

Basic Training Discipleship Follow-Ups

FOCUS
Vision for Life

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FOCUS

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FOCUS, the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, is a national collegiate outreach that meets college students where they are and invites them to examine the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Through large group outreach, Bible studies and one on one mentoring, FOCUS missionaries are equipped to introduce college students to the Person of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith, empowering them to share His love with the world.

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Follow-up 1: Repent and Believe

Take some time to read Luke 15:11-32. Jesus shares with us the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable the father has two sons. The first is a rebel who rejects his father and leaves home to squander his inheritance. The second acts like a slave, who, while never rejecting his father, serves him without a sense of love and feels himself to be the slave of a master rather than the beloved child of a gracious and loving father. Each person is tempted to relate to the Heavenly Father as either a slave or a rebel, and thus, they fail to trust Him.

If we are like the first son, we have either ignored or rejected what we know to be God's will. If this is so, then we must repent and begin to follow and to trust. Just as the first son came home, we too can come to God, trusting in His forgiveness. Or, like the second son, we may have been a "good kid," and "played by the rules," but for the wrong reasons. We may simply have wanted to avoid being punished instead of trusting that what God desires is our lasting joy. We may have avoided some of the bigger sins, but only because we were afraid of going to Hell. We missed the heart of the matter: God wants to love us and to be loved by us. In either case, we must turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive us and bring us into right relationship with His Father.

I'm certain of this—that if my conscience were burdened with all the sins it's possible to commit, I would still go and throw myself into our Lord's arms, my heart all broken up with contrition; I know what tenderness He has for any prodigal son of His who comes back to Him.

~St. Therese of Lisieux

Turn Around!

According to the Scriptures, the first word from the public ministry of both Jesus Christ and John the Baptist is the same: "Repent!" (Matthew 3:1 and 4:17). In its simplest sense, to repent means to "turn back".¹ Belief and trust in Jesus allow us to receive the grace to turn away from sin and attain our ultimate purpose. While "we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6), Jesus, the Good Shepherd, pursues us and ushers us back into the fold.

In the Gospel of St. John, we see His tender commitment to His flock:

¹ Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p.640.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:27-29).

The ultimate expression of the Good Shepherd's love for His sheep is another sign of seeming contradiction: His total self-gift on the cross.

"The revelation of divine love in Christ manifested at the same time the extent of evil and the superabundance of grace" (CCC 385). The light of Christ shines forth on our brokenness, and we see the truth of the human condition; the Divine Physician prescribes His own death as the cure for the illness of sin. At the same time, God's love and grace bring the healing we so desperately need. His condemnation, His utter rejection of our sinfulness, is also His mercy.

The Truth Will Make you Free

Repentance is a matter of not just the head, but it is also a movement of the heart:

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end to sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace (CCC 1431).

Jesus challenges us to think about things in a different light. He calls us to a life of love. As we have seen in the Prodigal Son, disobedience breaks our relationship with our Heavenly Father. However, God seeks more than obedience, He seeks our loving trust. God wants us to come to Him as children come to their loving father.

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

By yielding our lives to God, we are set free. This may at first seem like a contradiction. "How can I be free if I submit to someone else's will?"

Imagine, if you will, a patch of sunflowers. As you may know, the sunflower is a heliotrope - it turns so that its leaves face the sun throughout the day. Now imagine a sunflower who decided not to follow the sun's path across the sky, but faced in exactly the opposite direction. Naturally, such a flower would wither and die. In this way, the sunflower is not unlike the human soul. The obstinate flower in the above illustration would not be killed by the sun anymore than an unrepentant sinner is destroyed by God - rather, the unrepentant sinner is destroyed by sin, by refusing the gift of life.

More than anything else, God's desire is for our happiness. When we make the decision to follow Jesus, trusting Him and His commandments, we will experience deep peace and lasting joy. He tells us, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). His will does not interfere with our freedom, but allows us to experience total fulfillment, to flourish.

True repentance entails changing our attitude about freedom and trusting that God has a plan for our ultimate happiness. As we have seen, it is possible to obey without love, but God seeks our loving obedience, expressed in trust. As we grow in our loving trust of God, we will begin to experience the freedom and joy He wants for us: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

For Discussion

1. Is there any one theme in this Follow-up that you find most applicable to your life?

2. In light of the parable of the Prodigal Son, how would you describe your relationship with your Heavenly Father?

3. Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin. What He asks in return is that you turn your heart to Him, trusting Him as your Lord and Savior. Have you repented and made Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? (If you want to, you can begin your journey with Him right now.)

4. What are some areas in your life of which you need to repent and entrust to Jesus Christ?

5. What practical step(s) can you take to improve your relationship with God and allow Jesus to be the Lord of all your life?

6. Read CCC 1431. According to this passage, the four aspects of repentance are as follows:

- 1. A conversion to God with your whole heart**
- 2. An end to sin and a turning away from evil, i.e. choosing to lead a Christ-centered life**
- 3. A desire to change one's life and hope in God's mercy and trust in His help**
- 4. Salutary pain and sadness**

How are these aspects being recognized in your life right now?

7. We are never alone in the Christian life. In fact, the key to a Christ-centered life is allowing Christ to forgive you and to strengthen you.

According to Acts 2:37-38, what also is necessary besides repentance?

Transfer Point

There are two key points to pass on from this Follow-up:

1. Each of us needs to turn to God and to give his entire life to Jesus Christ as Lord. True faith in Jesus Christ requires us to follow Him as Lord and Savior.
2. We need to see that our Heavenly Father desires to heal us, restore us, and elevate us for our new life in Christ as adopted sons and daughters of God.

These themes will be fleshed out further in the subsequent Follow-ups. As you share your own experience of these truths with others, be sure to move from the over-arching principle (“We all are sinners...” etc.) to your concrete experience (“I was really stressed and afraid about X and Y all the time, and I sought freedom in such-and-such misguided ways. I’ve experienced a new joy and hope in Z fashion since striving to offer these things to Christ.”).

Remember that Our Lord is the Living Word - His instructions are life. As you share your heart with others and reveal how you have allowed Christ to shape your life, they will see more clearly the truth of the Gospel. This is the essence of being a witness for Him.

Follow-up 2: Baptism

Once Upon A Time...

...there was a just King who ruled a far green country. The beauty of his kingdom was rivaled only by his care for his subjects - everyone had gainful employment and no one went without food or shelter. The rich took care of the poor.

Of all his subjects, the King's Viceroy was the most intelligent. He was a brilliant but jealous man, so he could not tolerate the King's kindness to the poor. Because of his many talents and his great power in the kingdom, he believed himself alone to be worthy of the King's favor; when he realized that the King did not seem to esteem him as highly as he esteemed himself, the Viceroy fomented a rebellion.

The Viceroy used his cunning to turn several of the nobles against the King, promising them that once he sat on the throne, he would make these rich men even richer and more powerful. The nobles armed themselves, and pressed the peasants and hired workers on their lands into service in the ensuing civil war.

Though the Viceroy was a keen manipulator, his campaign proved unsuccessful. His army couldn't overpower the King's faithful knights. His band of rebels was utterly routed.

The King, in his benevolence, merely exiled the Viceroy and his followers (though their offense could have carried the penalty of death) to a craggy desert island across the sea. There, the Viceroy brooded over his defeat, and ruled over his pitiful band of exiles as a tyrant, cruel and twisted. He constructed the Inescapable Prison out of the jagged rock of the island to torture those who displeased him, and he built all manner of weapons to keep his subjects from attempting escape and to prevent any outsiders from approaching.

Over the years the Inescapable Prison grew as children were born into exiled families. In the dark depths of the Prison, the exiles tried to remember what life had been like before the war, before banishment by the King. Some, it seems, had received messages from across the sea which led them to believe that the King might someday send rescue.

And so it happened one day that a white ship appeared on the horizon. The Viceroy's servants warned their master that the ship's sails bore the crest of the King. The Viceroy ordered his minions to fire their bows and catapults, but to no avail; this was the Unsinkable Ship, captained by the Prince himself! When he landed on the island, the Prince announced to all in exile that the King wished to offer them clemency and free passage back to the mainland.

The prisoners rejoiced, but the Viceroy would not release them. The Prince proposed an exchange: he would willingly go down into the Prison, if all others would be let go. The Viceroy greedily agreed - he hated the King more than anything in the world, and knew the loss of the Prince would grieve him greatly.

The freed prisoners ran to the ship, and the Prince's personal guard piloted it back to the mainland. The faithful knights wept as they sailed, for they had lost the one they'd sworn to protect.

To the great surprise of all the throng that disembarked onto the King's docks, the Prince was there to greet them - with the keys to the Inescapable Prison in his hand! Thereafter, the King's restored subjects knew only happiness and peace, and the Viceroy could do them no further harm.

The End...and the Beginning...

This story is like our story. Because Adam followed Satan into rebellion against the heavenly Father, he was exiled from Eden and from fellowship with God. Because we are all descendants of Adam, we are born into a condition of separation from our Heavenly Father, a condition known as Original Sin. To make matters worse, we have committed sins of our own that separate us even more from God. The good news is that God, our Father in heaven, sent His only son Jesus Christ to die on a cross for our sins, so that we would be offered safe passage into the Father's kingdom. The question is, do we get on the boat?

Baptism Pre-figured

In the Old Testament, God, in His marvelous wisdom and providence, gave us events that point toward Baptism as the way we "get on the boat." Noah's ark foreshadows God's saving action through Baptism, because by it the Prophet and his family were "saved through water" (cf. 1 Peter 3:18-21). The waters of the Great Flood point to the waters of Baptism, through which God destroys sin and brings about a new beginning.

This water not so much washes as it destroys - just as in Baptism, the old man is destroyed by means of the sacrament of water, and the new man who comes up from the water belongs to the new creation (Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, p. 77).

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship.

~Romans 8:14-15

The early Christians, who were trained by the apostles and their disciples, illustrated their understanding of Baptism in the same terms:

“The Lord maketh the flood to dwell” (Psalm 28:10). A flood is an overflow of water which causes all lying below it to disappear and cleanses all that was previously filthy. Therefore, he called the grace of Baptism a flood, so that the soul, being washed well of its sins and rid of the old man, is suitable hence-forward as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (St. Basil, 230 A.D.).

In addition to the flood, in the Exodus, the nation of Israel is radically liberated through water. Israel is released from slavery in Egypt by a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. The waters of the Red Sea delivered the Israelites from slavery to Pharaoh, just as the waters of Baptism free us from an even greater slavery - the slavery to sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 1-2). St. Basil the Great observes:

The sea killed the enemy; so in Baptism, our enmity to God is destroyed. The people came out of the sea whole and safe; we also come out of the water as living men from among the dead (De Spiritu Sancto, 14).

Baptism is the death of sin and the beginning of new life; it is the birth into the life of Jesus Christ. This beginning, this birth, is not merely symbolic - it is a real beginning, a real birth. The word “Baptize” comes from the Greek *Baptizein*, meaning “to plunge” or “to immerse.” In Baptism, we are buried with Christ so that we may rise with Him. Through our Baptism our sins are washed away and we become a “new creation in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Entering the Covenant

Entering the Covenant When Jesus was Baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist, the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Jesus. The Father in heaven proclaimed, "This is My beloved son." What was made manifest in Jesus' Baptism, that He is God's beloved son, is communicated to us when we are Baptized.

At our Baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon us, entering our souls. At the same time, the Father in heaven pronounces, "This is my beloved son," or "This is my beloved daughter." God the Father in heaven looks down upon us and calls us His own!

Jesus Christ came to establish the New and Everlasting Covenant. You may have heard that before, but what does it mean on a practical level? A covenant is a life-transforming relationship in which two people give their lives to one another and become family. Think of adoption or marriage. In each case someone who was not a family member becomes one through a sacred covenant. A covenant is more than a mere contract. In a contract, people exchange goods and services; in a covenant, people exchange themselves.

Baptism is that covenant through which we receive the divine life. Jesus is not merely offering to save us from Hell, He is saving us for a participation in His own Divine life. In Baptism our sins are washed away and we become true children of God.

As children of God we become heirs of His kingdom. If our Father is King, then we are royalty. We are in the will, so to speak, and what we inherit is heaven. And since children tend to be like their parents, God makes us like Himself by giving us a share of His life, which we call grace. That grace, which is God's eternal life, makes us capable of living the life of heaven that God lives (CCC 1263 & 1265). That shared life of heaven, which we receive at Baptism, binds all of God's children together by bonds that are stronger than death and deeper than our natural family ties. This new life is the source of our unity in the Family of God, the Church (CCC 1267 & 1271). Each of us in the Church is a little church, a temple of the Holy Spirit. If we live in cooperation with the grace that God the Father gives us through Christ at our Baptism, God literally dwells within us by that grace.

For Discussion

- 1. Is there any one theme in this Follow-up that you find most applicable to your life?**
- 2. Read John 3:1-5. What does Jesus teach about Baptism in this passage?**
- 3. Read Titus 3:5-8. What does this passage teach about salvation? How does this passage help illuminate what we mean by the “gift” of salvation?**
- 4. Compare Titus 3:5-8 with Ephesians 2:8-10. What are we called to do as a result of our Baptism?**
- 5. What does Paul say about the believer in 2 Corinthians 5:17? How is someone who is “a new creation” different from someone who is rehabilitated or re-educated? Paul also indicates that need to give up something of our old nature. What might this be for you?**

Baptismal Promises

Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children? I do.

Do you reject the glamour of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin? I do.

Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness? I do.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth? I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Father's only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? I do.

+God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever. Amen.

Transfer Point

Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons and daughters of God; we become members of Christ and are incorporated into the Family of God, the Church (cf. CCC 1213).

With this great gift comes great responsibility and the promise of eternal joy.

Follow-up 3: Confession

Matthew 9:1-8

And getting into a boat Jesus crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he then said to the paralytic - "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

When people ask me, or indeed anybody else, "Why did you join the Church of Rome?" the first essential answer, if it is partly an elliptical answer, is, "To get rid of my sins." For there is no other religious system that does really profess to get rid of people's sins. It is confirmed by the logic, which to many seems startling, by which the Church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned.

~G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*

The First Easter

Picture the scene: The apostles are gathered together in the Upper Room where just days earlier they had celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus. The last few days have been a whirlwind of horror and tragedy. Before their very eyes, Jesus, their Master and best friend, the one they believed to be the Messiah, was tortured, humiliated and crucified. To make matters worse, the apostles thought they would be next.

But now there were reports that Jesus had risen from the dead. Hard to believe, but trusted friends had said so. Were they delusional, or was it true? In spite of the closed doors, Jesus appears in their midst:

"Peace be with you." When He said this He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:19-23).

Ponder the Lord's words for a moment. He tells His faithful followers that he sends them as the Father sent Him. Isn't this startling? The disciples are looking at the face of God Incarnate - who healed the sick, raised the dead, who let Himself be humiliated and killed, who rose from the dead. He now tells them that they, in spite of their human frailty, will retain or forgive sins by the power of the Holy Spirit - the same power for which the people glorified God in Matthew 9.

The Mission and the Struggle

As we've discussed elsewhere, our initial repentance is a new beginning - in Baptism we are forgiven our sins and given new spiritual life. While this sacrament starts us on the path to holiness, we still struggle with sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Notice how, even after being saved through the miracle at the Red Sea, the Israelites faced a long, perilous journey. The Christian life takes much the same shape:

The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 37, 2).

Whether you've been a Christian for a long while or not, you likely realize the difficulty involved in obeying the Lord's command to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance to aid us in the struggle to be faithful, as St. John tells us that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Through the grace that is offered to us in the Sacrament, we are forgiven the sins we have committed and strengthened by grace to resist the same temptations in the future.

You may have heard other Christians ask why Catholics believe it necessary to go to Confession - usually adding, "I just go straight to God to ask His forgiveness." The Church doesn't see Confession as 'indirect,' because She believes that receiving the

sacrament is going to God to ask His forgiveness. The mighty works performed by Jesus in His physical body He now performs throughout the world in His Mystical Body, the Church. Jesus became man so that we could experience communion with God here and now. He continues to speak to us and heal us through the Sacraments, by the ministry He gave to His priests and bishops.

Ongoing Conversion

The day after their wedding, a newlywed wife asked her husband if he loved her. He responded, "I loved you when we got married, why do I have to love you now?" Absurd as that kind of response would be, too many Christians live their lives as if they have already repented, and therefore there is no need to do it anymore. Just as marriage is both an event, and also a lifetime, so too is turning to follow Christ. Repentance is a lifelong process. St. Ambrose says of the two conversions in the Church, "there are water and tears; the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance" (CCC 1429).

The process of going to Confession gives us a concrete opportunity to be honest with ourselves and thus with Our Lord. Because we must name our sins out loud, we must do a good job of identifying them beforehand. Because He made us, Our Lord perfectly understands our nature; He knows that fallen man can very easily slip into self-deception, that we could convince ourselves more easily that we're "all right with God" by praying for forgiveness in a general sort of way. Spiritual renewal occurs whenever we repent of our sins in private prayer; sacramental healing occurs when we seek forgiveness within the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we hear the priest say, in the person of Christ, "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit," we know that Our Lord has forgiven us.

To make our celebration of this sacrament more effective, we need to prepare ourselves properly. To grow in the awareness of our need for repentance in specific areas, we ought to regularly examine our consciences. You can follow these simple steps to further open yourself to Christ's healing grace:

- **Review:** At the end of each day, reflect on your actions with a formal Examination of Conscience (see next page).

- **Repent:** Continually foster the desire to turn away from sin (for instance, immediately offer a brief prayer when facing temptations).
- **Reconcile:** Go to Confession. Jesus came to earth to forgive sins, to offer mercy and peace.

Jesus offers that same mercy, peace, and forgiveness to us every time we enter into the Sacrament of Confession.

For Discussion

1. **Is there any one theme in this Follow-up that you find most applicable to your life?**
2. **What has been your experience with the Sacrament of Confession? Have you experienced the “restoration of intimate friendship” with God? Do you find it difficult to make Confession a regular practice?**
3. **Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Does it help you to know that Jesus, Whom you approach in the Sacrament of Confession, has experienced temptations similar to yours? How?**
4. **What imagery comes to mind when reading about the throne of grace in Hebrews 4:16?**

5. Read CCC 1458. While it may be easy to see Confession as simply an obligation of the Christian life, how does the Catechism address this sacrament?

Examination of Conscience and Prayer of Contrition

Place yourself in the presence of God, recognizing His Fatherly power and your weakness. Tell Him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

Ask the Holy Spirit and your Guardian Angel for assistance to acknowledge your failings and virtues: What have I done wrong? What have I done right? What could I have done better?

Examine your conscience with sincerity:

- Did I often consider that God is my Father? Did I offer Him my work and sufferings? Did I make good use of my time? Did I pray thoughtfully and with attention?
- Did I anticipate other people’s needs? Did I criticize anyone or anything? Did I participate in gossip or negative humor? Was I patient, even when I found it difficult? Was I forgiving?
- Did I pray and offer some sacrifice for the Church, for the Pope, and for others?
- Did I allow myself to be carried away by sensuality? By pride? Did I avoid the near occasion of sin?
- Did I work sincerely on my particular resolutions? Was I joyful in my actions? Did I do what I said I would, when I said I would?

Make an Act of Contrition, sorrowfully asking our Lord's pardon: O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because I have offended You, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

Make, or renew, your particular intention for tomorrow:

- To stay away from certain temptations
- To avoid a specific fault
- To pursue a specific virtue

Transfer Point

Jesus acts now through His Mystical Body, the Church, as He did in the flesh 2000 years ago. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the ordinary means Jesus Christ established for the healing and forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism. We are restored to our divine sonship by receiving absolution after an honest confession.

Follow-up 4: New Identity In Christ

The Desire for Victory

In the 1976 Olympics, Japanese gymnast Shun Fujimoto hoped to help his team beat the very dominant USSR. During the floor exercises, he broke his right kneecap. To those watching, it was heartbreaking to see this young man's dreams vanish just one event from victory. To everyone's surprise, however, he braced his injured knee and stayed in the competition. While he feared his injury was serious, he hid the extent of it from his coach - Shun knew that losing a teammate this close to the goal for which they had trained and competed so strenuously would demoralize the team.

The last event was the rings, which one can compete in without the full function of one's legs. His trainers lifted him up onto the rings and he began his routine. The crowd was hushed as he performed, not because of his flawless performance, but because they were awaiting one thing - the dismount.

Most dismounts involve a free fall of over eight feet, and this man would need to dismount on a badly broken kneecap. At the end of his routine, he didn't back away, but executed a perfect dismount, landing on his legs and holding his place for the required time - before crumpling to the floor in agonizing pain. He received a 9.7 from the judges, and Japan won the team gold with a score only four-tenths of a point higher than the USSR's.

So be strict with yourself, like a good athlete of God. The prize, as you well know, is immortality and eternal life.

~St. Ignatius of Antioch

Later, at the medal ceremony, he hobbled onto the platform unassisted to receive the gold with his teammates. Fujimoto was asked, "How did you do it? Wasn't the pain unbearable?" He responded, "My desire to win was greater than my moment of pain."

"Run So as to Win"

While making great sacrifices in athletic competition is an admirable pursuit, even the Olympic gold eventually fades. As Christians, however, we have an even greater goal. St. Paul says:

'Adapted in part from <http://gymnasticszone.com/ToughGymnast.htm>.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (1 Corinthians 9:24-26).

If an athlete is willing to order his life toward winning a “perishable wreath,” how much more ought the Christian order his life toward the prize of eternal life? All of our choices, our decisions, our actions, have consequences. True wisdom involves knowing the end, or the final goal. We must strive to keep our end in mind and, like the gymnast, pursue that end with a passion and zeal that will lead us to victory.

New Choices

What if you were ready to board a flight from Chicago to San Francisco, and on the way to your gate, you noticed a pilot in the airport bar downing drink after drink? Now what if you got on the plane and glanced in the cockpit only to notice that same pilot sitting in the captain’s chair? What was once not a big deal has now become personal because that inebriated pilot holds your life in his hands. In a very real way, the same is true for all of us.

Each choice we make has an effect not only on our own lives, but on the lives of everyone else in the world. This means that as Christians we can order our lives in such a way that we will go to Heaven and take others with us as well. Practically speaking, what does this mean? It means that we need to examine our lives on a daily basis to ensure that our decisions are made for the greater glory of God’s kingdom.

A few suggestions come to mind regarding friends, time, and goals. Many questions could be asked in regard to just these three areas. For example: How are my friendships helping me to grow closer to Christ? Am I truly a friend if I just stand by and watch my friends make bad decisions? Do I use my time for God’s greater glory? One thousand years from now, when I reflect on my life, what do I want it to have stood for? The following passage from the Second Letter of Peter should cause us to pause and reflect. Take some time to read it slowly and carefully.

For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are

yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-11).

St. Peter tells us that not only does our every action have an effect, either positive or negative, but he also tells us that the end of all our actions should be life and love. As the book of Deuteronomy extols us, "Choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30:19).

New Purpose

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matthew 28:19-20).

These were the last words spoken by Christ to His disciples before He ascended to the Father in Heaven. These are the words He speaks to you. He speaks them to every Christian. Through our Baptism, we have been given a new life and a new purpose. That purpose is to cooperate with God in His great commission, for the Lord does not wish "for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It is God's deepest desire that all men would join in true communion and fellowship with Him. As Christians, we have the unique privilege of helping God fulfill His desire.

God wants us to allow Him to fill us with His love so completely that it overflows. Our reflecting of the Divine light in the way we view ourselves and other people, our desire to bind ourselves to Him and to make Him known, our honest sharing of the truth with others, our acts of service to other souls, are all outpourings of love. This is the essence of witness.

Through our Baptism we have died to our old selves and have risen to a new life in Christ. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). May we always seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and order our lives to help others seek it as well.

For Discussion

- 1. Read Ephesians 4:21-24 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. What does having a “new identity in Christ” and being a “new creation” mean to you?**
- 2. Read Galatians 2:19-20. What does it mean to be “crucified with Christ”?**
- 3. Read John 10:10. What do you think Jesus means when He says He wants us to have life “to the full”?**
- 4. Read John 14:6 and CCC 1265. If we embrace Christ as Lord and are Baptized, we share in His very life, which means we have a new identity (a new identity in Christ). What are some concrete steps you can take to more fully live out the new identity you’ve received? How can you share this with others?**
- 5. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and 19. Membership in God’s household is a gift - something we have not earned on our own. Do you live your life in such way as to glorify God for this gift while at the same time setting the example for others? How so? In what ways do your actions affect the other members of the household?**

Transfer Point

By virtue of our Baptism, we are marked as followers of Christ. This Follow-up should help us to more fully embrace that identity and make concrete resolutions to live out His mission for us.

Follow-up 5: The Teaching of the Apostles

“How can I know, unless someone guides me?”

In the very early days of Christianity, the apostles were all still living in Jerusalem and meeting regularly in the temple. After a severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem began, the apostle Philip went to Samaria to preach the Gospel. While he was there, an angel told him to go south by the desert route to Gaza. On his journey, he was told by the Holy Spirit to meet up with an important Ethiopian, the treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian was reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah in his chariot while traveling home from Jerusalem. When Philip ran up to the Ethiopian’s chariot and heard the man reading, he asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” So Philip got into the man’s chariot and informed him that the passage he was reading (“like a sheep he was led to the slaughter...”) referred to Jesus, and he told the man all about Jesus. When they came to a body of water along the way, the man asked to be Baptized. After the Baptism, Philip’s work being done, the Holy Spirit snatched Philip away (See Acts 8:27-39).

If you’ve ever tried reading the Bible, you’ve probably asked questions similar to the Ethiopian man’s question - questions like, “How can I know what Jesus meant?” or “Does this passage mean what I think it means?” Thankfully, Jesus provided us with men like Philip to help us to find answers to these questions. Jesus understood that in all things, but especially in matters of faith, good teachers are helpful and sometimes even necessary for us to come to knowledge of the truth.

The Teaching Apostolic Church

Before He was taken up to heaven, Jesus said to His apostles:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

Notice that Jesus tells them to go forth and make disciples because (“Go therefore...”) He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. He is transferring His authority over

Factoid:

St. Paul urged the Ephesians to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is better to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

This was an oral teaching this saying of Jesus is not recorded anywhere in the Gospels.

(Luke 10:16). This statement is very strong. To reject the teaching of the apostles is to reject Christ Himself and the Father Himself. In other words, Jesus is assuring us that the apostles speak for Him.

Jesus not only promised that He would be with the apostles always, but He also promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them “to all truth” (John 16:13). Therefore, their teaching is continually guided by the Spirit and is authoritative. This authority was clearly understood and exercised by the apostles. They understood that their apostleship was given to them by Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1) and that they were “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Peter

Jesus gave this apostolic authority to Peter in a special way:

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16: 18-19).

Not only does Jesus change Simon’s name to Peter (meaning “rock”) to symbolize his foundational position in the church, but he also gives him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Keys are a sign of authority given to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of David (see Isaiah 22:19-22). We see further evidence of Peter’s primacy (i.e., his leadership role among the apostles) from the fact that he is always listed first in scriptural lists of the apostles (while Judas is always listed last). Finally, the early chapters of Acts show Peter as the clear leader of the early church.

¹Here he gives them authority to Baptize. Elsewhere he gives them authority to administer the other sacraments, e.g., to forgive sins (John 20: 21-23) and to consecrate the Eucharist (Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24).

Tradition and Scripture

Faithful to Jesus' command to teach all nations to observe all He had commanded them, the apostles handed on to others everything they had received from Jesus - whether from His lips, from His way of life, or from His deeds. They handed on the Gospel in two ways: (1) orally, through their preaching and example, and by the institutions they established; and (2) in writing, when they and their followers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, committed their message to writing.² St. Paul spoke of these two means of handing on the Good News when he wrote:

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

The traditions and truths that are passed on orally make up Sacred Tradition.³ Those Apostolic writings determined by the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are collectively called Sacred Scripture.

Apostolic Succession

The question remains, who was authorized to pass on these traditions after the apostles died? What would happen to their teaching authority? Paul gives us insight into this through what he wrote to his disciple and fellow-bishop Timothy:

“The apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life.... Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles were familiar, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of the Tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?”

~ St. Irenaeus (2nd century Bishop of Lyons), *Against the Heresies*, III.4.1

²Vatican II, *The Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, no. 7. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 76.

³Not to be confused with various disciplinary, liturgical and devotional traditions in the Church. These customs and practices, which vary with time and place, are not part of Sacred Tradition and can be changed or even abandoned.

Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.... You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 1:14, 2:1-2).

Just as Timothy was to entrust to faithful men what he learned from Paul, the other apostles entrusted to their successors (the bishops) what they learned from Christ. These bishops received not only the entire Gospel, but also Christ's own authority which He had given to the apostles. This handing down of authority - from Jesus Christ to the apostles to present-day bishops - is called apostolic succession.

Today, the successors of the apostles - led by the Pope, the successor to Peter, the Head of the Apostles - form the teaching office of the Church, known as the Magisterium. The Magisterium exercises teaching authority in the name of Jesus Christ by passing on to us what Jesus and the apostles taught and did. This is how the Early Church devoted herself to the safeguard of "the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42; also 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Today, the Magisterium continues to give us the authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in the form of Sacred Scripture or of Sacred Tradition.

For Discussion

- 1. Discuss the role that various teachers (in any subject) have played in your life. Where do teachers get their authority to teach?**

- 2. Read Acts 8:26-39. Think of a time you did not understand a passage in the Bible. What did you do?**

- 3. Why do you think it is fashionable these days not only to question authority, but also to resist or even rebel against authority?**

- 4. Why might some people find it difficult to accept the authority of the Church's Magisterium to teach about Christ? How would you explain the idea of Magisterial authority to such a person?**

- 5. Why is sure (authoritative) knowledge of God's truths important for a Christian? How might not knowing one or more of God's truths affect your relationship with God and/or how you live as a Christian? How have you come to know God's truth?**

Transfer Point

The truths revealed by Christ to the apostles, which are intended to bring us into a deeper relationship with Him, are safeguarded and taught to us by the Church's Magisterium (which is the successors to the apostles, i.e., the bishops, in union with the Pope -- the successor to St. Peter). The Magisterium preserves and teaches through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Follow-up 6: Fellowship

St. Ignatius Loyola led an adventurous life. As a young man, he was vain and “sought little in life other than military glory and the admiring glances of high-born ladies at the Spanish court where he was a frequent visitor.” After being badly injured in battle, during his long recovery, he read a life of Christ and the lives of the saints and was converted to Christ. “The prayers, penances, and other austerities that the saints endured... for the love of God made a deep impression on the heroic side of the warrior’s mind. This awakened in him a new life of a soldier of Christ...” He was determined to serve the Lord by imitating the saints through fasting and pilgrimage. After he recovered from his battle wounds, Ignatius “left the family estate and embarked on a penitential journey of several years that took him across northern Spain through Italy to the Holy Land, back to Spain and eventually to Paris.... The long journey gave Ignatius an opportunity to realize that in order to pursue his vague vocation to save souls he needed a better education.... On October 1, 1529, the founder of the Society of Jesus formally entered the University of Paris and met his two new roommates, Pierre Favre, [who became] the first Jesuit, and a young popular sports hero [Francis Xavier] who looked rather disapprovingly on the gimpy, aging beggar [Ignatius]....”¹

Xavier and Favre made an odd pair. Favre was a peasant, pious and studious; Xavier was a Basque nobleman - dark haired, tall, a fine athlete, outgoing.... While Favre was pious, Xavier was worldly, so Loyola, who wanted to recruit others to serve God, needed a different strategy to win over Xavier. Loyola attended some classes in philosophy taught by Xavier at the College of St. Bauvais and helped pay some of his debts. Several accounts relate that he kept asking Xavier the question of Jesus: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?”²

These roommates became companions and friends. They assisted one another in the spiritual life and together founded the Society of Jesus in order to help others.

Fellowship: One of the most important aspects of the Christian life?

Christian fellowship has been described as “the bond of common purpose and devotion

¹The previous quotations have been from *The Jesuits and the Catholic Reformation — Part 1: The Founder* by Jeremias Wells at <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6236>.

²Donnelly, John Patrick, S.J. *Three Roommates in Paris, Santa Clara Magazine, Summer 2006*. <http://www.scu.edu/scm/summer2006/paris.cfm>

that binds Christians together and to Christ.”³ This bond is based on the life in Christ that Christians share. The communal bond of fellowship among Christ’s people is at the very heart of our relationship with Christ Himself. This should not surprise us, since Jesus tells us that the most important thing for us to do (after loving God with our whole heart, mind, and soul) is to love (agape) our neighbor. According to Him, all of Scripture calls us to love God and to love our neighbor. He says, “The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (see Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:31). And who is our neighbor? All the people who God puts in our lives are our neighbors. Through serving and being united with our neighbors, we serve and are united with Christ. As Jesus says, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Fellowship, Love, and Friendship

Closely related to fellowship or the communal life (koinonia) of Christians are friendship (philia) and love (agape, mentioned above). To participate in Christian fellowship is really to love God and neighbor and thereby to be friends with them. Jesus tells us that we remain in his love and are His friends when we follow his commandment to love one another (See John 15:9-17).

Three Types of Friendship

Since we all recognize what a huge role our friends play in our lives, we should examine the definition of friendship a little more deeply. The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that each type of friendship is determined by what the friends love, and lovable things are good, pleasurable, or useful. Therefore, there are (1) friendships of utility or use, (2) friendships for the sake of pleasure, and (3) friendships of the virtuous, which are for the sake of the mutual good of the friends.

(1) A friendship of utility is one based primarily on the use or benefit one may get from the relationship. It’s important to note that such friendships are called useful not because people “use” each other in a necessarily sinful way, but because each person gains some benefit from the other and that benefit is what is most responsible for bringing the people together. For example, many business relationships could be seen in this category. A buyer may regularly purchase certain goods he needs from a particular seller. While the buyer and seller may get to know each other over time and sincerely wish each other well, the friendship is based primarily on the mutual benefit they receive from the relationship.

³B. Chance, “Fellowship” in Holman Bible Dictionary, ed. T. Butler. Nashville: Holman, 1991, p. 482-83.

(2) A friendship of pleasure is one based primarily on the enjoyment one gets from the relationship. What joins the two people are the fun times and enjoyable experiences they share together. For example, enjoying the same music, the same sport, or the same social activities may unite two people in friendship. Others may be friends because they have fun whenever they are with each other, whether it be watching a movie, attending a concert, or going to a party. Or someone might be friends with someone because he is funny, entertaining, or good-looking. What makes this type of friendship attractive is that you receive pleasure from spending time with each other.

Bad company corrupts good morals.

~1 Corinthians 15:33

Weak Foundations

Aristotle says these first two types of friendship are the most fragile, because what is loved (some benefit or pleasure) is impermanent. They tend to dissolve easily because the friend himself is not loved, but rather the benefit or pleasure that he provides is loved. If and when these benefits or pleasures pass away, the friendship dies.

Have you ever noticed how people's friendships tend to change often, especially when they are young? One reason could be that the friendships are built on the weak foundations of pleasure or usefulness which change often. This, however, is not the case with the third form of friendship, virtuous friendship, which is based on a much deeper, more solid foundation of goodness.

Building on Solid Rock

(3) The virtuous friendship seeks the mutual good of the friends. Aristotle writes:

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue [or excellence]; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends (Nicomachean Ethics, VIII.3).

In this kind of friendship, what attracts two people to each other is their mutual goodness. The true friend loves the other person because of the other's goodness and for the sake of the other's own good, rather than for some benefit or pleasure that the other can bestow upon himself. The virtuous friend wants what is truly best for you and actively helps you pursue it. Strictly speaking, perfect-virtuous friendship can only take place between virtuous persons.

True Christian fellowship should strive for this third type of perfect friendship that is for the sake of the mutual good of the friends. Consequently, we will want to establish our strongest friendships with other Christians who truly understand the highest good - our relationship with Jesus Christ within His Church - and who strive to live a Christ-centered life. Thereby we can encourage each other in the things that matter most: prayer, moral living, frequenting the sacraments, virtue, etc. Christian friends build each other up and inspire one another to be the best men and women of God that they can be. They are truly "iron sharpening iron" (cf. Proverbs 27:17).

When lighting a fire for a barbecue, one places the coals close together in a pile, so that they can feed off of each other's warmth and end up burning stronger and longer than if they each were standing on their own. However, if one coal is separated from the others, it will not burn as strongly and soon will die out. In a similar way, Christians who make it a point to gather together in fellowship on a regular basis build each other up and encourage one another in their faith. They help enkindle in each other the fire of love for God. A solitary Christian, on the other hand, who tries to live his faith on his own and does

If the bond of your [friendship] is love, devotion, and Christian perfection, then your friendship will be precious indeed: precious because it has its origin in God, because it is maintained in God, and because it will endure forever in Him.

~St. Francis de Sales

not have the regular support of other Christians will have greater difficulty in maintaining the fire of the faith.

Now, as Christians, we understand that we are all sinners and that Christ came "not to call the just, but sinners" (Mark 2:17), so we need not simply close ranks and turn our backs on the rest of the world. We can have "friendships" with people of different backgrounds, even if they do not have strong relationships with Christ. We must be especially careful in such relationships, however, that we are not moved from the path of virtue. Sometimes we may lose "friends" because of our relationship with Christ. As Christ himself says, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

In the end, remember that having close Christian friends who share your conviction about Christ as the Lord of our lives is crucial, especially in environments where there is not a lot of support for living a Christ-centered life. Christian friendships really are like those

charcoals - when brought together, they enkindle in each other the fire of God's love. That's why the Bible says a true friend is a rare treasure (cf. Sirach 6:14).

For Discussion

1. What is the main insight about friendship that you gained from this Follow-up?

2. Read the Book of Sirach, 6:5-17. Does it describe any friendships you have had? Why do you think someone who fears the Lord (who places God first in his life) would be a true friend?

3. Read the following passages:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12: "Two are better than one: they get a good wage for their labor. If the one falls, the other will lift up his companion. Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up.... Where a lone man may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken."

Proverbs 27:17 : "As iron sharpens iron, so man sharpens his fellow man."

In light of these passages, what are the benefits of having Christian friends who can support each other? In what ways do good friends "sharpen" each other? Do you have friends who support you and "sharpen" you, build you up in your faith and keep you accountable in your relationship with Jesus? How? What can you do to foster fellowship with such friends?

4. Do you have any situations in which you wish you had more support from other committed Catholics? Discuss.

5. What can you do to be a good friend, extending fellowship to others who may not have many Christian friends to encourage them in their faith?

Transfer Point

Decisions we make about our friendships are some of the most important decisions we make in our lives.

We need God to help us to be a good friend, and in turn, we need to have good friends who will help us to grow in our relationship with God.

Follow-up 7: Breaking of the Bread

In 750 A.D., a Basilian monk, wise in the ways of the world but not in the ways of faith, was having difficulty in believing in the real presence of Our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. He prayed constantly for relief from his doubts, and from the fear that he was losing his vocation. He suffered through the routine of his priesthood day after day, with these doubts gnawing at him.

One morning, while he was having a strong attack of doubt, he began the Consecration of the Mass for the people of the town. He used the same size host which is used in the Latin Rite masses today. What he beheld as he consecrated the bread and wine caused his hands to shake, indeed his whole body. He stood for a long time with his back to the people, and then slowly turned around to them.

He said; "O fortunate witnesses to whom the Blessed God, to confound my disbelief, has wished to reveal Himself in this Most Blessed Sacrament and to render Himself visible to our eyes. Come, brethren, and marvel at our God so close to us. Behold the Flesh and Blood of our most beloved Christ." The host had turned into Flesh and the wine had turned into Blood.

The people, having witnessed the miracle for themselves, began to wail, asking for forgiveness, crying for mercy. Others began beating their breasts, confessing their sins, declaring themselves unworthy to witness such a miracle. Still others went down on their knees in respect and thanksgiving for the gift the Lord had bestowed on them. The flesh and blood from this miracle can still be seen today in Lanciano, Italy.¹

Mass Confusion

Although the Eucharist is at the very center of Catholicism,² this great mystery of our faith is not always understood, appreciated, or experienced as it should be. Sometimes we wonder why we have to go to Mass. And many of us who attend Mass every Sunday wish we could "get more out of it." Like the Basilian Priest who felt that his saying Mass daily was mere routine, we often feel like we are just "going through the motions" at Mass.

¹This story is modified from the story at <http://www.miraclerosarymission.org/lanciano.html> . For scientific details about this miracle, see http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/english_pdf/Lanciano1.pdf . For many other stories about Eucharistic miracles, see http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/engl_mir.htm .

²It is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Lumen Gentium 11; CCC, 1324).

While the Mass may sometimes seem like routine to us today, from the earliest years of Christianity it was considered to be the greatest event in the world and the greatest privilege of being a Christian. The breaking of bread (the Eucharist) was considered to be one of the four central activities of Christian life (Acts. 2:42) and Christians considered the Eucharist so sacred that they had to be careful not to receive Communion with serious sin and thus profane the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Perhaps part of our difficulty is confusion about what (or Who) the Eucharist really is. In practice, we allow our senses, which see and taste mere bread and wine, to lull us asleep at Mass, rather than allowing our faith to enliven us to the fact that the Eucharist is Jesus:

Factoid:

“Eucharist” comes from the Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.”

body, blood, soul, and divinity. Every time we receive Holy Communion, we receive Jesus into our body and our spirit and thereby obtain the most profound, intimate union with God that is possible here on earth. If we are not getting enough out of it, we must actively

move our minds and hearts to an awareness and participation in that union. We must join our whole person, spirit as well as body, to Jesus. To do this, it might help to reflect on the ways God has been and continues to be present to us.

God with Us

From the beginning of time, God has desired to be with His people, to be close to us, to be in communion with us. Indeed, God walked in the garden with our first parents. Through sin, however, man has distanced himself from God’s loving presence. That is why the Book of Genesis tells us that after Adam and Eve first sinned, they “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God” (Genesis 3:8). Every sin in history has had the same tragic effect of turning us away from our loving God and leading us into isolation.

Throughout salvation history, however, God gradually restored His presence with us. From the distant voice of God speaking to Noah, to the call of Moses in the burning bush, to the pillar of cloud guiding the Israelites in the desert, to the awesome glory cloud of God’s presence filling the Temple of Jerusalem, God’s presence becomes progressively more intimate throughout the Bible. His closeness to us reaches a climax in the person of Jesus, the God-man. In the first chapter of the New Testament, Jesus is called “Emmanuel,” meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Jesus is the fullness of God dwelling with mankind as one of us. Through Jesus Christ, God is truly and fully present with His people again.

The Power of God's Presence

The presence of Jesus - when He walked on earth - had effects in world; it overcame the illness, darkness, suffering, and sinfulness in people's lives. He promised to continue being with us, even after His ascension to the Father in heaven. In His last words to the Apostles, Jesus promised, "Behold, I am with you always, even until the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus is present to us in many ways. He is present in the Scriptures. He is present when Christians pray together. He is present in His priests and in all the Sacraments. Yet, He is present in a unique and most profound way in the Eucharist (cf. CCC, 1080).

Further evidence that Jesus desired for us to eat His real body and blood can be found in John's Gospel, chapter 6. Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).

At this, many in the crowd who took Jesus quite literally were outraged, saying "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). Yet Jesus' response becomes even more graphic and explicit: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.... For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:52-56).

We can see that Jesus didn't intend for the Eucharist to be simply "a symbolic reminder" of Him, because after this discourse, many of Jesus' own disciples left Him, because (not understanding that he would give us His flesh and blood under the palatable appearances of bread and wine) they (understandably) could not accept this provocative teaching that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood. It is most significant that Jesus did not chase after them and try to convince them that He was only speaking figuratively or symbolically. Instead, He let them go, because they did not believe (John 6:66).

The first Christians also testify to the Church's belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Less than 80 years after Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 6, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a 2nd-century Bishop who was a disciple of the Apostle St. John, wrote: "I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire His Blood, which is love incorruptible" [Letter to the Romans (ca. A.D. 110)].

St. Justin Martyr, a 2nd-century philosopher and Christian apologist, also wrote eloquently about the Eucharist. "For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus" [First Apology (ca. A.D. 148-155)].

I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was the seed of David; and for drink I desire His blood, which is love incorruptible.

~St. Ignatius of Antioch, 2nd Century

Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. When the priest says the words of consecration at Mass, the bread and wine truly change into the real living body and blood of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. Under the physical appearances of bread and wine, Jesus' body, blood, soul, and divinity are substantially present in the Eucharist (CCC, 1374-6).

The belief in Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist flows from Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper. There, Jesus instituted the Eucharist by giving the apostles His body and blood in the form of bread and wine. He took bread and said, "This is my body which is offered up for you," and then took a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus then commanded the apostles to continue offering His body and blood in the Eucharist as a memorial of the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (See Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

This Last Supper was the true Passover feast. This body and blood Christ gave the disciples was a pre-presentation of the sacrifice that He would make of Himself on the cross the next day. When we go to Mass, we participate in the re-presentation of that sacrifice on Calvary. In a mystical way, we transcend time and space and are drawn into that very same event offered up for each of us 2000 years ago when Jesus poured out His blood, and gave of His broken body for the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, it is the living Christ, the resurrected Christ that we receive in Communion when we joyfully obey His command to "eat my body."

The Power of the Mass in Our Lives

This doctrine of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is truly "good news" for us Christians today. The same Jesus who walked the streets of Palestine curing diseases, comforting the sick, and strengthening the weak is really present today in the Eucharist. We meet this Jesus every time we go to Mass and receive Holy Communion, and we can visit with Him regularly as He waits for us in the tabernacles of our churches. Jesus wants to be with us and to heal our spiritual infirmities, to comfort us in our trials, and to strengthen us in our weaknesses. When we approach Jesus in Holy Communion, we become like the beggars, the blind, the woman with the hemorrhage - all who longed just to draw near to Jesus, trusting that being amidst the power of His holy presence was enough to change their lives. To be like them, we must draw near to Christ. We must actively make ourselves aware of His presence by acts of faith, because it is hidden from all but the eyes of faith.

There are many ways to get more out of Mass, but they all require that you make yourself an active participant in the activity that is taking place. It is not always easy because our minds wander, but it is possible. Perhaps you can begin by asking an angel or a saint (or even Jesus Himself) to accompany you at Mass and help you focus. Truly repent of your sins. Make an effort to engage your mind and heart when you say the prayers of the Mass. Really think about the prayers as you say them and intend them to be your own. At the offertory, you can offer yourself to Christ, that He may transform you into His body and blood, so that you may be part of the life-blood and flesh of His Mystical Body. While only the priest consecrates the Eucharist, you can offer the Son to the Father with the priest and with all the angels in heaven. At the elevation of the Host, you can adore Christ ("We adore you, Oh Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.") and thank him for all he has done for you. At the elevation of the Chalice, you can thank Christ for his sacrifice which has washed you clean ("Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb..."). Throughout Mass, you can speak to Jesus, pour out your heart to Him, bring Him your concerns, your hopes, your fears, your sufferings, your sorrow for sin, and your joys. And you can pray for others, joining them to the holy sacrifice, offering the sacrifice for their conversion and salvation.

Another way to actively participate at Mass is to engage your imagination. During the consecration, for example, you can bring to mind images of the Last Supper (perhaps with yourself as a participant), the agony in the garden, Christ's passion and death on the cross, and finally His resurrection and His meetings with the disciples. Speak to Him in

any of these scenes, as you too are His disciple. Finally, you may simply remain silent (as undistracted as possible) and be in the presence of the Lord and rest in His peace.

When we do not “get much out of” Mass, it is usually because we do not put enough of our self into Mass. To engage our mind and heart completely in the Mass requires practice and effort, but it will bear great fruit. When we fail to participate as actively as we would like, we may take consolation in the fact that Christ is truly present to us regardless of our efforts, and good fruit can and will still come from our reception of the Eucharist.

For Discussion

- 1. How do you think some of the themes discussed in this Follow-up would help you gain more from participation in the Mass?**
- 2. Why might the early Christians have had a greater appreciation for the Mass than we do today? Discuss.**
- 3. In the first century, many Jews who were sick, suffering, lonely, or struggling with sin brought their burdens to Jesus with great confidence that He would help them. Do you bring your burdens or struggles to Jesus in the Eucharist? How about your goals, joys, or triumphs?**

4. If you lived in the first century in a village where Jesus was living for a few weeks, how often would you try to go see Him? That same Jesus is living in your town and you can meet Him at Mass and in the tabernacle. What can you do to meet Him more often?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-30. Why does Paul exhort his readers so forcefully regarding the worthy reception of the Eucharist? With this in mind, what specifically can you do to better prepare your soul for entering more fully into the Mass and receiving Jesus in Holy Communion?

6. Read CCC, 1324. Why do you think the Catechism says the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life”?

Transfer Point

To understand the Mass as the covenant family meal in which we receive the Real Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion, which deepens our union with Jesus, strengthens our love and helps us overcome our weaknesses (CCC, 1391-1394).

Follow-up 8: Prayer

To Know Christ Jesus

Two young men were discussing with each other their plans for the future. One of them was sharing his hope to marry a beautiful young actress who happened to be in one of his classes at the University. The other young man was surprised to hear this, because he did not even know that his friend had met the actress. He asked his friend how well he knew the actress. The hopeful suitor replied, "She is about five feet, eight inches tall, has jet black hair, blue eyes, smooth skin, a wonderful smile, and a lovely voice." He went on to inform the friend that she is majoring in drama and English and he listed the movies and plays in which she had acted. The friend considered this information and gently asked, "That's great, but how well do you know her?" Again the young man replied, "Well, she's a good tennis player -- I actually saw her compete at the state championship when we were in high school -- she has a couple dogs, I am told she likes to cook and travel, and she lives in an apartment with two other women." His friend seemed somewhat exasperated and asked again, "But do you actually know her?" The young man replied, "Well, I haven't met her personally yet, except in passing one day in class, but I've read everything I could find out about her and I did meet her roommate who told me some interesting things about her."

Prayer is... a conversation with God. Even if we whisper, even if we do not open our mouth, a cry rises within us. And God never fails to hear this inner conversation.

~St. Clement of Alexandria

Many Christians, without knowing any better, treat their relationship with God like the young man considering marriage in the story above. There is a tendency to equate knowing facts or doctrines about God to actually knowing God. While it is important to learn about God, the Christian life is essentially a relationship with God in which we know and love Him. The story above should make clear the difference. Most of us would react in surprise if someone were to say with any sort of certainty that he wanted to marry a woman just because he knew various facts about her before having developed any sort of personal relationship with her. The heart of any relationship (especially a spousal relationship, which is the image Paul uses for our relationship with God) is not knowledge of facts about the other person, but an exchange of love between persons who know each other intimately.

God Thirsts That We May Thirst for Him

"I thirst." This was Jesus' last request, recorded by St. John, before he died on the Cross. Have you ever thought of what Jesus really meant by this statement? Was it

Christ comes to meet every human being. It is He who first seeks and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; His asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for Him (CCC, 2560)

just because He was thirsty for water, or is there a hidden reality for which he thirsts? The Catechism explains that Jesus' thirst is His desire for relationship with His people. Jesus died on the cross not just to save us from hell, not just to help us lead a good life, and not just to help us be better servants. He died on the cross to restore the relationship between God and man that is severed by sin. Think about that: the extent to which God will go to be in communion with us is an agonizing death on

the cross! When was the last time you worked so hard for a relationship?

And Jesus still thirsts... He THIRSTS for us to come spend time with Him in prayer. This finally is the good news of the Gospel!

Our Search for God

Whether we are aware of it or not, as humans made in God's image and likeness, we are searching for God. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." We seek Him, "yet He is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27-28). When we do discover Him, we will find that He actually has been close to us all along, gently calling us to turn to Him. Our encounter with God's presence is PRAYER.

"Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the One whom You sent, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). Jesus Christ, on the night He was betrayed, reveals the heart of His mission: that we would come to know - not just know facts about - but know God personally and love Him more intimately even than a husband loves his wife, or a wife her husband.

In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with His Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with Him (CCC, 2565).

What is Prayer?

There are many types of prayer (e.g., adoration, petition, and thanksgiving; vocal or mental) and many different formal prayers (e.g., Our Father, Hail Mary, Act of Contrition; Rosary, Liturgy of the Hours), but ultimately all prayer is communication with God. St. Teresa of Avila says, "Mental prayer is nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent heart-to-heart conversation with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved."

"Prayer is both a gift and a grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and He himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name. The "spiritual battle" of the Christian's new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer" (CCC, 2725).

All prayer is an abiding with Jesus (cf. John 15:1-11). Abiding in Jesus is fundamentally a matter of the heart, a matter of responding to His love for us in a personal and decisive manner. Jesus wants to be our confidant and closest friend, the person with whom we share all that is in us. When we reveal ourselves to Jesus, He will give us insights as to where we can grow closer to Him and He will give us peace and comfort. He is overjoyed when we simply talk about our day with Him. He rejoices with us in little victories over sin; and He welcomes our praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. All of this is part of actively abiding in Him. As the Catechism mentions, it is not always easy. It requires active decisions on our part every day to bring our thoughts and our life situations to Him and to trust Him with our needs, so that we can "pray constantly" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). The real fruit of abiding in Jesus is an ever-deepening relationship with Him.

How do I Pray?

The disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." In response to this request, Jesus taught them the Our Father. This prayer is one on which we should reflect a great deal throughout our lives. Besides this explicit prayer, however, Jesus' own prayer life provides us with a model for prayer. Before continuing on, read Matthew 26:36-45, Mark 6:46-47, Luke 5:16, and John 17 to find out where, when, how, and for what Jesus prayed.

Making a Point to Pray: Time & Place

If you really want to commit to developing a relationship with Our Lord through prayer, it is necessary to make a point to pray regularly, certainly daily. It is also helpful in developing a good habit of prayer to find a special place to pray. If we decide simply to pray when and where the spirit moves us, we will often fail to give ourselves over to Christ in prayer.

It would be useful to ask yourself what the best part of your day to offer to God would be. A good place to start for most people is in the morning. We have our Lord's example in Mark 1:35 to guide us as well as the practicality of committing our day to

We need to be able to pray. We need prayer just like we need air. Without prayer, we can do nothing.

~Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Christ when it is new. Could you meet with God more than once, perhaps in the morning and the evening? However much time you decide to give over to prayer, be consistent and try to work up to spending at least a half hour per day in prayer (10 minutes per day is fine if you are just beginning to schedule time for prayer). You might want to ask

the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the best time for you to offer to God in prayer. It is extremely important to have a firm determination to make time for the Lord every day. Schedule an appointment with God in your planner as you would with anyone else. This will be an appointment with Jesus. Try to keep it at all costs.

In choosing a place to pray, seek someplace that is quiet where you can be alone; perhaps even where you can pray aloud or sing without disturbing others. It should be a place where you are comfortable, but not so comfortable that you might be prone to sleepiness. If possible, find a place that you can make sacred with a crucifix, pictures, or a statue. You are meeting with your Almighty God, and this prayer spot will become sacred and special to you. You don't have to meet in church, but if you prefer to, that is great.

Follow a Simple Plan

As you grow in your relationship with Christ, you will want to seek out the wisdom of the saints and the great spiritual writers on prayer. Always keep in mind, however, that the point of every form and method of prayer is to have conversation and communion with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. St. Teresa of Avila provides us with a very useful five-step Method for Meditation.¹

¹ Adapted from *Conversation with Christ*, Peter Rohrbach, p. 24.

- **Preparation:** Place yourself in the presence of Christ by saying a simple prayer, and then be quiet for a short while. “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).
- **Selection of Material:** Read some text in Scripture or study a picture, statue, or crucifix of Christ.
- **Consideration:** Reflect on your material. Ask questions: Whom? What? Why? For what reason? Reflect on Christ’s love and sacrifice.
- **Conversation:** This is the core of prayer. Converse with Our Lord about the material you considered. Employ the affections of love, adoration, thanksgiving, sorrow, and petition.
- **Conclusion:** Have a heart of gratitude toward Jesus for the favors and peace received. If you like to journal, then write down your inspirations, petitions, etc. from this time of prayer. Possibly make an examination of faults and make resolutions for future prayer.

Since we are children of a loving God and Father, we know that we can trust Him to hear and answer our prayers. Prayer is the way we place our trust in Christ’s promises and rely not on our own strength (cf. CCC, 1817). St. Bonaventure said, “Any day a man gains more by devout prayer than the whole world is worth.” More than the whole world?! Why are we not scrambling to pray at every moment?

**The Jesus Prayer:
Lord Jesus Christ, Son
of God, have mercy
on me, a sinner.**

For Discussion

1. Read Luke 11:1-13. Does the thought of going to God the Father as a child, trusting that He will provide for you, change the way that you pray? How so?

- 2. What do you really want from God? Think about all your needs, physical and spiritual. Remember that He not only wants to care for your physical needs, but "how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

- 3. Does prayer sometimes seem like an obligation rather than an opportunity to spend time with your loving Father? How can you move towards a more positive perception of prayer?**

- 4. Have you made a commitment to daily prayer at a certain time and place? Discuss.**

- 5. Read CCC 2564 & 2565. How does daily prayer relate to developing a personal relationship with God?**

Transfer Point

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:2). God alone satisfies our deepest desires. He desires a relationship with us and calls each one of us by name. When we seek Him with our whole heart, He will never cease to take care of us and lavish His many gifts upon us. The more often we pray, the more we make prayer a part of our daily life, the more peace we will find. The ultimate aim is to personalize our relationship with God through making a commitment to incorporate daily conversation with Christ into our schedule.

Follow-up 9: Spiritual Multiplication

Light the Fire

Sacred Scripture says that our God is a consuming fire (Cf. Heb. 12:29), and Jesus Himself said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). The early Church Fathers taught that this passage referred to Christ's desire to see the fire of divine love ablaze upon earth.

St. Dominic (the founder of the Dominicans) was a great evangelist in the thirteenth century. When he received his call from God to become an evangelist, he had a vision of a dog running through a dry wheat field. The dog was carrying a burning torch in its mouth, and as it ran, the torch ignited a fire in the field. God told St. Dominic that he was to be like that dog, igniting fires in the hearts of the people he served.

You must be as lighted lanterns and shine like brilliant chandeliers among men. By your good example and your words, animate others to know and love God.
 ~St. Mary Joseph Rossello

Making Disciples

As we try to decide the best way to reach the world for Jesus Christ, we should look to His example. In order to reach the world with His saving message, Jesus came at a specific time, to a specific nation, to twelve specific men. Even among the twelve, he focused much of His time on three of His Apostles (Peter, James and John). Yes, Jesus preached and healed the masses, but His lasting impact was realized through His Apostles. Jesus reaches the world through those who follow Him.

So, too, we can see in history that the Apostle John mentored St. Polycarp and St. Ignatius of Antioch (each of whom were Bishops and martyrs in the early Church). St. Paul mentored Saints Timothy and Titus; some of his instructions to them are found in the books of the Bible named after these men. In The Second Letter to Timothy, St. Paul shows us that he not only taught Timothy about Christ, but he also taught him how to teach others about Christ. "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The role of discipleship is to light the fire of God's love in our own hearts first, and then in the hearts of those around us. Following St. Paul's encouragement to teach, but even more, to teach others how to teach, we desire to raise up a generation of "spiritual pyromaniacs," who continually go about setting spiritual fires and teaching others to do the same.

Shotguns and Rifles

When you shoot at a target with a shotgun, you will both hit and miss it. After the pellets leave the barrel of the gun they spread out rapidly. If you look at your target you will see that some of the pellets have hit the target and others have gone right by it. When you shoot a rifle, you either hit or miss, and when you hit the mark there is no doubt about it. The bullet from the rifle leaves a lasting impact. In our lives as disciples we can take one of two strategies: we can try to be something to everybody or we can try to be everything to somebody. In this Follow-up we will discuss the concept of “spiritual multiplication.” This effective method of evangelizing is about leaving a lasting impact on the lives of at least a few close friends, and then encouraging them to do the same with others.

Giving to vs. Giving Through

The old adage “Give a man a fish and you have fed him for a day, teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for life,” is just the beginning. Imagine if you could also teach the man how to teach others how to fish - you would then have not just him, but the whole village for a lifetime. With spiritual multiplication, we not only teach men and women how to “fish” spiritually, we teach them how to become teachers of teachers. We not only pass on the faith, we also pass on the vision and the tools to make future leaders, who in turn will go out and lead others.

Life in Christ is meant to be shared. Jesus Himself challenges us in the Sermon on the Mount to pass on the faith to others:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

Our salvation in Jesus Christ is the greatest gift imaginable. To the degree that we recognize what Christ has done in our life, we will want to share it with others. We never want to impose the faith on anyone, but we do want to propose it to others by sharing what God has done for us and letting them know that God’s grace is available for anyone who asks for it. A great way to express our gratitude for our new life in Christ is to share it with those we meet. In this way, we will not only go to Heaven, but we will invite others to join us.

Growth by Addition vs. Growth by Multiplication

Imagine that you were given the gift of an evangelist. For the rest of your life, you would be allowed to bring one million people to faith in Christ every year! One million new Christians would be added to the Church every year. Each of these people would live the rest of their lives as committed Christians; however, like many Christians, each of these converts would never become evangelists themselves.

Now, imagine that you were given no special gift for evangelization, but you were willing to live the model of “win, build, and send discipleship.” You would simply invest your life in leading two other people to Christ. Your time would be invested in efforts such as loving them, praying with and for them, sharing the ordinary aspects of daily life and sharing the fullness of the faith with them as well as equipping them to go out and do the same for at least two others. “[T]he true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers... or to the faithful” (CCC, 905). Imagine that after these two you never reached any other person directly for Christ. Imagine that you spent an entire year building up these two persons, and the following year they each followed your example and went out and spent an entire year investing their lives in the conversion of only two other persons each. This process of each Christian investing in the lives of two other persons for the sake of Christ would slowly but surely over the years begin to change the world.

At the end of the first year, the “super evangelist” would have one million converts to Christianity and you would have only two disciples! At the end of the second year the super evangelist would have a total of two million converts! And you would have a total of six, the two people you mentored and the four with whom they had worked. For several years it would appear as though being a super evangelist was the only way to go. But eventually an amazing thing would happen. Each year the group of people committed to discipleship would gain momentum and size; slowly at first, but steadily, they would reach more and more people, each person would not only turn to Christ, but each would become a “mini evangelist” committed to reaching two other persons with the Gospel of Jesus Christ! In the nineteenth year, the discipleship model would actually begin reaching more persons! Exactly 1,048,574 new converts would be added that year. The following year, the “super evangelist” would reach another one million people, but those ordinary Catholics who were committed to discipleship (the “mini evangelists”) would reach another 2,097,150! By the twenty-fourth year, the “super evangelist” would have reached 24 million people, but the discipleship group would have reached

over 33 million people! And each of these Christians would not only know and live his faith in Christ; each would share it with others also!

If this is how Christians are to act, why doesn't the Church do it this way?

We might wonder why the faith does not grow this way. In a certain sense, we can say it has and it does. Certainly in the early Church "the first disciples burned with the desire to proclaim Christ: 'We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard'" (CCC, 425; Acts 4:20). And even today,

The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: "All, however, must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks." Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (CCC, 1816).

Nevertheless, it seems there are many Catholics who do not even know the faith, let alone witness to it. We must caution that we should focus on what we can do, rather than on what others do not do. If you have the knowledge and the talent to evangelize, let the process begin with you. Perhaps that evangelization will be within the Church

itself to poorly catechized Catholics.

Do I give the Christ who is full of zeal, love, and sunshine? Do I come up to the mark? Or am I a dark light, a false light, a bulb without connection, having no current and therefore shedding no radiance? Put your heart into being a bright light.

~Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Also, we must be careful to recognize that there is a structure of discipleship within the Church that must be understood and respected. The Pope works in union with the bishops, who in turn pastor their individual flocks, which are called dioceses. The bishops serve the

Christians in their dioceses by working in union with their priests, who serve in local parishes. The priests care for us, and each of us in turn, is called to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ through witness and discipleship.

Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, “that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.” For lay people, “this evangelization... acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world (CCC, 905).

Our own work of evangelization must fit within the apostolic structure of the Church. “Lay people who are capable and trained may also collaborate in catechetical formation, in teaching the sacred sciences, and in use of the communications media” (CCC, 906). We must be well-prepared to evangelize and must submit ourselves to the Church in doing so, being careful that the Christ we proclaim is indeed the very Christ proclaimed by the Church.

For Discussion

- 1. What does Jesus call us to do in order to fulfill the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20?**
- 2. Read Catechism, 900. What does it mean to have both a “right” and a “duty” to make known the message of salvation?**
- 3. According to 2 Timothy 2:2, to whom are we supposed to teach the faith?**

4. Spiritual Multiplication: Fulfilling the Great Commission by winning people to Christ and His family the Church, building them up in their knowledge and practice of the faith; their life of prayer and virtue and then, sending them out to do the same. What is the first step you can take to begin practicing win, build, and send discipleship? What practical steps can you take (1) in your spiritual life and (2) in your practical day-to-day actions?

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8. What does it mean to share our very lives? What are some specific ways you can think of to begin doing this with those in your life?

Transfer Point

To see the Gospel imperative of living a life committed to Christian discipleship: this is Jesus Christ's final request and commandment. To cultivate the conviction that discipleship and spiritual multiplication are the God-given method for reaching the world for Christ. No other method has been given, and, indeed, no other method is possible.

Follow-up 10: Moral Authority

Words and Actions

There is a story about Mark Twain talking to a businessman from Boston who made his money by taking advantage of the underprivileged and the poor. The businessman boasted to Twain, "Before I die, I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top." Twain replied, "I have a better idea. You could stay in Boston and keep them."

It is relatively easy to talk about God and to study theology. Doing so might even be the result of faith. It is a lot harder, however, to put faith into action, to "practice what you preach." But Jesus challenges us to follow through with our beliefs when He says, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). Living your faith is essential for your own good; at the same time, if you really live your faith, you can be a very powerful witness to others.

Actions speak louder than words; let your words speak and your actions teach.

~St. Anthony of Padua

Moral Authority

We all know what it is like to be inspired by others. Heroes include teachers, parents, friends, and even sports stars. We learned a bit about St. Ignatius of Loyola in an earlier Follow-up. He was a 16th-century Spaniard who was inspired by the lives of the saints. As a young man, he was a soldier who led an immoral and selfish life. During a battle, his leg was broken in several places by cannon shrapnel. While he was recovering from his injury, Ignatius had to lie in bed for six months. He asked for some novels of chivalry to be brought to him, but the only two books in the house were a Life of Christ and a book of the lives of the saints, so he read them over and over again and was converted to Christ. The more he read the lives of the saints, the more he was inspired by these holy men and women to live his life completely for Christ. He desired to imitate (and even surpass!) the heroic deeds of the saints. He became a great evangelizer, preacher, and educator. He founded a great religious order, the Society of Jesus. Within 25 years there were over 1,000 Jesuits. They went out as missionaries to evangelize the "new worlds" of America and the Far East. They literally converted the world! They also started Catholic colleges and high schools throughout the world. St. Ignatius was brought to Jesus through the examples of others. He then became an amazing Christian leader and helped to bring thousands (and through his order, millions) to Christ!

The secret to this kind of leadership is holiness and moral authority. Moral authority comes from being totally remade through the grace of Jesus Christ and then having that transformation shine through you to those around you. It comes from living the gospel so that others see a life changed by Christ, inspiring them to want to be changed too! Ignatius gave up his career as a soldier to preach, to teach, and to live his life in service to others. When he spoke, people listened, because he was following so powerfully what he preached. He was doing what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 5:14: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

The Big Three

To be called to Christ-like leadership is a tremendous honor. Before we can lead effectively, we must know how to follow and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. As we allow Jesus to become Lord of our lives, we will begin to change our habits, eliminating bad habits (vices) and acquiring good ones (virtues). FOCUS has identified three virtues that are particularly important for Christ-centered university students. "The Big Three" in FOCUS are chastity, sobriety, and striving for excellence in all we do. These three

Virtue demands courage, constant effort, and above all, help from on high.

~St. John Vianney

virtues are central to our relationships with Christ and with others and to the work that God is calling us to do. We focus especially on these virtues because on a college campus there are so many temptations and opportunities to be unchaste, to lose self-control, and to blow off our responsibilities. Practicing these virtues is not an impossible dream; they can be attained by God's grace through our cooperation! If you practice them, you will have moral authority with others. The ability to live these virtues well, through God's grace, will make you a powerful witness to your friends. When you speak about God and what He has done in your life, your words will carry incredible weight, because you are already practicing what you preach. And people will see the joy that comes from living a life of virtue.

Chastity

We are made with natural desires for many good things such as food and sex. These are basic and essential human desires. They are good desires. However, because of the Fall, these desires are disordered in that they are not automatically under the control of our reason and will. Consequently, we often desire to have these things in unhealthy and selfish ways that are not appropriate to our true nature. Instead of only desiring to use the procreative power in the proper context of a loving marriage (where spouses

are mutually supported and children can be raised well), we often want to take pleasure for ourselves, even at the expense of others. Chastity is nothing more than the ability to control sexual desire so that it does not turn us away from the love of God and of neighbor and so that it can be used in the service of true and lasting love. When we live unchastely, we lose our focus on God and we acquire habits that will be difficult to shed even when we find true love. When we live chastely, we can radiate the unselfish love of Christ to those around us and we save our self to give as a complete and pure gift to our eventual spouse.

The Pure in Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Chastity is about more than simply not having sex before marriage. Chastity is about loving the way that God has called us to love, with a pure heart and mind, without selfishness or lust. In order to be pure and chaste, we must guard our thoughts and desires. Jesus says in Matthew 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Our actions flow from what is in our heart. Jesus says in Luke 6:45: “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil.” What is going on in our mind and heart is very important! This is especially true with purity. We must respect persons in our thoughts and in how we treat them. We can counteract bad thoughts with good thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Sobriety

It’s a familiar story: a new freshman is excited about going off to college and meeting new people. Maybe the freshman wants to just hang out and not get too into drinking, but it seems sometimes that drinking is about the only thing anyone wants to do. So, the freshman starts to go out drinking because he or she does not want to be alone in the dorms on Friday nights. There is nothing wrong with alcohol in moderation; Jesus’ first miracle involved Him changing water into wine for a wedding feast. But, alcohol can be abused and can cause people to make really bad decisions. Sirach 31:25 says: “Do not aim to be valiant over wine, for wine has destroyed many.”

Getting drunk seriously impairs our reason. Reason is an amazing gift of God that allows us to make moral choices. Sometimes it is difficult to make good decisions even when you are sober. When you are drunk, it is often nearly impossible to make good and loving decisions. In fact, St. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." We need every gift that God has given us in order to live a good Christian life. Drunkenness takes away our power to make good decisions.

Which Spirit Leads You?

We finally need to decide who, or what, is going to lead us. Will it be a spirit of drunkenness, or the Holy Spirit? In the book of Ephesians, St. Paul says, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise... And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:15-18). Simply speaking, do we want our actions to be inspired by the "spirits" of alcohol, or by the Spirit of God?

Chastity and sobriety give you control over your desires and keep you clear-headed so that you can make good decisions. These virtues prepare us for even greater virtues of love and action. Jesus wants you to have a great life. He says in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." God is not trying to limit your fun by calling you to chastity and sobriety. He is trying to protect you from being wounded by sin so that you may achieve abundant life and maximum happiness! Life in Christ is full of joy and peace: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Excellence

Ephesians 1:4 says that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world." He knew us and had a plan for our lives! First of all, He calls us to be His children through Jesus Christ. He also calls us to be doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, accountants, office managers, priests, nuns, husbands, wives, and many other vocations. Right now your calling is to be a student. You may also be entrusted with other tasks: a job, a volunteer position, being a good friend, leading a Bible study, etc. These responsibilities are entrusted to you by God. Through them God is issuing you a challenge to accomplish them to the best of your ability, that is, to be excellent in them. St. Paul says this in Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ." You can actually serve the Lord by working, by going to class, or by doing homework!

We all want to be good at whatever we do. Although most people would like to be successful, only a very few end up achieving great success. Why is this? Thomas Edison, who was the creator of over 1000 inventions, said that the key to his success was hard work. He said that “genius is 99% perspiration, 1% inspiration.” He was also a great optimist in his diligence. It took him over 2,000 attempts before he was able to get the incandescent light bulb to work. When a young reporter asked him how it felt to fail so many times, he said, “I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2,000-step process.” Edison considered all the time spent on experimentation to be of great value. Thomas Edison embodied excellence. In his own words, “Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” We can also attain this kind of excellence in our lives. The key issue is often whether we are willing to work hard to be excellent.

Another name for excellence is virtue. Virtues are good habits. You can have good habits in sports, in art, and in all areas of life. The runner runs faster (i.e., acquires the virtues of speed and strength) by training consistently. The artist has skills because of time spent studying art, practicing technique, etc. Our soul can also have virtues, both moral and intellectual. An intellectual virtue is knowledge of some sort. Moral virtues are perfections of the will and the passions (or desires), so that one is able to act justly, bravely, and moderately. The moral virtues perfect our natural life. There are also supernatural (or “theological”) virtues that allow us to live a supernatural life in God’s love. They are faith, hope, and charity. All the virtues help us to live life to the fullest. As Socrates said, the most important thing is not simply life, but a life well lived. By acquiring the virtues, with the help of God’s grace, we can have the freedom to live a full life, an excellent life, and abundant life!

For Discussion

1. Is there any theme in this Follow-up that you find most applicable to your life?

- 2. Read Luke 6:43-48. What is Jesus telling us about how our attitudes affect our actions?**

- 3. Why do you think that chastity is “the power to love in the right way”? How does lust turn us away from Christ? What are some ways that we can love the opposite sex better?**

- 4. Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. Why is it important to be watchful and sober? What is the difference between a person that is sober and one who is drunk? What are some alternatives to drinking?**

- 5. Read Colossians 3:23-24. How can you be more excellent in the tasks with which God has entrusted you?**

- 6. Do you feel that the Christian call to chastity, sobriety, and excellence is liberating, or is it stifling of your freedom?**

7. Recall the example of St. Ignatius. Have you ever been inspired by someone's example? Have you ever been turned off by someone in a leadership role? How did this affect you?

8. Read James 3:1. Why do you think that more is expected of a leader or teacher?

9. Why are chastity, sobriety, and excellence essential to leadership?

Transfer Point

To establish the need for personal excellence and integrity as a means to living life abundantly, also so we can earn the right to be heard by those who do not yet know Jesus Christ and by those who have not yet come to see the Church He founded as the Family of God.

