity and offer himself as a sacrifice for all (CCC 616).
- Jesus Christ is both God and man (CCC 240–242, 455).
- Fully human, Jesus can represent the human family and offer a gift of love on behalf of all humanity. Since he is also fully divine, his gift of love takes on infinite value—offering the perfect, redemptive sacrifice for all (CCC 616).
- When we say Jesus “descended into hell” in the Creed, this does not refer to the place of damnation, but the realm of the dead...Jesus in his human soul united to his divine person went to the realm of the dead and opened Heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him (CCC 637).
- Jesus truly rose from the dead (CCC 693).

- By his Death, Jesus liberates us from sin. By his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to new life in him that we may become sons and daughters of God and have eternal life (CCC 654).
- By his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus precedes us into his Father's glorious kingdom in Heaven (CCC 666).
- Jesus invites us to participate in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection by uniting our entire lives—our daily works, joys, and sufferings—with the Cross of Christ (CCC 618).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments reflecting on what the Death and Resurrection of Jesus means to you. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Have you ever considered what it means that Jesus died for you and paid the price for your sins? Take a few minutes now to thank him for the great gift that he gave you. You may want to silently pray the following prayer called the Act of Contrition, which expresses heartfelt sorrow for our sins:

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

2. In the video, we heard that because we live in a broken world, we should never ask, "Will I suffer?" but rather "What will I do when I suffer?" As St. Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (2 Peter 4:12). In fact, Jesus himself entered our humanity and has shared in our suffering. And he wants to be with us to help us in the midst of our trials. What do you do when you encounter suffering in your life? Do you turn to God or do you turn away from God? Make a commitment now to turn to God for help the next time suffering enters your life.

3. Reflect on the following quote:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."
—Luke 9:23

Consider some ways you can imitate Christ's sacrificial love more in your life. For example, how can you be more generous in your relationship with God? What are some ways you can deny yourself—your time, comfort, or desires—and make sacrifices to serve better the people God has placed in your life?

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the great mysteries of our faith—the Death and Resurrection of the Lord.



Let's close our time together today by joining our suffering with that of Jesus.

O Jesus, you have called me to suffer
because you on your part suffered for me,
leaving me an example that I might follow.
When you were insulted,
you did not return the insult.
When you were mistreated,
you did not counter with threats
but entrusted yourself to the One who judges justly.
By your wounds we are healed.
Help me to imitate you in suffering.
Let me break with sin by means of my sufferings,
so that I may no longer live
according to the lusts of sinners
but according to the will of the Father.
Since you yourself have suffered and been tempted,
I know that you are able to bring aid
to all who suffer and are tempted.
I entrust myself to you and to the Father, my Creator,
knowing that you will never fail me. Amen.

—Prayer to Imitate the Suffering Christ



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading about the Paschal Mystery, see the following *Catechism* passages:

The Trinity: CCC 238–248, 452–455

Value of Christ's sacrifice: CCC 616–617

The descent into Hell: CCC 632–635

The meaning of the Resurrection: CCC 651–655

Jesus precedes us into Heaven: CCC 665–667

Our participation in Christ's sacrifice: CCC 618

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 8

Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week by Pope Benedict XVI

Making Sense Out of Suffering by Peter Kreeft

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Session 7



THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIFE OF GRACE



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Nihil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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THE HOLY SPIRIT & THE LIFE OF GRACE: God's Divine Life Within Us



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

A little boy in a best-selling book who is said to have died and gone to Heaven was asked to describe the Holy Spirit. He paused for a moment and then said, “Hmm, that’s kind of a hard one.” I think we can all identify with that. Describing the Holy Spirit is hard. We all have mental images of Jesus and God the Father, but the Holy Spirit...?

Maybe you picture a dove, as the Spirit appeared at Jesus’s baptism. Or tongues of fire or a rushing wind, as at the first Pentecost. But however you imagine the Spirit, he’s probably more mysterious than the other two Persons of the Trinity. Little wonder, then, that even life-long Christians can sometimes have trouble relating and praying to the Holy Spirit.

However, it is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity—the bond of love between the Father and the Son—who dwells in our hearts and enables us to become sons and daughters of the Living God.

In this week’s lesson, we take a closer look at who the Holy Spirit is, how the Spirit operates in our lives and in the life of the Church, and why it is absolutely essential that we come to know and love the Spirit if we are to enter into full relationship with the Trinity. In short, we will learn, in the words of the traditional prayer, why we need the Holy Spirit in our lives to “renew the face of the earth.”

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **How the Holy Spirit builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church, bringing souls into communion with God so that they bear fruit and give witness to Christ**
- **How the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and how God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit**
- **The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit**
- **The ways the Holy Spirit sanctifies, or makes us holy**
- **How we are saved, and the relationship between faith and works in this process of sanctification**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*.

Have participants turn to page 53 of their Guides to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week as we learn about the Holy Spirit and the critical role he plays in our lives, let us begin with the traditional prayer to the Holy Spirit:



Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

Suggested Scripture readings for a Celebration of the Word of God

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

Galatians 5:22-23

Ephesians 1:13-14

Isaiah 11:2

STEP # 2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: What does the Holy Spirit mean to you? That might seem like an odd question, but it is an essential one. As Christians, we are called not just to acknowledge the Spirit, but to form a relationship with him. This week we are going to discover how we do that, by learning about the Third Person of the Trinity and how his presence enables us to become sons and daughters of God.

We will look at:

- How the Holy Spirit builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church, bringing souls into communion with God so that they bear fruit and give witness to Christ
- How the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and how God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
- The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit
- The ways the Holy Spirit sanctifies, or makes us holy
- How we are saved, and the relationship between faith and works in this process of sanctification

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3**VIDEO PART I: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIFE OF GRACE***Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 13 minutes.***STEP #4****PROCLAMATION***After the video has stopped,*

SAY: We just heard how God wants to meet us in our weaknesses, in our fears, in our sins, and in our failures, and how he wants to send his Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and form us into the kind of saintly men and women he calls us all to be.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity, the bond of love between the Father and the Son. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to build, animate, and sanctify the Church. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our souls. The presence of the Spirit in the soul can bear fruit in the Christian's life, fruit such as greater love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, making us holy through grace, which is a participation in the life of God. God's divine life is infused into the soul by the Spirit to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. Becoming a child of God is a free gift given to us through faith, but we remain in God's family and mature as his spiritual children through love and good works.

**DIGGING DEEPER****What are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit?**

"The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1830). The traditional list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord (see Isaiah 11:1-3).

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



SAY: In our second video segment, we are going to look more deeply into the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 20 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we will discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Spirit of God

“No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.’ Now God’s Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who ‘has spoken through the prophets’ makes us hear the Father’s Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith. The Spirit of truth who ‘unveils’ Christ to us ‘will not speak on his own.’ Such properly divine self-effacement explains why ‘the world cannot receive [him], because it neither sees him nor knows him,’ while those who believe in Christ know the Spirit because he dwells with them.” —CCC 687



STEP #7

DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on the Holy Spirit. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

The Holy Spirit makes sanctification possible. We know that we cannot get to heaven on our own—we need help to get there. Justification is a very important concept to understand. What did justification, through an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, do for us?

(First is a restoration of Divine Sonship. We were sons and daughters of God until the Fall of Man with Adam and Eve. They lost their inheritance and subsequently so did we. Through Christ's death and resurrection, and through the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can die and rise with Christ through the waters of Baptism, restoring our inheritance to God's kingdom and our position as sons and daughters of God. The second thing that justification provides is grace, which is sharing in the very life of God. With the Holy Spirit within us and His love within us, we have the capacity to become holy because of the work that the Holy Spirit, through grace, does within us.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

How do we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit? How can we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit in our daily lives?

(• We receive the Holy Spirit at Baptism, and that life in the Holy Spirit grows through prayer and frequenting the sacraments.

• We can deepen our relationship with the Holy Spirit by asking him to help us in our moral lives—to heal our wounds of sin, and enlighten and strengthen us to imitate Christ and do what is good (CCC 740, 1995). We also can ask Him to help us in our prayer (CCC 741, 2672) and invite the Holy Spirit to guide our daily lives and help deepen our participation in the life and mission of the Church (CCC 740).)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Let's say your friend says to you, "All you need to do is accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior to be saved. He did all the work for us." How would you respond?

(It is true that we cannot merit heaven by any work of our own—we must have faith to be saved. But St. Paul was speaking of the Old Covenant and how we are not saved by the works that we do as part of that Covenant; we are saved through Jesus Christ. He never says (and St. James elaborates) that we are saved by "faith alone." Our works are a response to our faith; we must practice what we believe and follow Christ's commandments. It is grace that makes it possible for us to have faith, and it is grace that gives us the power to do works—so we are not saved by faith alone, but by grace alone.)



DIGGING DEEPER

St. Augustine's prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy. Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy. Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- The Holy Spirit is the Third Divine Person of the Holy Trinity, the bond of love between the Father and the Son (CCC 684–685).
- Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to build, animate, and sanctify the church and bring souls into communion with God so that they bear fruit and give witness to Christ (CCC 737ff).
- The Holy Spirit does this through the Church's proclamation of the Gospel, through the sacraments, and through working in the moral and spiritual life of the Christian (CCC 738).
- God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rm 5:5; CCC 735). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are permanent dispositions in the soul, making it more docile to God's promptings.
- Through the power of the Spirit, Christians can bear much fruit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control (CCC 736).
- These fruits are seen when we live less for self and walk more in the Spirit (CCC 736).
- The Holy Spirit sanctifies us, makes us holy, through grace, which is a participation in the life of God. God's divine life is infused into the soul by the Spirit to heal it of sin and to sanctify it (CCC 1996–2000).
- Faith and works are interrelated in God's plan of salvation. Being liberated from sin and becoming a son or a daughter of God is a free gift given to us through faith, but we remain in God's family and mature as his spiritual children through love and good works. Thus faith and love together lead us on toward eternal life (CCC 1987–1995).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments reflecting on what the Holy Spirit means to you and your life. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. At the end of the video, we were asked two essential questions: Will you develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit? Will you take time to ask the Spirit to guide and shape your daily life? Reflect now on your response.
2. The fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. If you could choose one of these to be made manifest more in your life now, which one would you chose? Which one seems the easiest? Which one seems the hardest? Pray now that the Spirit will enter into your life and transform you with his fruits.



STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the Holy Spirit and his role in your life.



Let's close our time together today with one of the most famous hymns written to the Holy Spirit.

“Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest,
And in our hearts take up Thy rest;
Come with Thy grace and heav’nly aid
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made,
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.
O Comfort Blest to Thee we cry,
Thou heav’nly Gift of God most high;
Thou fount of life and fire of love,
And sweet anointing from above,
And sweet anointing from above.
Praise be to Thee Father and Son,
And Holy Spirit Three in one;
And may the Son on us bestow
The gifts that from the Spirit flow,
The gifts that from the Spirit flow.”

—Words: Latin, tenth century; trans. Edward Caswall, 1849, Richard Mant, 1837, and Robert Campbell, 1850.



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading about the Holy Spirit, see the following *Catechism* passages:

The Name of the Spirit: CCC 691

Symbols of the Spirit: CCC 694–701

The Holy Spirit as God’s Gift: CCC 733–736

The Spirit and the Church: CCC 737–741

Justification and Sanctification: CCC 1996–2000

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 5, 9

Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem, (Lord and Giver of Life on the Holy Spirit)
by St. Pope John Paul II

The Holy Spirit (www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/spirmenu.htm)

Justification in Catholic Teaching by James Akin
(www.ewtn.com/library/answers/justif.htm)

NOTES

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Session 8



WHY DO I NEED THE
CHURCH?

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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WHY DO I NEED THE CHURCH?

The Mystery of the Catholic Church



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

“I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious.”

How many times have you heard someone say something along those lines? In our day and age, that stance is popular, especially among people who have stopped attending church but who continue to believe in God (or at least a “higher power”). When someone tells us that they just don’t want to be tied to rules and regulations, or that they prefer to have a “personal relationship” with Jesus, but that they don’t need the Church, what should be our response?

Merely telling them that they are wrong isn’t going to be convincing. We have to take the time to explain how religion and spirituality are intricately interwoven, as well as how Jesus never expected us to follow a spiritual path without a community: the Church. We need to point out that the truly spiritual life is, as Jesus himself said, like a vine in which he is the trunk and we are the branches. We are interconnected through our beliefs, our worship, and our desire to know and understand the truth. And once we understand the truth, we realize that it is as impossible to be spiritual without being religious as it is to swim without getting into the water.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The mystery of the Church and what it means in our lives**
- **How the Church has two dimensions: human and divine**
- **The three ways the unity of the Church is made manifest**
- **The four marks (or chief characteristics) of the Church**
- **Why Jesus established only one Church**
- **How the Church can be holy when it is filled with sinners**
- **What it means when we say the Church is apostolic**
- **Why we call the Church “Catholic”**

STEP #1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*.

This week as we learn why and how Jesus established his Church, and why we need a Church, let us begin by praying for the Church herself.

Have participants turn to page 59 of their Guides to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.



We praise you,
O almighty and eternal God!
Who through Jesus Christ
hast revealed your glory to all nations,
to preserve the works of your mercy,
that your Church,
being spread through the whole world,
may continue with unchanging faith
in the confession of your name. Amen.

—www.catholic.org

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see *Introduction to the Leader's Guide*)

1 Corinthians 12:12–26

Colossians 1:17–20

Ephesians 2:19–22



STEP # 2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Some people today say that they are “spiritual” but not religious. Or they say they don’t need to belong to a church because they have a personal relationship with Jesus. But, as we will soon see, that’s not what Jesus intended. He didn’t come to save us as isolated individuals, but as a profound communion of all believers. He fulfilled the Father’s plan to unite all humanity into one covenant family, the Church.

In this session we are going to explore some of the fundamental aspects about the Catholic Church. We will look at such common questions as:

- The mystery of the Church and what it means in our lives
- How the Church has two dimensions: human and divine
- The three ways the unity of the Church is made manifest
- The four marks (or chief characteristics) of the Church
- Why Jesus established only one Church
- How the Church can be holy when it is filled with sinners
- What it means when we say the Church is apostolic
- Why we call the Church “Catholic”

We will start by watching a short video.



STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: THE CHURCH: JESUS'S PLANNED COMMUNITY



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 15 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just heard how Jesus never intended for us to follow him all on our own. We are not a collection of individuals, but a community of believers. When Jesus said, “I am the vine and you are the branches,” he was inviting us to share in the unity of life with him that is the Church he established on earth.

The Catholic Church is not merely a human institution, but a divine institution as well. The Church is established by Jesus Christ as the family of God, the communion of all believers united in him.

The Catholic Church has four chief characteristics, or marks: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Church is *one* because of her founder Jesus who reconciled all humanity to himself.

The Church is *holy* in the sense that it is united with Christ, sanctified by him, and endowed with the grace and truth people need to be made holy like Christ.

The Church is *catholic*, which means “universal,” because Christ is present in her throughout the world, and because the Church has been sent by Christ to bring all humanity into communion with him.

The Church is *apostolic* because she is founded on the Apostles, faithfully hands on the teaching of the Apostles, and continues to be guided by the Apostles through their successors, the bishops, assisted by the priests, who both are in union with the successor of St. Peter, the Pope.

The Church deepens our communion with Christ, helps us live out the Gospel in our own lives, and shares that Good News with the entire world.



DIGGING DEEPER

Historical Ecumenical Moment

When Pope Francis was elected to the papacy in 2013, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople attended the installation, something that hadn't happened since the Eastern and Western churches split in 1054 AD. In honor of this momentous occasion, the Gospel reading at the installation Mass was sung in Greek, rather than the traditional Latin. Both The Ecumenical Patriarchate Press Office and the Vatican referred to this as an important sign of hope for Christian unity.

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH



SAY: In our second video segment, we are going to look at the Catholic Church and why it is unique among all institutions in the world.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 28 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

Apostolic Succession

From the earliest times in the Church, the concept of apostolic succession has been a hallmark of the faith. About AD 94, Clement of Rome indicated that the Apostles appointed their successors, and Irenaeus in AD 180 stated that being able to trace a bishop's succession is proof of the truth they teach. Finally Tertullian in the early third century wrote: "Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men."

STEP #7 DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on Why Do We Need the Church? Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

The Church is unique among all institutions in the world, because it has both divine and human dimensions that come together in perfect unity. What are the three ways this unity of the Church is made manifest?

(The three signs of unity in the Church are: its human leadership, as shown through apostolic succession; its public ritual, as demonstrated in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; and its public teaching. Another way to express this is that the Church has common leaders, common worship, and a common set of beliefs. Yet another way this was described in the video is that the Church is united by its teaching authority, the Mass and sacraments, and the beliefs expressed in the Creed and Catechism of the Catholic Church.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

The Church has four characteristics or distinctive marks that set it aside from all other Christian denominations. What are these “marks of the Church” and what do they mean?

(The four marks of the Church are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Church is one because Jesus desired that all believers be one, as he is one with the Father (John 17). The Church is holy because it has been established by God, and Jesus has associated himself with it. The Church is catholic because it is universal, the meaning of the word “catholic.” The Church is apostolic because its leadership can be traced in an unbroken line back to the Apostles themselves.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Let's say that your friend says to you that he (or she) is “spiritual” but not a “religious” person. What is the problem with that statement?

(It is not possible to love Jesus but hate religion. Jesus participated in Judaism. He did not do away with authority, ritual, or Tradition. Rather, he fulfilled the Old Covenant and instituted new rituals and authority. It is clear that Jesus wanted to set up a kingdom—and kingdoms have rules, authority, rituals, and tradition. You cannot love the King but hate His kingdom. Religion is simply the institution of faith.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- The Church is the supernatural family of God; the communion of all believers united in him (CCC 771–772).
- The Church is both human and divine, earthly and heavenly (CCC 773, 779).
- God has used human people, rituals, and institutions to gather his people and accomplish his plan of salvation (CCC 781 ff).
- God's people are united in his Church through the bonds of Christian love as well as three visible bonds of community: the bond of apostolic succession through the bishops who maintain the fraternal harmony of God's family; the bond of a common celebration of worship particularly in the sacraments; and finally, the bond of professing the one faith received from the Apostles (see CCC 815).
- There are four chief characteristics of the Church, known as the marks of the Church (CCC 811–812, 881).
- The Church is “one” because that is what Jesus intended. He prayed that we would all be one even as he is one with the Father (CCC 813).
- The Church is “holy” in the sense it is united with Christ, sanctified by him, and endowed by him with the fullness of the means of salvation (CCC 823–824).
- The Church is “Catholic,” meaning “universal” in the sense Christ is present in her throughout the world, and because the Church has been sent by Christ to bring all humanity into communion with him (CCC 830–831).
- The church is “apostolic” because it is founded on the Apostles and faithfully hands on the teachings of the apostles. The Church continues to be guided by the successors of the Apostles, the bishops (CCC 857).



DIGGING DEEPER

The Church - People of God

“At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him. He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it. He gradually instructed this people. . . All these things, however, happened as a preparation for and figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ . . . the New Covenant in his blood; he called together a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit.” (CCC 781)

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments reflecting on all that you learned about the Catholic Church, and Jesus's desire for us to participate fully in the life of the Church he established. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. In the video, we heard that Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with us in his Church, but not a private, individualistic relationship. What are the differences between a personal relationship with God in his Church and an individualistic relationship with God?
2. Reflect on the following quote:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

—John 15:5–7

Jesus describes himself as the vine and we, united to him in the Church, are the branches. In what ways can you "remain" in Jesus? What comes to mind when you read Jesus's promise that if we remain in him, we will bear much fruit? What kind of fruit would you like to bear in this life?

3. Even though most Americans claim to believe in God, more and more embrace the idea of being "spiritual" but not belonging to an organized religion or church. One of the fundamental reasons for this attitude, according to the presenters in the video, is that we don't like the idea that there is something outside of ourselves with an objective standard that has the right to guide, inform, and correct our beliefs and behavior. Some people might want the benefits of being "spiritual," but they don't want the challenges that come with real growth and transformation. Are there ways that you keep the Church and her teachings at a distance because you don't want to be challenged or have to change your life? What would you have to change or give up to fully embrace all the teachings of the Church? How might your life be different if you gave yourself over completely to Christ and his Church?

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the Church and its role in your life.

Let's close our time together today by praying that all Christians everywhere may one day be united in the one Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, at your Last Supper you prayed to the Father that all should be one. Send your Holy Spirit upon all who bear your name and seek to serve you. Strengthen our faith in you, and lead us to love one another in humility. May we who have been reborn in one Baptism be united in one faith under one Shepherd. Amen.



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading about the Catholic Church, see the following *Catechism* passages:

The Church is One: CCC 813–814

The Church is Holy: CCC 823–825

The Church is Catholic: CCC 830–831

The Church is Apostolic: CCC 857

The bonds of unity in the Church: CCC 815

Bishops as successors of the Apostles: CCC 861–862

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 10, 11

Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

The Compact History of the Catholic Church by Alan Schreck Ph.D.

Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic History by Matthew Bunson

By What Authority? An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition by Mark P. Shea

NOTES

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Session 9



MARY AND THE SAINTS

Nihil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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MARY AND THE SAINTS:

Our Spiritual Mother

& the Communion of Saints



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Of all the teachings of the Catholic Church, the ones that give many non-Catholics the most trouble tend to center on Mary. In fact, one of the most misunderstood dogmas in the Church is that of Mary's Immaculate Conception, which the vast majority of non-Catholics (and not a few Catholics) think refers to the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.

But that's not the only problem. "What's all the fuss about Mary and the saints?" many wonder. "Why do Catholics pray to her? Do they think she's a goddess? Doesn't all this attention to Mary take away from a relationship with Jesus?" For Catholics who know and love Mary, such questions sound almost irreverent. She is so important in both theological considerations and popular devotions, her presence in the life of a Catholic can seem second nature. And yet, despite her prominence, what the Church actually teaches about Mary can sometimes be a little confusing—or even misunderstood. If we are to truly understand and appreciate the one whom the poet William Wordsworth called, "Our tainted nature's solitary boast," then we need to learn who Mary really is and the essential role she plays in the life of every Christian. Devotion to Mary and the saints is one way that Catholics come to know and love God and more deeply appreciate the great gift of salvation.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The four basic dogmas the Church teaches about Mary**
- **How Jesus is at the heart of everything Catholics believe about Mary**
- **Why Catholics don't worship Mary and the saints, but honor them as models for all Christians**
- **What Catholics really mean when they say they "pray to" Mary and the saints**
- **Why Mary is the "Queen of Heaven"**
- **The mysteries of the rosary**
- **What role Mary should play in the life of every believer**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*.

Have participants turn to page 65 of their Guides to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.



This week as we focus on Mary and her great love for us as her sons and daughters in Christ, let us pray together the Hail Mary: Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

Suggested Scripture readings for a Celebration of the Word of God

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

Luke 1:39-45

Luke 1:46-55

John 2:1-11

STEP # 2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: Christians acknowledge that Jesus was “born of the Virgin Mary,” but for many, Mary is little more than a statue in a nativity scene. Not for Catholics. For Catholics Mary is the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, and the first and most perfect disciple of the Lord. This week we are going to learn just who Mary of Nazareth is, and why loving Mary brings us closer to her son Jesus.

We will look at:

- The four basic dogmas the Church teaches about Mary
- How Jesus is at the heart of everything Catholics believe about Mary
- Why Catholics don't worship Mary and the saints, but honor them as models for all Christians
- What Catholics really mean when they say they “pray to” Mary and the saints
- Why Mary is the “Queen of Heaven”
- The mysteries of the Rosary
- What role Mary should play in the life of every believer

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: MARY AND THE SAINTS



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 10 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just have seen how important Mary is, not just as the Mother of our Savior, but also as our ongoing intercessor in our walk with Christ. If we are to truly follow Jesus, then we must also learn to know his mother.

The Church's teachings about Mary do not focus on her for her sake alone, but tell us about Jesus's plan of salvation. The Church teaches four dogmas about Mary: She is the Mother of God; she was immaculately conceived, meaning she was conceived without Original Sin; she was a perpetual virgin; and she was assumed—taken to Heaven in body and soul—at the end of her earthly life. Catholics don't worship Mary and the saints, but honor them as models and recognize the great saving work God has accomplished in their lives. Catholics do not pray to Mary and the saints like they pray to God, but seek their intercession, asking them to pray for us just as we might ask a friend or family member for prayer. The attention we give to Mary and the saints does not distract us from God, but draws us closer to him, for just as Christian fellowship draws us closer to Christ, so does our communion with the saints in Heaven join us closer to Jesus.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Immaculate Conception

The Church has from the beginning believed that Mary, being "full of grace" through God, was redeemed and preserved from sin from the moment of her conception by her mother, St. Anne. This is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX affirmed in 1854: "... We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful" (DS 2803).

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: OUR SPIRITUAL MOTHER AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS



SAY: In our second video segment, we are going to look at Mary and her important role in Jesus's plan of salvation.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 26 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Saints

In the Book of Hebrews, the saints are presented as a "cloud of witnesses" whose examples of holy living encourage those of us on earth to turn away from sin and persevere in our faith in Jesus Christ: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us." —Hebrews 12:1



STEP #7

DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on Mary and the saints. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Why do Catholics honor the saints? Why are the saints' prayers for us so powerful?

(• Catholics honor the saints because they lived lives of heroic virtue in following Christ. The saints provide a powerful example and witness to us of what it means to be a true disciple of Christ, and by their prayers give us the strength and hope to persevere in the Christian life.

The saints' prayers are so powerful because:

- They are in intimate communion with God in Heaven.*
- Through the love shared between them and God, their prayers for us are made effective.)*

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What are the four Catholic dogmas about Mary? What do they teach us about Jesus and the Father's plan of salvation?

(• Mary was immaculately conceived in order to prepare her for her mission to be the Mother of God.

• Mary is the Mother of God because Jesus is fully human and fully God. Calling Mary the Mother of God is affirming that Jesus Christ is truly God. To deny this truth about Mary would deny the truth that Jesus is God.

• In the Assumption, Mary is the first follower of Christ to fully share in the resurrection of the body. The Assumption gives all Christians faith and hope that we too will someday share fully in Christ's Resurrection and his complete victory over sin and death.

• Her virginity affirms that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and is indeed God who became flesh in the Incarnation. Mary's perpetual virginity was an outward sign of her total devotion to God.

• Mary's entire life is a convincing testimony of God's great love for all of us and all that he desires to accomplish in us through his grace. Mary is our model of faith and our bright star of hope in all things.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

How is Jesus's command to St. John to "Behold your mother" a challenge to us in our own prayer life and journey with Jesus?

(Next to Jesus, Mary is the most prominent and important figure in all of the Scriptures. Her role in the plan of salvation is prophesied in many Old Testament passages, and she played a bigger role than anyone in forming and loving Christ as a child into his adult life. Mary can bring us closer to Jesus if we learn to understand her role in the kingdom.)



DIGGING DEEPER

The Rosary

A central devotion to Mary, a Rosary is made up of a series of prayers counted on a string of beads. The set of ten prayers, known as a decade, consists of one Our Father, ten Hail Marys and one Glory Be. Five decades are prayed in a standard Rosary, and each decade focuses on one of the Mysteries of Christ's life. The mysteries recall important events in the life of Christ. The traditional fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary are the Joyful Mysteries of Christ's Birth, the Sorrowful Mysteries of Christ's Passion and Death, and the Glorious Mysteries of his Resurrection triumph. In 2002 Pope St. John Paul II introduced five new mysteries—the Luminous Mysteries of Christ's public ministry. The word "rosary" comes from the Latin *rosarium*, meaning crown or garland of roses.



STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- The Church teaches four important dogmas about Mary. First, Mary is the mother of God....This tells us that her child who took on her flesh was the Father's eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Hence, Mary is truly the Mother of God (CCC 984–986).
- Second, Mary was Immaculately Conceived, meaning that she was conceived full of grace, without original sin. To become the mother of the Savior, Mary was endowed with this unique gift so that she might be a pure vessel for the Son of God (CCC 490). By the grace of God, Mary remained free from sin for her whole life (CCC 493).
- Third, the perpetual virginity of Mary. Mary conceived of Jesus as a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit—and this points to Jesus's divine origins as the Son of God who truly entered our humanity (CCC 496). Her remaining a virgin throughout her life serves as a sign of her exemplary faith, her “undivided gift of herself to God's will” (CCC 506).
- Fourth, Mary's Assumption. At the end of her earthly life, she was given the unique privilege of being assumed body and soul into Heaven, anticipating the resurrection of all Christ's faithful at the end of time (CCC 966).
- Mary is the spiritual mother for all Christians. Because of her complete cooperation with Jesus's redemptive work, she continually intercedes on our behalf before her Son (CCC 968, 969).
- Catholics don't worship Mary and the saints like we worship God, but we honor them as models we can imitate, and we recognize the great work God has accomplished in their lives (CCC 971).
- Catholics don't pray to Mary and the saints like we pray to God, but we seek their intercession, asking them to pray for our needs just like we might ask a friend to pray for us (CCC 969).
- The attention we give to Mary and the saints does not distract us from our relationship with God, but draws us closer to him—for just as Christian communion draws us closer to Christ, so does our communion with the saints join us closer to Jesus (CCC 957, 961, 962, 972).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments reflecting on who Mary is and how you can grow in your relationship with her. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Reflect on the following words from St. Louis Marie de Montfort:

“We never give more honor to Jesus than when we honor his Mother, and we honor her simply and solely to honor him all the more perfectly. We go to her only as a way leading to the goal we seek—Jesus, her Son.”

Consider the four dogmas you learned about Mary in this week’s lesson. How can accepting those teachings bring you to a deeper understanding of Jesus and his love for you?

2. At the end of the video, the presenter talked about who Mary is and what it means to develop a relationship with her. Take a few minutes to ask yourself what your relationship with Mary is like, and what you would like it to be. Ask God in prayer what keeps you from developing a closer relationship with Mary.
3. There are many prayers and devotions in the Church dedicated to Mary, with the most prominent one being the Rosary. Take some time this week either to pray a Rosary if you are familiar with the prayer, or to learn more about how to pray a Rosary. As you do, reflect on how each mystery of the Rosary points us to Christ through Mary.

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on Mary and her place in your life.

Let's close our time together today by praying the great prayer asking for Mary's intercession, called the Memorare.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help
or sought thy intercession,
was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence,
We fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins our Mother;
to thee do we come, before thee we stand, sinful and sorrowful;
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not our petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer us.
Amen.



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Immaculate Conception: CCC 490–493

Mother of God: CCC 495

Perpetual Virginity: CCC 496–500

Assumption: CCC 966

Devotion to Mary: CCC 971

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 12

Apostolic Letter on the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Rosarium Virginis Mariae by St. Pope John Paul II

The New Rosary in Scripture: Biblical Insights for Praying the 20 Mysteries by Dr. Edward Sri

Walking with Mary: A Biblical Journey from Nazareth to the Cross by Dr. Edward Sri

The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary by St. Alphonsus Ligouri

Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God by Scott Hahn

Butler's Lives of the Saints by Alban Butler

365 Saints by Woodeene Koenig-Bricker

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Session 10



THE LAST THINGS



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

Nil Obstat: Ben Akers, S.T.L.

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

August 1, 2013

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THE LAST THINGS: What Happens After We Die?



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

What happens after we die?

We've been asking that question since the dawn of time. We have archaeological evidence that the earliest humans buried their dead with items indicating a hope for an afterlife. In modern times, a Google search for "life after death" comes up with nearly two BILLION results! Books that discuss "near death" experiences proliferate on Amazon.com. With a mixture of curiosity, fear, and hope, all of us long to know what happens after death.

Of course, no human knows the exact details of what happens when the curtain of life on this earth draws shut, but as Christians we have One Who Has Gone Before Us in the person of Jesus, whose death and resurrection shed light on what awaits us. The Church has long taught that prayerful consideration of the Four Last Things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell—is an essential part of our growth and maturation as Christians. Unless and until we take these things seriously, our life here on earth will lack meaning and focus. It's only when we consider the decisions we make in the light of eternity that our entire lives begin to make sense and our relationship with God can come to full maturity.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The particular judgment of each soul at the moment of death**
- **Hell: what it is, and why, if we fail to repent, we will be separated from God forever**
- **Heaven, the perfect communion of life and love with the Trinity**
- **Purgatory, the purification some need before entering into full communion with God**
- **Why Catholics pray for the dead**

STEP # 1**OPENING PRAYER**

SAY: Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*.

Have participants turn to page 71 of their Guides to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week we are going to look at one of the topics we often try to avoid—death and what happens to us after we die. So let us begin by saying a prayer for a happy death, written by St. Vincent Ferrer, a great priest and preacher.



Lord Jesus Christ,
 Who willest that no man should perish,
 and to Whom supplication
 is never made without the hope of mercy,
 for Thou saidst
 with Thine Own holy and blessed lips:
 “All things whatsoever
 ye shall ask in My name,
 shall be done unto you”;
 I ask of Thee, O LORD,
 for Thy holy Name’s sake,
 to grant me at the hour of my death
 full consciousness
 and the power of speech,
 sincere contrition for my sins,
 true faith, firm hope and perfect charity,
 that I may be able to say unto Thee
 with a clean heart:
 Into Thy hands, O LORD,
 I commend my spirit:
 Thou hast redeemed me,
 O God of truth,
 Who art blessed forever and ever.
 Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader’s Guide)

Hebrews 9:27

John 5:24

1 Corinthians 15:51-57

STEP # 2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: What happens after we die? That's a question we all wonder about at some point. Death, and what happens afterward, is the last great mystery of life. While we all have questions, as Christians we have some answers as well, because Jesus has gone before us and through his Resurrection has given us insight into what awaits us after the moment of our death.

In this session we are going to explore what the Church calls the Four Last Things: death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell.

We also will consider the following important topics:

- The Particular Judgment of each soul at the moment of death
- Hell: what it is, and why, if we fail to repent, we will be separated from God forever
- Heaven, the perfect communion of life and love with the Trinity
- Purgatory, the purification some need before entering into full communion with God
- Why Catholics pray for the dead

We will start by watching a short video.



DIGGING DEEPER

What the Church Teaches About Hell

"The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death, the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire.'" The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs....God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) and persistence in it until the end is necessary. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want 'any to perish, but all to come to repentance'" (CCC 1035, 1037).

STEP #3**VIDEO PART I: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?**

Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 15 minutes.

STEP #4**PROCLAMATION**

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We've just listened to how the early Christians had a very different view of death than their pagan neighbors. The idea that death is not just an end but rather a beginning is fundamental to Christian belief. It lies at the very heart of what we profess to believe about Jesus, his Resurrection, and our own salvation.

At the moment of death, every person receives his or her eternal reward or retribution in what is called the "Particular Judgment."

Those who die in friendship with God and are perfectly purified will immediately see God as he is, face-to-face in Heaven. There are some people who die in friendship with God, but their love is imperfect. Their souls are assured of Heaven, but they first must undergo a purification before entering full communion with God. This period of purification is called Purgatory.

If a person dies outside of friendship with Christ and without having accepted God's loving mercy, he remains separated from God for eternity in what we call Hell, or eternal damnation.

Finally, as Christians we believe that at the end of time, Christ will come again in glory, our bodies will be resurrected, and all humanity will face the Last Judgment, in which the truth of each man's relationship with God will be made known and the consequences of each person's actions will be revealed.

STEP #5**VIDEO PART II: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE DIE?**

SAY: In our second video segment, we are going to look more deeply at what the Church teaches about the Last Things.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 25 minutes.

STEP #6

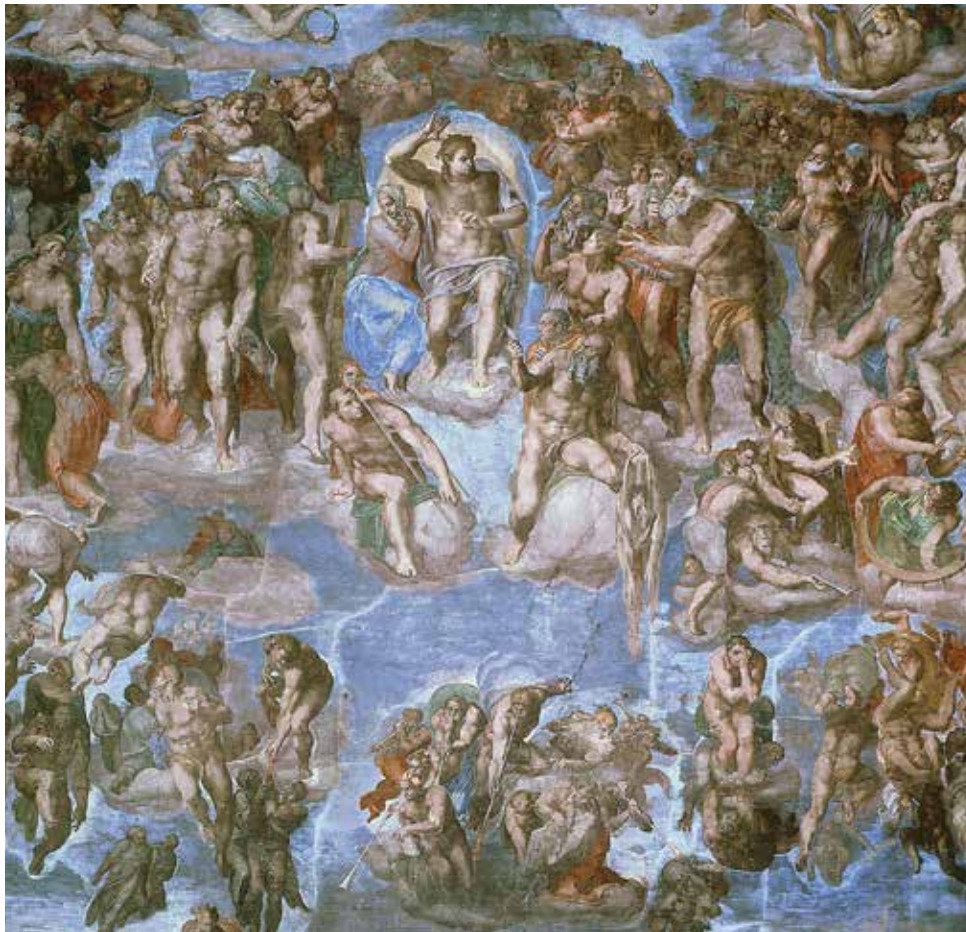
BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

Michelangelo's Last Judgment

The most famous depiction of The Last Judgment is Michelangelo's masterpiece on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel. In it, the artist shows the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment of all humanity. Many famous saints such as Catherine of Alexandria, Peter, Lawrence, Bartholomew, Paul, Simon, Sebastian, and John the Baptist are depicted rising to Heaven. Along with the rest of the Chapel, the fresco was restored between 1980 and 1994, revealing many details that had been concealed by years of grime and smoke.

STEP #7

DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on The Last Things. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

We all have various images of Heaven, but according to the video, what is Heaven?

- (• Scripture tells us that we can't even conceive of the joys of Heaven.
- We will be entirely filled with the joy, the truth, and the love of God.
- Heaven is the ultimate fulfillment of human desire—a share in the Blessed Vision of God. We will see God in Heaven as he is.
- In the end, Heaven is perfect communion with the God who is.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

In the presentation, the Catholic teaching on Purgatory is discussed. What are some of the misconceptions about Purgatory? What does the Catholic Church really teach about Purgatory? And why can Purgatory be seen, at least in some sense, as something for which we should be grateful?

- (• Some misconceptions: Purgatory isn't a "second chance" after we die, nor is it an eternal in-between state for those not good enough for heaven or bad enough for Hell.
- What does the Church teach about Purgatory? Purgatory is a state of purification or purgation of venial sin and all attachment to sin for those who die in friendship with God (those who die in the state of grace) but are not ready for total communion with God in Heaven yet because their love is imperfect.
- It can be considered something good for those souls who love God, though not perfectly, because they can be purged of the selfishness that keeps them from full union with the God who is Love and live with him forever.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Why is it accurate to state, "God doesn't send people to Hell"?

(At the Particular Judgment, God makes a judgment about the condition of a person's desires in his or her heart. It is not God who sends people to Hell; it is the will of the person that does so. If a person has lived life in a relationship with God, the soul continues that relationship for eternity in Heaven. If a person has severed his or her relationship with God, the person continues that reality into eternity. God does not force his love onto someone, which is why it is an act of God to create Hell. If someone does not wish to spend eternity with God in Heaven, then God gives that soul what it wants, which is eternity without Him.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL)

SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- **The Particular Judgment:** At the moment of death, every person receives his eternal reward or retribution in his soul. If he dies in the state of grace, in friendship with Christ, he receives entrance into Heaven (either immediately or through purification). If he dies out of friendship with Christ, never accepting Christ's loving mercy, he remains separated from Jesus in eternal damnation (CCC 1051).
- **Hell:** We cannot be united with God unless we chose to love him. If we gravely sin against God, against our neighbor, or against ourselves and fail to repent and accept God's mercy, we will remain separated from him forever by our own free choice. This definitive self-exclusion from unity with God is called Hell (CCC 1033).
- **Heaven:** Those who die in friendship with God and are perfectly purified will see God as he is, face-to-face in Heaven. Heaven is the perfect communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the angels and saints. This perfect communion with God is the fulfillment of every human desire and the state of complete happiness (CCC 1023–1029).
- **Purgatory:** There are some who die in friendship with God, and their souls are assured of Heaven, but they first must undergo a purification of venial sin and all attachment to sin before entering full communion with God in Heaven (CCC 1030–1032).
- **Prayers for the Dead:** Catholics pray for the dead so that their loving intercession might contribute to the souls' purification and hasten their union with God in heaven (CCC 1032).
- **The Last Judgment.** At the end of time, Christ will come again in glory, our bodies will be resurrected, and all humanity will face the Last Judgment, in which the truth of each man's relationship with God will be made known and the consequences of each person's actions will be revealed (CCC 1038–39).

STEP #9**CALL TO CONVERSION**

SAY: Spend a few moments reflecting on what the Catholic Church teaches about the Last Things. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. In the words of a traditional *Catechism*, “God made us to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in Heaven.” As we go through our lives, the single most important question we need to ask in light of eternity is *How can we know, love, and serve God?* If we want our lives on earth to have meaning, we need to explore this question in depth. What do you think it means to know God? What does it mean to love God? What does it mean to serve God? What is one way this week that you can get to know God better? To love him more deeply? To serve him more completely? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance—and courage—to follow through on your commitment.
2. Reflect on the following quote from the Ash Wednesday liturgy: “Remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” How does this quote make you feel? Why do you think that the Church asks us to reflect on this statement at the beginning of Lent? How might this prayer help you focus more on what is truly important in this life?
3. At the end of the presentation, Dr Sri asks a fundamental question: “Are you moving toward eternity with Jesus or without him?” Take some time to look over your life, your priorities, the way you spend your days. Is your life moving toward Jesus or away from him? How would your life be different if you were truly making all your decisions in the light of your eternal destiny?

**DIGGING DEEPER****What the Church Teaches About Purgatory**

“All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come.”

From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come (CCC 1030–1031).

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the Four Last Things as well as on the Church's teachings about Purgatory.

Let's close our time together today by praying St. Alphonsus Liguori's Night Prayer:

Jesus Christ, my God,
 I adore you and thank you
 for all the graces
 you have given me this day.
 I offer you my sleep
 and all the moments of this night,
 and I beg of you
 to keep me without sin.
 Therefore, I put myself
 within your sacred side
 and under the mantle of Our Lady,
 my Mother.
 Let your holy angels
 stand about me and keep me in peace;
 and let your blessing be upon me.
 Amen.



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Particular Judgment: CCC 1021–1022

Heaven: CCC 1023–1029

Hell: CCC 1033–1037

Purgatory: CCC 1030–1032

Last Judgment: CCC 1038–1041

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 13

The Last Things by Regis Martin

The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis

Heaven, the Heart's Deepest Longing by Peter Kreeft

Encyclical Letter *Saved by Hope* by Pope Benedict XVI

(www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html)

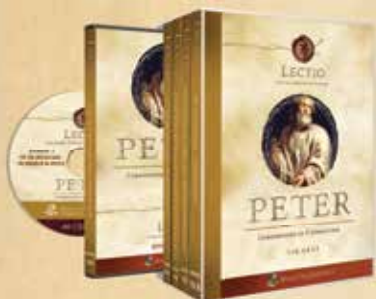
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EUCHARIST: DISCOVERING THE MASS IN THE BIBLE

Jesus said, “This is my Body” and “This is my Blood.”

Some say they're merely symbols of remembrance. Others say they're really the Body and Blood of Christ but can't explain how that's possible. The Eucharist is the center-point of the Mass – but why?

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