

Lay Spirituality



Christ Pantocrator mosaic from Hagia Sophia

School of Faith Catechetical Institute

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Session 1:

Life as Vocation

Doctrinal Goal:

After completing this session, the student will understand that the lay faithful are individuals who live committed to Christ.

Experiential Goal:

Upon completion of this session, the student will recognize life as a vocation of service to God and others in the community in which they live.

Lesson Plan:

- I Living our vocation, committed to Christ**
- II In the Church**
- III With our fellow men and women and in society at large**

Lead - In Question:

Ask students, "Who are the members of a family?"

With this question and the subsequent reflection, the instructor leads into the concept of belonging to the Church, God's great family.

Warm-Up Activity (10 minutes):

Have the students gather into small teams to discuss, "What does it mean to belong to a family?".

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

Commitment defines our Christian vocation: through our baptism we have entered into a covenant of love in which God and the faithful Christian commit to each other. God commits to me, and I commit to God. Baptism is the base, being the fundamental sacrament, because it joins us to the Triune God, makes us children of the Church, and projects our spirit of service onto our fellow men and women and onto society.

I Living our vocation, committed to Christ

- The lay faithful is a person who is, above all, committed to Christ. He or she lives, as did Saint Paul, " I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (*cf. Gal 2:20*).
- Faith in Jesus Christ requires a complete giving up of the self.
- Thus, the life of a Christian is centered on a loving response to Christ's love; it is a ceaseless effort, throughout each day's activities, to live a deep and sincere faith, one that gives direction to all of the facets of life, endowing them with supernatural meaning.

II In the Church

The instructor will explain that baptism grafts us to the family of the covenant, the Church. From this arises our active commitment to the Church. It is a commitment that implies building the Church and making it grow, enriching the Church with our own efforts to live out our calling to personal saintliness, helping her in her needs, living in accordance with her norms and lifestyle, and taking on her mission - both human and supernatural - as if it were our own. The Church's mission is one and the same as the mission of each of her children.

The members of the lay faithful consider the Church their spiritual family, and their guiding attitude is to contribute every effort to improve that family.

Those who do not adopt the Church as their own, those who see her from the outside, though they may be baptized, those who do not consider themselves as committed parties, are sadly unable to see this stream of life. They think of the Church as an institution replete with impositions and enforcements - a merely legalistic entity - and do not feel encouraged to participate fully within her, in her life: they do not reflect that the Church is theirs as a gift from Christ.

The Catholic's commitment to the Church also implies the defense of all that the Church has received from Christ, and which, therefore, cannot be altered.

All of this makes up the treasure of the Church which must be shared with confidence and with a humble willingness to serve our brothers and sisters: this passing on of the treasure is part of the apostolic commitment which Christ assigned to His Church.

The Christian is linked to the Church through his or her particular Church, that of the diocese, the parish, the community where he or she worships God and lives the mystery of being a part of the family of the covenant.

III With our fellow men and women and in society at large

This divine vocation, in the heart of the Church, focuses our attention on others since Jesus Christ identifies Himself with each of our brothers and sisters, particularly the smallest of these. The same commitment which we have with Christ and with Christ's Church is extended to each of the people who surround us.

For the Christian, the love of others, especially those nearest to us, must be as a personal identification badge, for it is with this manifestation of love that the world will know that we are disciples of Christ: if we love one another (*cf. Jn 13:35*).

The baptized person's commitment to others is always demanding since it implies a constant search for their good, following the example of Christ who gave His life for our good.

The building of society and the concern for the common good are the Christian's duties and are linked to our commitment to the Lord and to our duties as citizens.

Conclusion:

Viewing life as a vocation - as a calling from Christ to follow Him - grants us greater interior freedom, stimulates us and commits us to giving the best of ourselves.

Summary:

- Faith in Jesus Christ demands total donation of self. Thus, Christian life is centered on a loving response to Christ's love; it is a ceaseless effort, through our daily activities, to live a deep and sincere faith, which directs all aspects of our life, endowing them with supernatural meaning.
- The lay faithful view the Church as our spiritual family and the attitude that guides us is one of making every effort to improve our family.

- For Christians, love of others, especially those closest to us, must be as a personal identification badge: this is how all will know that we are Christ's disciples.

Points to Remember:

- Baptism is the base, as the fundamental sacrament, since it enjoins us to the Triune God.
- The lay faithful must feel themselves to be truly members of the ecclesial community.
- We all have a vocation: parents, teachers, students, laborers, professionals, retirees...

Additional Reading:

Mary Carol Kendzia (ed.), *Catholic Update Guide Baptism*. (Liguori, July 2011).

Rick Sarkisian. *Lifework: Finding your Purpose in Life*. (Ignatius Press, October 1997).

Bibliography:

Living Water: Understanding the Gift of New Life through Baptism. Catholic Faith Explorer Series. Ignatius Press.

Self-Check:

1. What is the basis of Christian commitment?

Baptism, as the fundamental sacrament, is the basis, since it unites us with the Triune God, makes us children of the Church, and projects our spirit of service onto our fellow men and women and onto society.

2. Why do some baptized people see the Church as an institution replete with legalistic impositions?

Those who do not make the Church their own, who see her from the outside - even though they may be baptized - do not consider themselves committed, involved parties.

3. What does it mean to "work for the common good"?

The building of society and concern for the common good are duties of the Christian which arise from their commitment to the Lord and their duties as citizens.

4. How can you live your commitment to Jesus Christ, the Church and your fellow men and women?

This divine vocation, in the heart of the Church, focuses our attention on others, just as Jesus Christ identifies Himself with each of our brothers and sisters, particularly the least of them. This same commitment we have to Christ and to Christ's Church extends to those who surround us.

5. What does the Gospel commit us to?

To follow the example of Christ who gave Himself for us. Likewise we must consider our commitment to the Church as something that is for our own good and that of others.

6. How is the Christian related to the universal Church?

By putting our commitment into practice in our particular Church, which means our parish, which in turn belongs to a diocese.

7. What is the most fundamental sign of the Christian?

The "see how they love one another" (*cf. Jn 17: 20-26*) - love is the distinctive sign.

8. What is the baptized person's commitment like?

This commitment defines our Christian vocation: baptism is a covenant of love in which God and the faithful Christian commit one to the other.

9. What is the universal vocation of all Christians?

Saintliness is our universal vocation.

10. In this session, what was it that most got your attention?

Students' answers will vary. Encourage them to develop their ideas.

Session 2:

Participating in Christ's Priestly Mission

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon completion of this session, the student will know that the true worship they owe God is in spirit and truth.

Experiential Goal:

After completing this session, the student will be motivated to participate more conscientiously in responding to God with acts of worship.

Lesson Plan:

- I Worshipping God in spirit and in truth**
- II Sanctifying the domestic Church**
- III Active, full and fruitful participation in the liturgy**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students: "Have you ever thought about the phrase "in spirit and in truth" and what it means?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to explain what the term "domestic Church" refers to.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"When I was about 10 or twelve years old, I was an altar boy, but I must admit I was not very assiduous. My father, having come to notice one day my lack of discipline, told me: 'You are not a good altar boy. You don't pray enough to the Holy Spirit. You must pray more to Him.' And he gave me a prayer book that contained a prayer to the Holy Spirit. He told me to pray it every day. I have not forgotten it. It was the greatest, most enduring, and most powerful of all the spiritual lessons I have ever obtained from all my readings and studies. I understood for the first time the meaning of Christ's words to the Samaritan woman about the true worshipers of God, about those who worship Him in Spirit and truth (cf. *Jn* 4:23)."¹

I Worshipping God in spirit and in truth

The "laity are marvelously called"² - and are admirably gifted with the ability - to render unto God spiritual worship. They know from experience that, through baptism, Christ has given them the strength to be able to offer the Father authentic worship in spirit and truth. By virtue of their baptismal priesthood, they come together to the Eucharistic offering, exercising this priesthood in the reception of the sacraments, in prayer and in thanksgiving, and by bearing witness to a saintly life, in abnegation and in the practice of works of charity.

"For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. and so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives."³ In the logic of this worship, spiritual life becomes more and more an uninterrupted thanksgiving, "for the praise of his glory" (*Eph* 1:12).

¹ Pope St. John Paul II. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 141,142.

² Pope John Paul II. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (abbreviated henceforward as CIC)*, (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 901.

³ Pope Paul VI. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen gentium*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1964), 34, as cited in Pope John Paul. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 901.

Moral life possesses the value of "spiritual worship" (*Rom 1:12*) and for all intents and purposes resides in opting for the good, as we are invited to do the greatest good.

"In particular, *the life of holiness* which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God's love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord's law, even in the most difficult situations." ⁴

II Sanctifying the domestic Church

Saint John Vianney invited the faithful to join their lives to Christ's sacrifice and offered himself up too, exclaiming: "What wondrous good it does a priest to offer himself, each morning, as a victim to God!".

- "In a very special way, parents share in the office of sanctifying "by leading a conjugal life in the Christian spirit and by seeing to the Christian education of their children." ⁵
- They are their children's first faith educators; they form them with their word and example in living a Christian and apostolic life; they carefully cultivate the sacred vocation which they may have discovered in their children, prudently helping them in their vocational choice.
- Parents' dedication to the task of forming their children spiritually and morally also sanctifies the parents, as they too receive the benefits of renewing and going deeper into their faith, as has been shown time and time again in Christian families.

III Active, full and fruitful participation in the liturgy

Spiritual worship implies participation in the Eucharistic celebration. Fullest participation is achieved when the communicant becomes aware of the mystery being celebrated and its connection to daily life: this awareness favors our actually living what is celebrated.

⁴ Pope Saint John Paul II. *The Splendor of Truth: Veritatis splendor*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 107.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 902

Participation in the Sunday Eucharist, prescribed by the Church, is the highest act of worship in the exercise of our universal priesthood, just as the sacramental oblation of mass is for the ministerial priesthood of the ordained clergy.

Participation in the Eucharistic banquet is for everyone a requirement of vital bonding to Christ, as He Himself declared: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (*cf. Jn 6: 53*).

Conclusion:

Living the baptismal priesthood means being a priest and a victim. Our altar is our home, our work and entertainment; our bread and our wine are the moments of everyday life; our mission is to save sinners; our priestly anointing is our baptism; our Jordan river is the baptismal font of our parish. Living our priesthood common to all the faithful means to be responsible for all those who surround us.

Summary:

- The lay faithful are called, and are admirably gifted with the ability to render unto God spiritual worship. They know from experience that, through baptism, Christ has given them the strength to be able to offer the Father authentic worship in spirit and truth.
- "In a very special way, parents share in the office of sanctifying "by leading a conjugal life in the Christian spirit and by seeing to the Christian education of their children." ⁶
- Participation in the Sunday Eucharist, prescribed by the Church, is the highest act of worship in the exercise of our universal priesthood, just as the sacramental oblation of mass is for the ministerial priesthood of the ordained clergy.

Points to Remember:

- The "life of holiness which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God's love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord's law, even in the most difficult situations." ⁷

⁶ CIC, 902

⁷ *Veritatis splendor*, 107. *Op. cit.*

- Parents, in particular, participate in the mission of sanctification.
- Spiritual worship implies participation in the Eucharistic celebration.

Additional Reading:

Douglas Bushman. *In His Image Session Three: The Church Continues the Mission of Christ the Priest*. Ignatius Press, Jan 1989.

Bibliography:

Mary Reed Newland. *How to Raise Good Catholic Children*, rev. ed. (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 2004).

Self-Check:

1. What do I understand by the term "worship God in spirit and truth"?

All of my deeds, prayers and apostolic initiatives, married and family life, daily work and rest - if done in the spirit - and even the tribulations of life - if undertaken patiently - become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2. How are Catholic morals best understood?

Catholic morals are best understood in terms of Gospel simplicity which consists, fundamentally, of following Jesus Christ, in the abandonment of self to Him, in letting oneself be transformed by His grace and renewed by His mercy which is obtained in the life of communion with the Church.

3. How do parents participate in the task of sanctifying their children?

"In a very special way, parents share in the office of sanctifying "by leading a conjugal life in the Christian spirit and by seeing to the Christian education of their children." ⁸

4. What are the fruits of our participation in the Eucharist?

Sacramental participation stimulates and perfects our oblation, filling us with sacramental grace which helps us live and work according to the demands of our offering made with Christ and the Church.

5. What does it mean to live our baptismal priesthood?

By virtue of the lay faithful's baptismal priesthood, we come together to the Eucharistic offering, exercising this priesthood in the reception of the sacraments, in prayer and in thanksgiving, and by bearing witness to a saintly life, in abnegation and in the practice of works of charity.

⁸ *CIC*, 902

Session 3:

Participating in Christ's Prophetic Mission

Doctrinal Goal:

At the close of this session, students will have come to know that the Christian vocation is essentially an apostolic vocation.

Experiential Goal:

As a result of this session's study, students will become interested in participating in an apostolate, be that in their home, in their parish or in the community where they live.

Lesson Plan:

- I The Christian vocation is a vocation to the apostolate**
- II The vocation to the apostolate: a personal commitment**
- III A personal commitment that is made more powerful**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students: "Does anybody know what the word 'apostle' means?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to write down at least three names from amongst the apostles called by Jesus, and who represent the work of the primitive Church.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (*cf. Mk 16:15 and Mt 28:19*). This was the explicit command which the Lord gave his disciples before He ascended into Heaven. Over the centuries, faithful Christians have heard Christ's words resounding again and have taken them to heart. Each of us must feel this calling as a charge given to each of us personally.

I The Christian vocation is a vocation to the apostolate

Christ also carries out His prophetic function through the lay faithful. He makes them His witnesses and infuses them with the sense of faith and grace in His word.

To put this apostolate into practice, the Holy Spirit gives special gifts to the faithful distributing them to each as He wishes, so that every person, according to the grace received, placing it at the service of others, may also be administrators of the multifaceted grace of God, for the edification of the entire Body of Christ in charity.

From the reception of these charisms, even simplest of them, it is then up to the believers to exercise the right and the obligation for the good of mankind and the edification of the Church, either within the Church herself or in the greater world.

II The vocation to the apostolate: a personal commitment.

The first, most fundamental and irreplaceable form of activity in the building of the Body of Christ is that which the individual members of the Church carry out. The prerequisite and implication for this are a personal conviction which springs from faith and the sense of belonging to the Church which faith lights in the soul.

- With the apostolate of the word, essential in some circumstances, lay people faithfully announce Christ, explain His doctrine and spread and profess it according to their condition and knowledge.
- Cooperating, moreover, as citizens of this world, with regard to the regulating and governing of temporal order, lay people - in the light of faith - search to impart loftier motives for whatever they do in their family, professional and social life, and they make these reasons manifest to others in a timely manner.
- We must all be convinced that with public worship and prayer, penitence and the free acceptance of the toil and calamities which life brings to us, all of which make

us more akin to the patient Christ, all people can help to bring about the salvation of the world.

- The lay faithful who possess the right skills and solid training can also collaborate in catechetical training, in the teaching of sacred sciences and in communication using social media.
- The lay faithful also have the right, and sometimes even the duty, in virtue of their knowledge, competence and prestige to manifest to the sacred ministers their opinion concerning matters pertaining to the good of the Church.

III A personal commitment that is made more powerful

This ecclesial tendency towards an apostolate carried out in association, has, beyond any doubt, its supernatural origins in the love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is a question of uniting and coordinating the activities of all those who wish to sow the Gospel message in the spirit and mentality of the dear people. It is about performing an evangelization capable of exerting an influence in the public opinion and institutions; and in order to achieve this, it is necessary to carry out a concerted action in a well-organized group.

While always maintaining the courteous relationship due to the ecclesial authority, the faithful have the faculty to freely found and direct associations which pursue charitable or pious objectives, or to encourage the Christian vocation in the world. That faithful may too join together to work towards those same ends together.

Church movements and new communities with deep, solid training are called to make a strong announcement of God, becoming for thousands of Christians in all of the corners of the world, veritable schools of Christian life, holiness and mission.

These lay associations are focused on the mission which the Church must carry out in the world. Their apostolic strength is dependent on conforming with the Church's goals and on the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of each of their members and of the whole association.

Variety is preserved in the Church's unity when rivalries, envy, tension, monopolization are all avoided. Instead, dialogue, the spirit of participation and communion are encouraged, contributing to the spreading of the Gospel message.

Conclusion:

Christ's Church needs lay people who are faithful to their vocation - which essentially and radically is the call to holiness - and congregating around their pastors, are willing to share, with them, the daily task of evangelizing in all settings.

Summary:

- As faithful Christians, we announce His word because we have been indwelt by Him, made children through His Son, and our hearts flooded by the Holy Spirit.
- The first, most fundamental and irreplaceable form of activity in the building of the Body of Christ is that which the individual members of the Church carry out.
- This ecclesial tendency towards an apostolate carried out in association, has, beyond any doubt, its supernatural origins in the love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Points to Remember:

- "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (*cf. Mk 16:15 and Mt 28:19*).
- The lay faithful possessing the right skills and solid training can also collaborate in catechetical training, in the teaching of sacred sciences and in communication using social media.
- Lay associations are focused on the mission which the Church must carry out in the world.

Additional Reading:

Pope Saint John Paul II: *Speech to the laity, catechists and to the movements of apostolate in the Cathedral of Santa Cruz in Bolivia* (May 13, 1988).

Bibliography:

Douglas Bushman. *In His Image Session Two: The Church Continues the Mission of Christ the Prophet*. Ignatius Press: Jan 1989

Self-Check:

1. What is involved in believers' being living stones of the Church?

Being living stones of the Church involves awareness of the original task for the good of all members, a task that cannot be substituted with anything else, or delegated to anybody else.

2. Why do we say that Christ also performed His prophetic function through the lay faithful?

He makes us His witnesses and gives us the sense of faith and grace in His word.

3. What is the prerequisite to the first, most fundamental and irreplaceable form of activity in the building of the Body of Christ?

A personal conviction which springs from faith and the sense of belonging to the Church which faith lights in the soul.

4. According to Paul VI, what are Christians witnesses to? ⁹

Christians are witnesses to what the Church teaches and what the Holy Spirit brings us to accept, experience and live.

5. What service can solidly trained lay faithful perform?

They may give catechetical instruction, teach sacred sciences and function in communication through social media.

6. What is the supernatural origin of the Church's tendency towards apostolate in association.

The love with which the Holy Spirit floods the hearts of the faithful.

7. What is the calling of the new ecclesial movements and communities whose members have deep, solid training?

To a strong proclamation of God and to be for thousands of Christians all over the world veritable laboratories of faith, authentic schools of Christian life, holiness and mission.

⁹ Pope Paul VI. *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 41.

8. On what does the apostolic strength of these associations depend as they focus on the Church's mission in the world?

Their strength depends on being united with the Church's own goals, as well as the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of each of its members and the whole association.

9. Why are the movements within the Church so varied?

This variety is a manifestation of the sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit who respects and encourages the multifold trends, temperaments, vocations, capacities, inclinations, and spiritual sensitivities that exist among human being.

10. How can the unity amongst so many different movements within the Church be preserved?

This unity is preserved by avoiding rivalries, envy, tension, monopolization and by fostering dialogue, the spirit of communication and of communion.

Session 4:

Participating in Christ's Kingly Mission

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon completion of this session, the student will understand how it is that the person who has dominion over his own soul, the one capable of reining in his passions, exercises royal power over himself: his self-mastery makes him king.¹⁰

Experiential Goal:

At the end of this session the student will have learned the relative value of material goods, rank ordering them on a scale of values.

Lesson Plan:

- I Overcoming sin: in ourselves and in the world**
- II Cooperating in the governance of the Church**
- III Knowing the meaning, value and use of the temporal realities**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students, "What fields do you believe the Christian should impregnate with his or values?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Spontaneously call on three students to propose what the scale of values for a Christian should be. Have them order their values as in a pyramid (the bottom rung being the most fundamental).

¹⁰ CIC, 908.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

The Parable of the Talents (*cf. Mt 25: 14-30*) has the ability to make us reflect on the meaning, value and use we make of the temporal realities, notably calling on us to question whether or not we are making the most of God's gifts to us and if we may have developed unhealthy attachments, and all of this to give greater glory to God.

I Overcoming sin: in ourselves and in the world

"That man is rightly called a king who makes his own body an obedient subject and, by governing himself with suitable rigor, refuses to let his passions breed rebellion in his soul, for he exercises a kind of royal power over himself. and because he knows how to rule his own person as king, so too does he sit as its judge. He will not let himself be imprisoned by sin, or thrown headlong into wickedness. " ¹¹ The gift of regal freedom also involves the ability to transform all situations - our labor, worries, joys and happiness, the passing of the years - into a chance to do good, through the interior strength of prayer. No circumstance, no chance events - be they positive or negative, nor even the behavior of others can affect this freedom in a negative way. All things can only foment the true good, which is to love.

"Moreover, by uniting their forces let the laity so remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that these may be conformed to the norms of justice, favoring rather than hindering the practice of virtue." ¹²

II Cooperating in the governance of the Church

Filled with the inner freedom of the children of God, there are two main settings in which the lay faithful fulfill their vocation:

- The first is to live in the world, the characteristic property of the lay person and his or her spirituality, which leads him to evangelize family, social, work, cultural and political life.
- "The laity can also feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This

¹¹ Saint Ambrose's Commentary on Psalm 118, cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 908.

¹² *CIC*, 909.

can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them." ¹³

III Knowing the meaning, value and use of the temporal realities

The lay faithful have the responsibility of understanding how things relate to God, since all things come to us from God, and as such are a gift from His love and must lead us to Him and help man to perfect himself through the divine union.

"The Christian loves temporal goods as a *gift* from God and must receive them every day with renewed recognition...It is God whom he loves through them and as at their origin, and he will never love them more than God or against His will.

"...Living beings have their meaning: we transmit a calling from on high. They go before us to speak to us of God and draw us closer to Him. This is why Christian love is deeply imbued by a desire: that of transcending being, to submerge oneself in our natural movement.

"On the other hand, the Christian must work with and love that which is temporal as if these things were instruments. Mankind needs materials goods: money, well-being, technical progress, which although these may be bad guides, can nevertheless become magnificent servants if they are taken advantage of with a just love.

"...In this way the Christian loves temporal things as something which must aid him in his quest for God. His love is detached and free because it is directed from the start towards God and eternity.

"His union with the Lord is founded on his detachment from the temporal; his adhesion to God is the cause of his freedom from things human. The danger is not in loving the beautiful things of this world too much, but rather in an insufficient love of God, his soul and his brothers, and as a consequence of loving other things too much, losing himself in it.

"...Because it is a love of that which is visible founded on a love of that which is invisible, a love of creation directed towards the Creator, a temporal love which reveals an eternal love. This possession, imbued with detachment, this love, which renounces itself for another love, is the attitude which Saint Paul demands: (*cf. 1 Cor 7: 29-31*) ' I tell you, brothers, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully.'" ¹⁴

¹³ CIC, 910.

¹⁴ Jean Mouroux. *The Meaning of Man*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1948.)

We must not lose sight of the final goal which gives meaning and value to our whole existence, but strive through our daily toil to transform reality and make it according to God's project.

Conclusion:

Work, and all other activities, undertaken with the assistance of grace becomes a means of daily sanctification: "The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith, when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present".¹⁵

Summary:

- Through His obedience unto death, Christ has communicated to His disciples the gift of regal freedom, so that they may overcome the kingdom of sin residing in themselves through self-resignation and the living of a saintly life.
- Many members of the laity can "feel called, or be in fact called, to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life.. by [exercising] different kinds of ministries...".¹⁶
- "The Christian loves temporal values as a *gift* from God and must receive them every day with renewed recognition...It is God whom he loves through them and as at their origin, and he will never love them more than God or against His will."¹⁷

Points to Remember:

- To vanquish in ourselves the kingdom of sin, with God's assistance, we must put into practice the virtues of abnegation and mortification.
- The gift of regal freedom also involves the ability to transform all situations into an opportunity to do good, through the interior strength of prayer.

¹⁵ Josemaría Escrivá. *Meditations*, 3 March 1954.

¹⁶ *CIC*, 910.

¹⁷ Mouroux, *op. cit.*

- "On the other hand, the Christian must work with and love that which is temporal as if these things were instruments." ¹⁸(Mouroux, Jean. *The Meaning of Man*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1948.)

Additional Reading:

Pope Saint John Paul II. *Redemptor hominis*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 4 March, 1979), cf 21 *The Christian vocation to service and kingship*.

Bibliography:

Douglas Bushman. *In His Image Session Four: The Church Continues the Mission of Christ the King*. Ignatius Press, Jan, 1989.

¹⁸ Mouroux, *op. cit.*

Self-Check:

1. What does the Parable of the Talents teach us?

It has the capacity to make us reflect on the meaning, value and use of temporal realities.

2. What is St. Ambrose's commentary on freedom?

"That man is rightly called a king who makes his own body an obedient subject and, by governing himself with suitable rigor, refuses to let his passions breed rebellion in his soul, for he exercises a kind of royal power over himself. and because he knows how to rule his own person as king, so too does he sit as its judge. He will not let himself be imprisoned by sin, or thrown headlong into wickedness".¹⁹

3. What are the settings in which the lay faithful carry out their vocation?

The first is to live in the world; the second is the laity's calling to cooperate with their pastors in the service of the ecclesial community.²⁰

4. How must the Christian regard temporal goods?

"The Christian loves temporal goods as a *gift* from God and must receive them every day with renewed recognition" (*cf.* Jean Mouroux. *Op. cit.*)

5. Why does toil and all other activity, undertaken with the help of grace, become a means of daily sanctification?

"The ordinary life of a Christian who has faith, when he works or rests, when he prays or sleeps, at all times, is a life in which God is always present" (Josemaría Escrivá. *Op. cit.*)

¹⁹ Saint Ambrose's Commentary on Psalm 118, cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 908.

²⁰ *CIC*, 910.

Session 5:

Adhering to the Word of God

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon concluding this session, students will know that thorough study and the correct interpretation of Sacred Scripture are essential to avoid falling into fundamentalism.

Experiential Goal:

After completing this session, students will value the Church as Mother and Teacher: she is the one authorized to interpret Sacred Scripture.

Lesson Plan:

- I The word of God in personal dialogue with the Lord**
- II The faith experience**
- III In the company of the Catholic Church**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students, "What is the connection between a mother and a teacher?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to look through the *Book of Revelation* in the Bible and search for a verse which seems difficult to understand. The objective of this exercise to show them that it is not always possible to interpret Scripture literally, and that the Church teaches us the correct interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear the Word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ, have received the Kingdom itself. Then, by its own power the seed sprouts and grows until harvest time." ²¹ Given that the hearing of the word of God is oriented towards - as Jesus says - acting on the word, the Church has always proposed living a coherent lifestyle.

I The word of God in personal dialogue with the Lord

The two ways of drawing closer to Sacred Scripture - via erudition and via faith - are complementary.

It is necessary to study Sacred Scripture, knowing well how to interpret it, so as to not fall into fundamentalism which consists of taking a Biblical verse and applying it to current events, without taking into account the differences in culture, time and literary genres found in the Bible.

Essentially, Scripture must be read in faith, understanding each page's connection to Jesus Christ, who - as if He were our soul's true love - has left us His eternal love letters, so that we feel we have been touched by the greatest of loves.

The words of Scripture, as they are the words of God, are eternally youthful, always 'alive', just spoken today, because God continues to talk to each of us through them, in a way that is unprecedented and unique.

The word of God is to be read as a dialogue with God. "Help me to understand your word, what you want to tell me on this page." When listening, the simple of heart have the great advantage of understanding God's word deeply and of being able to put it into practice because the word of the Lord is life for man and woman.

II The faith experience

We must permit ourselves to be aided by the great masters - both of olden and modern times - of the prayerful reading of the Bible. These masters help us to better understand and also to learn how Sacred Scripture is to be read.

We must recognize and give thanks for the fact that when we read the Bible, we ourselves are read by the Bible, interpreted by the Bible - as it were - to the degree that such an interpretative reading defines us in our most authentic Christian essence.

²¹ Pope Paul VI. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Lumen gentium*, 5. (Citta del Vaticano: Librería Editrice Vaticana, 21 Nov, 1964).

III In the company of the Catholic Church

Because the word of God is fixed forever in Sacred Scripture, the voice of the Church comes alive and resounds in all of the ages as needed. All of the words uttered by Jesus Christ "become part of [the era of the Church] in an ever new way".²² It is very important to read the Bible personally, in the light of Tradition, the Fathers of the Church and the Magisterium, synchronizing spiritual reading with the liturgical season, documents of the Magisterium of the Church, the speeches of the Holy Father, the writings of the founders [of congregations], and all of those Catholic ascetics and mystics recommended for their solid doctrine and spiritual excellence.

The most privileged moment in which the Church listens to the word is in the liturgical gathering where "Christ "is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church".²³

"The word of God is not always expressed in the same way during the liturgical celebration, nor does it always penetrates the heart of the faithful with the same efficacy; but Christ is always present in His word, and, carrying out the mystery of salvation, sanctifies humankind and pays perfect tribute to the Father. [...] Thus, the word of God, offered ceaselessly in the Liturgy, is always alive and effective, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes the Father's active love manifest, while never losing its efficacy for men and women".²⁴

Conclusion:

The holiness of many Christians is the consequence of the sincere, and often radical, response to the call of the word of God, as a continual option to go deeper into a personal relationship with God and permit Him to be the guide to our actions.

²² Pope St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit in the Church: *Dominum et vivificantem*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May, 1986), 29.

²³ Pope Paul VI, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum concilium*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December, 1963), 7.

²⁴ Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops. *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 1981. Ordenación de las lecturas de la Misa, Prenotandos n° 4.

Summary:

- It is necessary to study Sacred Scripture, knowing well how to interpret it, so as to not fall into fundamentalism.
- We must let ourselves be assisted by the great masters - both ancient and contemporary - of the prayerful reading of the Bible.
- If it is important to read Sacred Scripture with the help of masters, in the company of friends, with other travelers along the road, it is particularly important to read it in the great company of God's pilgrim people, the Church.

Points to Remember:

- "The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field" (*cf. Lumen gentium*, 5).
- We must recognize and give thanks for the fact that when we read the Bible, we ourselves are read by the Bible - as it were.
- The most privileged moment in which the Church listens to the word is in the liturgical gathering

Additional Reading:

Pope Benedict XVI: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum domini, on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. 30 September, 2010.

Synod of Bishops, XII Ordinary General Assembly: *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Lineamenta*, 9. October, 20018.

Bibliography:

Jeff Cavins & Sarah Christmyer. *A Quick Journey Through the Bible*. Great Adventure Catholic Bible Study Program. (Ascension Press, August, 2007)

Self-Check:

1. Why is the word of the Lord compared to a seed?

"The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear the Word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ, have received the Kingdom itself. Then, by its own power the seed sprouts and grows until harvest time" (*Lumen gentium*, 5).

2. When reading Sacred Scripture, what must we do to avoid falling into a fundamentalist trap?

It is necessary to study Sacred Scripture and have a clear understanding of how to interpret it.

3. Why is it said that the word of God is to be read as a dialogue with God?

The word of God is to be read as a dialogue with God. When getting started, we should pray asking the Lord for His help, "Open the door of understanding to me, Lord." Then ask the Lord, "Help me to understand your word, what you want to tell me on this page."

4. What does St. Gregory the Great say about reading the word of God in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Book 2, Homily 2.1?

"I have often discovered that many of the things from the word of God on which I had been meditating alone and could not understand, I did come to understand them while in the presence of my brothers. With that experience I discovered where I could obtain the understanding of the texts."

5. Why do we say that when reading the Bible that it is the Bible - as it were - which reads us?

When we read the Bible prayerfully, the Bible makes us, build our interior, cements our identity, evangelizes us and Christianizes us.

6. What is the best way to make a personal reading of the word of God?

In the light of Tradition, the Fathers of the Church and the Magisterium, synchronizing spiritual reading with the liturgical season, documents of the Magisterium of the Church, the speeches of the Holy Father.

Session 6: Ceaselessly Exercising the Theological Virtues

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon conclusion of this session, students will know which are the theological virtues.

Experiential Goal:

After this session, students will put the theological virtues into practice in their lives.

Lesson Plan:

I Faith is the response to a Person

II Hope in God generates fortitude

III Charity does good unto all

Lead-In Question:

Ask students, "What is a virtue and how many kinds of virtue are there?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to gather into small groups. They will look for the section on The Virtues in their *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part Three, Section One, Chapter Seven: paragraphs 1803-1845). Ask them to look through the topic and comment on it briefly.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"Remain in me, as I remain in you... Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing' (cf. *Jn* 15:4,5). The distinction between the two aspects of the union to which the text refers is significant: *Christ's presence in us*, which we should welcome, recognize, and increasingly desire, being joyful if we are sometimes able to experience it with particular intensity; and *our presence in Christ*, which we are invited to achieve through our faith and love.

"This union with Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who instills it in the soul that accepts it and complies, be that in contemplation of the divine mysteries, or through an apostolate, which seeks to communicate its light in both personal and social action (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theol.*, II-II, q. 45, a. 4)" ²⁵

I Faith is the response to a Person

Faith is a gift from God, more valuable than life itself as the martyrs of yesterday and today prove.

This gift from God is accepted with a human act, a personal decision, an option which is the foundation and commitment of our existence, a personal response to the One whom we know loves us. Faith is the personal response to a Person.

"Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in Whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (cf. *Acts* 17:28), seek His will in every event" ²⁶. This continual exercise illuminates the circumstances of each day, the joys and sorrows, toil and rest, reflection and action.

Only by the light of faith, can one "see Christ in everyone whether he be a relative or a stranger, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things both in themselves and in their relation to man's final goal " ²⁷

Only by the light of faith, can one see the action of divine Providence, answering prayers and anticipating human needs.

²⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *General Audience: Lay Spirituality*. 1 December 1993.

²⁶ Pope Paul VI. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: Apostolicum actuositatem*. November, 1965, 4.

²⁷ *Apostolicum actuositatem*, 4. *Op. cit.*

Such faith is nourished by meditation on the word of God, liturgy and popular piety, from the doctrine which gives security and a rational basis and grows in us when we step up the intensity of our response to God with an intense life of prayer and when we pass it on to others. Opening faith up to its community and social dimension is essential.

II Hope in God generates fortitude

"Sustained by his faith in God, who is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (*cf. Heb 11:1*), the Bishop" - as well as the lay faithful - "should expect to receive every good gift from God and should place the greatest trust in divine Providence... Hope which "does not disappoint" (*cf. Rom 5:5*) evokes the Bishop's" - and layperson's - "missionary spirit, which enables him to approach his apostolic undertakings creatively, to direct them firmly and to see them through to their conclusion".²⁸

"If faith provides a fresh outlook, hope also gives new energy to involvement in temporal affairs (*cf. Apostolicum actuositatem*, 4)... This is a hope that is not devoid of trouble and sorrow but can disappoint no one, because it is based on the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christ's cross and resurrection".²⁹

Hope is the source of fortitude and patience. "Among the trials of this life they find strength in hope, convinced that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (*cf. Rom 8:18*) (*Apostolicum actuositatem*, 4).

III Charity does good unto all

Faith and hope impel charity which comes from God, calling us "to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of the faith" (*cf. Gal 6:10*), cultivating Christian friendship, laying aside 'all malice and all deceit and pretense, and envy, and all slander' (*I Pet 2:1*), and thereby they draw men to Christ" (*Apostolicum actuositatem*, 4).

Spiritual life is presided over by charity, which is the most fundamental disposition of Christian life: "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us" (*Rom 5:5*). All of Christian life is settled on the dual commandment of love: the love for God above all things; and the love for our neighbor as we love ourselves (as members of the Body of Christ).

²⁸ *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops: Apostolorum successores*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 40.

²⁹ Pope St. John Paul II, *General Audience: Lay Spirituality*. 1 December 1993.

Love for God is love that leads us to do His will, with a surrender such as that of Christ's. And the love of neighbor is that which leads us to serve others, beginning with those closest to us, giving our lives as did Christ. Thus, the basis of spiritual formation consists of humbly asking the Lord for that generous love and gift of self. Forming oneself in charity is to exercise that generosity and surrender in the fulfillment of God's will and service to others.

Conclusion:

The holiness to which the lay faithful are called requires the exercise of the virtues, firstly, the theological, since it is in their very nature to lead man directly to God. The theological virtues are the specifically Christian way of relating to God, the backbone which keeps spiritual life together.

Summary:

- Faith is a gift from God, more valuable than life itself, as the martyrs of yesterday and today prove.
- This is a hope that is not devoid of trouble and sorrow but can disappoint no one, because it is based on the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christ's cross and resurrection".³⁰
- Spiritual life is presided over by charity, which is the most fundamental disposition of Christian life.

Points to Remember:

- It is by the light of faith that one can always and everywhere recognize God in Whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*).
- If faith provides a fresh outlook, hope also gives new energy.
- Faith and hope impel charity which comes from God, calling us to do good to all mankind.

³⁰ John Paul II, *General Audience: Lay Spirituality*. 1 December 1993.

Additional Reading:

Häring, Bernhard. *The Theological Virtues : Secret Power Source for Christian Discipleship*.

Bibliography:

St. Francis de Sales. *The Exercise of Virtues: Introduction to the Devout Life (Part 3)*. First published 1608. Allen Press: October 2008.

Self-Check:

1. What does Pope Benedict XVI have to say about faith in his 20015 encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, 1?

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

2. How is personal faith nourished?

Such faith is nourished by meditation on the word of God, liturgy and popular piety, from the doctrine which gives security and a rational basis and grows in us when we step up the intensity of our response to God with an intense life of prayer and when we pass it on to others.

3. How does John Paul II describe Christian hope in his *General Audience on Lay Spirituality*, 1 December 1993?

"This is a hope that is not devoid of trouble and sorrow but can disappoint no one, because it is based on the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christ's cross and resurrection."

4. How is hope the source of fortitude and patience?

"Among the trials of this life [we] find strength in hope, convinced that "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us" (*cf. Rom 8:18*) (*Apostolicum actuositatem*, 4).

5. What is the connection between faith, hope and charity?

Faith and hope impel charity which comes from God, calling us to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of the faith (*cf. Gal 6:10*).

6. What is the most fundamental disposition of Christian life?

Spiritual life is presided over by charity, which is the most fundamental disposition of Christian life.

7. What is the basis of spiritual formation?

Thus, the basis of spiritual formation consists of humbly asking the Lord for that generous love and gift of self. Forming oneself in charity is to exercise that generosity and surrender in the fulfillment of God's will and service to others.

8. What is the innate vocation of every human being?

Love is the most fundamental and innate vocation of every person.

9. What are the demands of holiness - the faithful layperson's calling?

The holiness to which the lay faithful are called requires the exercise of the virtues, firstly, the theological, since it is in their very nature to lead man directly to God.

10. How do the theological virtues relate to God?

The theological virtues are the specifically Christian way of relating to God, the backbone which keeps spiritual life together.

Session 7:

The Meaning of the Sacred Liturgy

Doctrinal Goal:

After completing this session, students will know the important relationship that exists between a full participation in the sacraments and acts of piety and popular devotions.

Experiential Goal:

Students will appreciate the sacramental life and the diverse expressions of piety and popular devotions.

Lesson Plan:

- I Living a Eucharistic existence**
- II Obtaining nourishment from the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation**
- III Cherishing popular devotions**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students, "Have any of you participated in a procession or an organized prayer session (such as a novena for a departed loved one or for a saint's feast day)?" Briefly discuss their experiences.

Warm-Up Activity:

What forms of piety and popular devotions do you know?

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

It is in the washing of the feet that Jesus displays who he is and how he acts. He, who is the Lord, "Jesus removes the garments of his glory, he girds himself with the "towel" of humanity, and becomes a slave".³¹ He performs the service of washing our dirty feet. This is the meaning of all of His life and passion: he bows before our dirty feet, before humanity's filth, and cleanses us, purifies us with his immeasurable love. This same meaning of the life of Christ is prolonged in the liturgy.

I Living a Eucharistic existence

The Eucharist is a way of being that reveals Christ's unconditional "yes" to the Father. There are many "intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters: gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because the Eucharist is thanksgiving; an attitude of self - offering, which will impel them to unite the offering of themselves to the Eucharistic offering of Christ; charity nourished by a sacrament which is a sign of unity and sharing; the yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration before Christ, who is really present under the Eucharistic species."³²

Christian existence, the fruit of the personal encounter and lasting friendship of every baptized person with Christ, can and must be called Eucharistic existence.

"The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom 8:29ff.*)."³³

Eucharistic spirituality, along with participation in the Sunday Mass with its holy communion is prolonged in adoration before the Holy Sacrament and in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, filling life with thanksgiving, continuing Christ's sacrifice all week long; in other words, we must become host with Christ Host.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI. *Homily Holy Thursday*, 20 March, 2008.

³² Pope St. John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 48. 15 March 1992.

³³ Pope Benedict XVI. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 71. 22 February, 2007.

II Obtaining nourishment from the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

The Eucharist, because of the conversion to Christ which it implies, leads to the sacrament of Penance: "when we realize Who it is that we receive in Eucharistic Communion, there springs up in us almost spontaneously a sense of unworthiness, together with sorrow for our sins and an interior need for purification" ³⁴: "a love for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation" ³⁵.

Christian life implies a constant conversion: the Christian soul knowing itself to be loved seeks each day to better and better love God and his or her brothers and sisters through the acts of living. Conversion is nothing other than a ceaseless effort and decision to reject sin and renew love for God through continual purification.

The quality and zeal of our spiritual life depends on the assiduous and conscientious practice of recurring to the sacrament of Penance: "the whole of [our] existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason [we fail] to receive the sacrament of Penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion". ³⁶

The Church's experience teaches us that our conversion never comes to an end, and we will always need to take up spiritual combat. "This struggle to live in Christ is rooted in the sacrament of Penance, where our wounds and failures are healed."

III Cherishing popular devotions

Christian holiness is fed, above all else, with an assiduous sacramental life, but this life finds its perfect complement with popular devotions expressed in multiple forms having faith as their source. In their most authentic manifestations these devotions favor faith and predispose one to the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

The existence of a deeply rooted, rich and profound popular piety is a characteristic of faith in Latin America and is present at all social levels and sectors, and has particular importance as a point of encounter with Christ for all those who with a spirit of poverty and humility sincerely seek God. The esteem held by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church for popular devotions is motivated, above all, by the values which underlie these devotions:

³⁴ Pope St. John Paul II. *Letter on the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist: Dominicae cenae*, 7. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, February, 1980).

³⁵ Pope Benedict XVI. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission: Sacramentum caritatis*, 20. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, February, 2007.)

³⁶ Pope St. John Paul II. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today: Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 31,VI. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December, 1984).

the piety of the people has an almost innate sense of the sacred, the mystery, the transcendental, making faith more alive and concrete; it manifests an authentic thirst for God and a perspicacious sense of God's profound attributes.

The religious sense of the Christian people finds its expression in many forms of piety, such as: feast days, novenas, the rosary and the station of the cross, processions, religious dances, songs from religious folklore, tenderness displayed for the saints and angels, promises, prayers in family, pilgrimages, visits to sanctuaries dedicated to Christ and to the Virgin or other saints, prayers for the souls in purgatory, and the use of sacramentals such as water, oil and candles.

Popular piety oriented towards the mystery of Christ constitutes a fundamental element in overcoming secularism, atheism, idolatry and is an antidote against the sects.

Conclusion:

The saints that go before us were spiritually fed through the Eucharist, were assiduous in frequenting the sacrament of Penance and lived their practice of popular piety fruitfully, earning interior riches, themselves promoting, in many cases, these devotions. The saints acquire their capacity for a constantly renewed love for their fellow men and women thanks to their encounter with the Lord in the Eucharist, and reciprocally, this encounter garners realism and depth through their service to others.

Summary:

- The Eucharist is a way of being that passes from Jesus to the Christian and from his or her witness, tends to irradiate out towards society and culture.
- "[L]ove for the Eucharist leads to a growing appreciation of the sacrament of Reconciliation".
- The saints that go before us were spiritually fed through the Eucharist, were assiduous in frequenting the sacrament of Penance and lived popular piety fruitfully, earning great interior riches.

Points to Remember:

- The Eucharist is a way of being that reveals Christ's unconditional "yes" to the Father.
- Christian existence implies ceaseless conversion.

- Christian holiness is fed, above all else, with an assiduous sacramental life,

Additional Reading:

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*. December 2001.

Bibliography:

David Torevell. *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform*. T&T Clark, 2004.

Louis-Marie Chauvet. *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*. Liturgical Press: 2001.

Self-Check:

1. What is the Christian called to express with every act in his or her life?

The Christian is called to express true worship of God. This is where the intrinsically Eucharistic nature of Christian life takes shape.

2. What did Pope Benedict XVI say about love for the Eucharist in *Sacramentum caritatis*, 71 (*op. cit.*)?

"The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom* 8:29ff.)." ³⁷

3. On what does the quality of our spiritual life depend?

The quality and zeal of our spiritual life depends on the assiduous and conscientious practice of recurring to the sacrament of Penance: "the whole of [our] existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason [we fail] to receive the sacrament of Penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion". ³⁸

4. Why is it said that only in forgiveness can the world undergo a true transformation?

Nothing in the world can improve if evil is not overcome, and evil can only be overcome through forgiveness.

5. What gives sustenance to Christian holiness?

More than anything else, an assiduous sacramental life.

6. What is it that motivates the Magisterium of the Catholic Church's high regard for popular piety?

The esteem held by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church for popular devotions is motivated, above all, by the values which underlie these devotions: the piety of the people has an almost innate sense of the sacred, the mystery, the transcendental, making faith more alive and concrete; it manifests an authentic thirst for God and a perspicacious sense of God's profound attributes.

³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission: Sacramentum caritatis*. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, February, 2007), 71.

³⁸ Pope St. John Paul II. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today: Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 31,VI. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, December, 1984).

7. What are some expressions of popular piety?

Feast days, novenas, the rosary and the stations of the cross, processions, religious dances and songs from religious folklore.

8. Can it be claimed that popular piety is an antidote against the sects?

Popular piety oriented towards the mystery of Christ constitutes a fundamental element in overcoming secularism, atheism, idolatry and is an antidote against the sects.

9. What is the relationship between the saints and popular piety?

The saints that go before us were spiritually fed through the Eucharist, were assiduous in frequenting the sacrament of Penance and lived their practice of popular piety fruitfully, earning interior riches, themselves promoting, in many cases, these devotions.

Session 8:

Prayer Life

Doctrinal Goal:

Having studied this session, students will assign a greater importance to their life of prayer - be this prayer in private, with the family, or in community.

Experiential Goal:

Students will be encouraged to pray in their families, in their communities and in their private life.

Lesson Plan:

- I Living a personal life of prayer**
- II Praying with the family**
- III Participating in communal prayer**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students what kinds of prayer they are aware of.

Warm-Up Activity:

What is more important - knowing the types of prayer that there are, or putting them into practice?

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

“Without our own, intimate and ceaseless interior life of prayer, faith and charity, we cannot remain Christian, we cannot usefully and helpfully participate in the brilliant liturgical rebirth, or give any efficacious witness to that Christian authenticity we speak so much of; we cannot fully think, breathe, act, suffer or hope with the living pilgrim Church: we must pray. ” ³⁹

I Living a personal life of prayer

Spiritual life is fed by prayer, particularly through meditation, performed in the intimacy of God's presence.

During prayer, we meditate on and listen to the word of God. Prayer also permits us to know ourselves better, earning a knowledge that grants us humility and thankfulness, and bestows on an understanding of the events that unfold in our lives, and permits us to lead our lives in accordance with God's will for us.

Prayer must be a daily occurrence, not something sporadic: it must be central to our life. All Christians, regardless of age or gender are called to cultivate prayer as best they can:

- A child's prayer is simple, direct and trusting - and should even serve as model for adults: Jesus told us to be as children and praying with a simple and total trust means praying as children know how to do.
- Young people know that without Christ they will never be able to find the meaning of their lives, true happiness or to savor the fascinating truth about love.
- Husbands and wives must spare some time alone with God, heart to heart, during which time they must will their spouse to not be their first concern.
- The senior years is a time of grace that invites us to unite with God with an ever more intense love.

II Praying with the family

Family prayer means praying together - husband and wife together, parents and children together.

³⁹ Pope Paul VI, *General Audience*, 20 August, 1969.

Family prayer sheds light and hope on our daily life; it is woven spontaneously around each day's life experiences.

The Church proposes to families that they pray the rosary to the Virgin Mary - if not all five mysteries, at least one mystery every day- as one of the most excellent and efficacious community prayers which the Christian family can pray.

Prayer reinforces the family's spiritual solidity and cohesion, helping the members to participate in God's "strength". The Christian family prays together because their prayer is an expression of shared life and imparts a strength that helps keep them together.

III Participating in communal prayer

Faith, on the one hand, implies a deeply personal relationship with God, but, on the other hand possesses an essential communal component: both dimensions are inseparable.

Living the communion of prayer, within a living community, means putting God's word into practice (*Mt 18:19*).

Community life is essential to the Christian vocation. The fraternal welcome, the esteem and fellowship felt for one another sustain our prayer: "Christianity, from its very beginning, has meant fellowship, a network of relationships constantly strengthened by hearing God's word and sharing in the Eucharist, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit." ⁴⁰

Conclusion:

The solidity and certainty of our faith, hope and love are fed through prayer: "[I]t would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions." ⁴¹

⁴⁰ Pope Benedict XVI. *Sacramentum caritatis*, 76. *Op. cit.*

⁴¹ Pope Saint John Paul II. *Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000: Novo millennio ineunte*, 34. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, January, 2001).

Summary:

- Spiritual life is nourished by prayer, particularly by meditation, done in the intimacy of the presence of God.
- Family prayer is praying together: husband and wife, parents and children together.
- Faith implies a profound personal relationship with God, but also, possesses an essential communal component: both dimensions are inseparable.

Points to Remember:

- Prayer - as something central to our Christian being - must be every day, not sporadically.
- The Church proposes that families pray the rosary to the Virgin Mary.
- Community life is essential to the Christian vocation.

Additional Reading:

Pope St. John Paul II. *The Spirit: Source of Prayer Life. Catechesis on the Holy Spirit. General Audience.* 17 April, 1991.

Bibliography:

Guardini, Romano: *The Art of Praying: The Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer.* Sophia Institute Press, 1994. (Formerly entitled *Prayer in Practice*, 1957.)

Pope Benedict XVI. *A School of Prayer: The Saints Show Us How to Pray.* Wednesday Audiences from May 2011 to May 2012. Ignatius Press: 2013.

Self-Check:

1. How can I give an authentic and efficacious Christian witness?

By ceaselessly cultivating my own, intimate interior life of prayer, faith, and charity.

2. Where can I find Christ every day?

In a personal and intimate encounter with Christ, discovered through daily prayer where we personally experience Christ's irresistible attraction, as a Man and as God.

3. How can I nurture my spiritual life?

Through prayer, particularly meditation, performed in the intimacy of God's presence.

4. What is the fruit of daily meditation?

Daily meditation makes us fall in love with things divine, it introduces us to God's mysteries, foments closer contact with the divine persons, and enkindles charity within us.

5. What should a child's prayer be like?

Simple, direct, and trusting: a model for the prayers of adults.

6. What about young people - what should their prayer be like?

Prayer should be in silence, meditatively, to permit the understanding of the definitive meaning of one's own existence - the discovery of which imbues one with peace.

7. And husbands and wives - what ought their prayer to be like?

Both spouses must lay aside time to enter alone, heart-to-heart, into God's presence: during this time, the other spouse must remain as a secondary concern.

8. What are the fruits of family prayer?

Prayer in family fills each member's daily life with light and hope: this prayer is woven spontaneously from the family's daily occurrences.

9. What is the prayer which the Church proposes that the family pray together?

The holy rosary is recommended.

10. How is it that prayer has two dimensions: both personal and communal?

Faith involves both a deep, personal relationship with God, and an essential component of opening to the community - both dimensions are inseparable.

Session 9:

Drawing Closer to the Blessed Mother of God

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon completion of this session, students will deepen their knowledge of the figure of Mary as Mother of God and our own mother.

Experiential Goal:

After completing this session and deepening their awareness of Mary, Mother of God, students will be keen to imitate her virtues.

Lesson Plan:

- I Knowing the excellence of our Mother of God**
- II Loving her as pious children**
- III The imitation of her virtues**

Lead-In Question:

Read *Jn* 19:26. Discuss with the students: "What witness did Jesus give us from the Cross?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to take a few minutes to jot down all of the virtues they can think of which are exemplified in the Blessed Virgin.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

At the foot of the Cross, Jesus Christ, expressing his final wish upon seeing his mother, and next to her the disciple whom He loved, said to His mother: "Woman, behold your son". (Jn 19:25-27) He gives us Mary as Mother, and Mary, by accepting us as her children, commits her love: a perfect love, animated by tenderness and compassion for all her children, especially the sinners; a demanding, authentic love, which seeks what is good for her children; a merciful love, which intercedes for us all before God to reach the graces which each of us needs for our sanctification, our ordinary life and our apostolic action.

I **Knowing the excellence of our Mother of God**

The most fundamental teaching we have on the Virgin Mary comes from Sacred Scripture: the Church reads these in the light of Tradition, which gives us the certainty as to the contents and true meaning and transcendence of the Holy Books. This truth of faith concerning Mary, as an integral part of the doctrine of faith on the mystery of Jesus, must be transformed into spiritual life: if we wish to be Christians, we must be Marian, which means we must recognize the essential, vital providential relationship which binds the Virgin to Jesus and which opens up to us the road which leads to Him.

Marian devotion is a source of deep Christian life, commitment with God and with our brothers and sisters, and is authentic in that it leads us to a more coherent Christian life.

The importance that Marian prayer has acquired must be recognized as a sign of the Holy Spirit's inspiration: the *We fly to thy patronage*; the *Hail Mary*; the *Angelus* prayed three times a day - at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset; the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary*; medals with the image of the Virgin Mary - all of these remind us of the supremacy of spiritual life and the need for prayer.

II **Loving her as pious children**

God has willed that Mary be for us the Mother of divine grace, and in this - as in everything - we must accept things as God has willed and made. Without Mary we cannot grow as we should as His children. On the contrary, the one who is as a child and takes her by the hand, will always live trusting in the Virgin's maternal attentiveness.

Some fear - concerning this point - that we may fall into certain excesses. Certainly, in this, as in all things, with Jesus Christ as our model, we must find the exact standard: we must love Mary as Jesus loved and continues to love her.

There is no danger at all of our loving the Virgin Mary in excess. There may be some excess in our external demonstrations; but such a danger is easily overcome when Marian

piety is subject to the universal standard of the liturgy and the popular devotions recommended by the Church. Marian devotion, true and deep, is of necessity reflected in an authentic Christian life, in a life lived according to the teaching of our divine Savior.

III The imitation of her virtues

Her virtues are many and varied: firmness of faith, quick obedience, simple in humility, exultant in magnifying the Lord, burning with charity, strong and constant in the fulfillment of her mission, including offering herself as holocaust, in full communion with her Son's sentiments. She is the road to Christ, and holding her hand, we can more easily, safely, quickly and objectively make our way towards holiness.

The objective in imitating Mary's virtues is to develop in ourselves her interior attitude, which is one of uninterrupted adoration of the Word: by living in intimacy with Mary, our soul can better retreat to God's intimacy, removed from the world and its vanities, and in greater contemplation. Devotion to Mary is the best school of Christianity and apostolic commitment, the best workshop in prayer and piety, the first teacher of faith, hope and charity : "The more I imitate the Mother of God, the more deeply I get to know God." ⁴²

Conclusion:

A splendid example of this Marian spirituality, which molds the interior of the person, so configuring one to Christ, the First-born of many brothers and sisters, are the witnesses of holiness and wisdom of so many faithful Christians, who have all grown in the shadow and under the patronage of their Mother: The greatest realization of Christian existence as trinitarian living as "children in the Son" is given us by the Virgin Mary, who by her faith (*cf. Lk 1:45*) and obedience to God's will (*cf. Lk 1:38*) and by her constant meditation on the Word and on the actions of Jesus (*cf. Lk 2:19, 51*), is the Lord's most perfect disciple."

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⁴² *Divine Mercy in my Soul: the Diary of Saint Mary Kowalska*, 843. Marian Press, 3rd ed. (Feb, 2005).

⁴³ *Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, May 13-31, 2007 Concluding Document of the Aparecida Conference*, 266.(Washington, DC: USCCB, 2008). This document can be retrieved online at <http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aparecida-Concluding%20Document.pdf>.

Summary:

- Over the centuries, the Church, moved by the Holy Spirit, and sustained by Him in her unceasing task to contemplate God's plans and to go deeper into the meaning of Sacred Scripture, has deepened her understanding of Mary's mission in His plan of salvation.
- Without Mary we cannot grow as we should as children of God: the Virgin Mary who herself raised and educated Jesus, must raise and educate us as well.
- Mary's virtues are many and varied: firm in her faith, quick to obey, simple in her humbleness, exultant in magnifying the Lord, burning with love.

Points to Remember:

- "From that moment, the disciple took her into his home" (*Jn 19:27*).
- Marian devotion, if it is true and deep, must necessarily be reflected in an authentically Christian life.
- "The more I imitate the Mother of God, the more deeply I get to know God." (*Divine Mercy in my Soul, 843. Op. cit.*)

Additional Reading:

Pope St. John Paul II: *Mary is our Model and Guide in Faith. General Audience, 6 May, 1998.*

Bibliography:

Pope St. John Paul II: *Series of Catechesis on Mary, the Mother of God.* (Wednesday General Audiences from 6 September, 1995 to 12 November, 1997.) [Audiences # 40-70 are available in English on the Vatican Website. The Average Joe Catholic website <http://averagejoecatholic.blogspot.mx/2008/12/theotokos-catechesis-on-mary-by-pope.html> contains all 70 audiences on Mary in English.]

Mary, Our Mother and Guide: Understanding Mary's Role in Salvation history, the Church, and Our Lives Today. Catholic Faith Explorers Series. Ignatius Press and Ave Maria University.

Self-Check:

1. What is meant by the expression 'Christ's Last Will and Testament'?

The episode in the Gospel of St. John 9: 25-27 in which Jesus gives the care of his mother to the disciple John.

2. Where is fundamental teaching on the Virgin Mary to be found?

In Sacred Scripture, and in the Church which reads Scripture in the light of Tradition.

3. Why is devotion to Mary a source of profound Christian life?

Devotion to Mary is a source of profound Christian life, commitment to God and our brethren and is authentic in that it leads one to commit to a more coherent Christian lifestyle.

4. Why is it that Christians bereft of devotion to the Virgin Mary suffer interminable fears and anxieties concerning this topic?

They are like children who feel they have no mother.

5. How is true Marian devotion reflected?

It must be reflected in an authentically Christian life, in a life which conforms to the teaching of our divine Savior.

6. What does Pope Paul VI say about the imitation of Mary's virtues in his Apostolic Exhortation *Signum magnum*, 1. (13 May, 1967)?

"Neither the grace of the divine Redeemer, nor the powerful intercession of His Mother and our spiritual Mother, nor yet her sublime sanctity, could lead us to the port of salvation if we did not respond to them by our persevering will to honor Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin with our devout imitation of their sublime virtue."

7. What are some of the Virgin Mary's virtues?

Quick to obey, simple in humbleness, exultant in magnifying the Lord, burning with love, strong and constant in fulfilling her mission.

8. What is the primary purpose in imitating Mary's virtues?

The main objective is to develop in ourselves her interior attitude which is one of uninterrupted adoration of the Word of God.

9. What is the best school of apostolic commitment?

Devotion to Mary is the best school of Christianity and apostolic commitment, the best workshop on prayer and piety, the first teacher of faith, hope, and charity.

10. What does the *Aparecida Concluding Document*, 266, (from the V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean) say about faith and obedience to Mary?

"The greatest realization of Christian existence as trinitarian living as 'children in the Son' is given us by the Virgin Mary, who by her faith (*cf. Lk 1:45*) and obedience to God's will (*cf. Lk 1:38*) and by her constant meditation on the Word and on the actions of Jesus (*cf. Lk 2:19, 51*), is the Lord's most perfect disciple."

Session 10:

Veneration of the Holy Angels, the Holy Apostles, the Saints, and the Blessed

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon completing this session, students will know the importance of angels in their lives, the witness given by the apostles who are also models of saintliness, and the saints and blessed who have followed their example.

Experiential Goal:

After completing this session, students will come to value the presence of the angels as well as the great witness given by the lives of the apostles, the saints and the blessed.

Lesson Plan:

- I Veneration of the Holy Angels**
- II Letting Ourselves be Guided by the Holy Apostles**
- III Friendship with the Saints and Blessed**

Lead-In Question:

Group Brainstorming Session - Ask students what they know about angels.

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to write in their notebooks the names of the Apostles. The first student to finish reads the names out loud to the rest of the class.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

The Catholic Church, in her wise, moral pedagogy, has constantly invited the lay faithful to seek and find in the saints, and foremost in the Virgin, invigorating examples of the formation of the Christian conscience. She does not undermine the value of the primacy of the following of Christ, which is the essential and original foundation of Christian morality, but rather this following is underlined in the people who have participated in Christ's holiness. This is about following Christ, as an invitation, attraction and under the impulse of grace, through the imitation of the saints. The lives of the saints, which are a reflection of God's singularly good bounty, not only constitute a true confession of our faith and a drive to communicate it to others, but also give glory to God and His infinite holiness.

I Veneration of the Holy Angels

"The Church, which at its outset was saved and protected by the ministry of Angels, and which constantly experiences their "mysterious and powerful assistance", venerates these heavenly spirits and has recourse to their prompt intercession.

"During the liturgical year, the Church celebrates the role played by the Holy Angels, in the events of salvation and commemorates them on specific days: 29 September (feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael), 2 October (the Guardian Angels)." ⁴⁴

"Devotion to the Holy Angels gives rise to a certain form of the Christian life which is characterized by:

- "devout gratitude to God for having placed these heavenly spirits of great sanctity and dignity at the service of man;
- "an attitude of devotion deriving from the knowledge of living constantly in the presence of the Holy Angels of God;- serenity and confidence in facing difficult situations, since the Lord guides and protects the faithful in the way of justice through the ministry of His Holy Angels." ⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy - Principles and Guidelines*, 215. December, 2001.

⁴⁵ *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy - Principles and Guidelines*, 216. *Op. cit.*

II Letting Ourselves be Guided by the Holy Apostles

"The Apostles were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends. Their journey with Jesus was not only a physical journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, but an interior journey during which they learned faith in Jesus Christ, not without difficulty, for they were people like us.

"But for this very reason, because they were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends, who learned faith on a journey that was far from easy, they are also guides for us, who help us to know Jesus Christ, to love him and to have faith in him." ⁴⁶

"[T]he apostle Peter to whom Jesus entrusted the mission of confirming the faith of his brothers (*cf. Lk 22:31-32*), helps them to strengthen the bond of communion with the pope, his successor, and to find in Jesus the words of eternal life.

- "Paul, the tireless evangelizer, has shown them the path of missionary boldness and the will of approaching each cultural reality with the Good News of salvation.
- "John, the disciple loved by the Lord, has revealed to them the transforming power of the new commandment and the fecundity of remaining in his love." ⁴⁷

III Friendship with the Saints and Blessed

"The *raison d'être* for the feasts of the Saints is to highlight concrete realizations of the saving plan of God and "to proclaim the marvels of Christ in his servants." ⁴⁸ We must obtain correct instruction on the importance and significance of the saints and blessed.

- "Our people nourish affection and special devotion to Joseph, Mary's husband" ⁴⁹ and Jesus' father. "The virtues of St. Joseph have been the object of ecclesial reflection down through the centuries, especially the more recent centuries. Among those virtues the following stand out: faith, with which he fully accepted God's salvific plan; prompt and silent obedience to the will of God; love for and fulfilment of the law, true piety, fortitude in time of trial; chaste love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, a dutiful exercise of his paternal authority, and fruitful reticence." ⁵⁰ St. Joseph, "the just, faithful, and generous man who knows how to lose himself in order to find himself in the mystery of the Son. St. Joseph, the silent

⁴⁶ Pope Benedict XVI. *General Audience: John, the Theologian*. 9 August, 2006.

⁴⁷ *Aparecida*, 273.

⁴⁸ *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 229.

⁴⁹ *Aparecida*, 273.

⁵⁰ *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 219.

teacher, fascinates, attracts, and teaches, not with words but as the shining testimony of his virtues and his firm simplicity."⁵¹

- St. John the Baptist, whom "Jesus praised... by attributing to him the glorious phrase "of all children born to women, there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7, 28)."⁵²

The Litanies of the Saints, sacred images, authentic relics and processions are some of the important elements in the veneration of the saints and the blessed.

Conclusion:

The lay faithful are called to holiness as perfection of love, living in the world as men and women of the Church and living as men and women of the world in the heart of the Church. Saintliness is the goal, and at the same time, the most beautiful and exciting reality of Christian life. Beyond all false mysticism, true holiness consists of a habitual union with God in the ordinary circumstance of life by means of participating in a life of grace and the generous and faithful carrying out of God's will. Since His will is summarized on the precept of love, to be saintly is to live in love and for love.

Summary:

- "The Church, which at its outset was saved and protected by the ministry of Angels, and which constantly experiences their 'mysterious and powerful assistance', venerates these heavenly spirits and has recourse to their prompt intercession. (*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 215)
- "The Apostles were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends. Their journey with Jesus was not only a physical journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, but an interior journey during which they learned faith in Jesus Christ" (Pope Benedict XVI. *General Audience: John, the Theologian. Op. cit.*).
- The lay faithful are called to holiness as perfection of love, living in the world as men and women of the Church and living as men and women of the world in the heart of the Church.

⁵¹ *Aparecida*, 274.

⁵² *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy - Principles and Guidelines*, 224.

Points to Remember:

- Devotion to the Holy Angels gives rise to a certain form of the Christian life (*Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 216.).
- "Paul, the tireless evangelizer, has shown them the path of missionary boldness and the will of approaching each cultural reality with the Good News of salvation. (*Aparecida Concluding Document*, 273).
- The Litanies of the Saints, sacred images, authentic relics and processions are some of the important elements in the veneration of the saints and the blessed.

Additional Reading:

Pope Benedict XVI. *Series of Catecheses on the Saints. General Audiences* concluding 13 April 2011.

Pope Benedict XVI. *The Apostles. Our Sunday Visitor*: 2007

Bibliography:

DeMoss, Nancy Leigh: *Holiness: The Heart God Purifies* (Revive our Heart Series). Moody Publishers, Chicago. 1 August, 2005.

Self-Check:

1. What are two elements in the devotion to angels?

- a) devout gratitude to God for having placed these heavenly spirits of great sanctity and dignity at the service of man;
- b) an attitude of devotion deriving from the knowledge of living constantly in the presence of the Holy Angels of God

2. Why are the Apostles as guides to us?

Because they were Jesus' travelling companions, Jesus' friends, who learned faith on a journey that was far from easy, they are also guides for us, who help us to know Jesus Christ, to love him and to have faith in him.

3. What special mission did John, Paul and Peter have in the history of salvation?

Jesus entrusted the apostle Peter with the mission of confirming the faith of his brothers. Paul has shown us the path of missionary boldness. John has revealed to us the transforming power of the new commandment and the fecundity of remaining in his love (*cf. Aparecida Concluding Document, 273*).

4. What is the most important thing we should know from the lives of the saints?

We must not stop and focus so much on the legendary elements associated with their existence, but instead on the value of their Christian personality, in the efficacy of their witness to the Gospel, in the personal charisma with which they enriched the life of the Church.

5. What are some of St. Joseph's virtues we should imitate?

A solicitous and silent obedience, a love and faithful observance of the Law, sincere piety, fortitude in trials, virginal love for Mary.

6. What are some of St. John the Baptist's virtues we should imitate?

Humbleness, self-control, zeal.

7. What are some important elements in the veneration of the saints?

The Litanies of the Saints, sacred images, authentic relics and processions.

8. What are the lay faithful who live in this world called to?

The lay faithful are called to holiness as perfection of love, living in the world as men and women of the Church and living as men and women of the world in the heart of the Church.

9. Explain what it means to be a saint.

To live in and for love.

10. What does holiness consist of?

Holiness does not consist of doing extraordinary things, but involves instead living faithfully, serenely and simply the ordinary doings of daily life.

Session 11:

The Gospel of Life

Doctrinal Goal:

Upon completion of this session, students will appreciate the sacred value of life.

Experiential Goal:

After completing this session, students will be moved to become ardent defenders of life.

Lesson Plan:

- I Marriage as a faithful and fecund alliance between man and woman**
- II The sacredness of human life**
- III Participating in family life as a community of love**

Lead-In Question:

Ask the students: "What was Pope St. John Paul II referring to when he talked of the "culture of death"?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students to get into small discussion groups. The groups should submit solutions to three actions which attempt against life, such as abortion, or euthanasia.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life?' (*Mk* 8:36) contain an enlightening and stirring statement about the individual: value comes not from what a person 'has' even if the person possessed the whole world!-as much as from what a person 'is'... The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a "child in the Son" and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God." ⁵³

I Marriage as a faithful and fecund alliance between man and woman

The matrimonial covenant is a vocation and a mission which comes from God Himself. God, having created man and woman in His own image and likeness, having called them into existence out of love and in love, has at the same time, called them into mutual love, to give to each other as partners. This is accomplished through sanctification in a union of faithful and fecund love, culminating with the fullness of passing on a Christian education to their offspring.⁵⁴ Jesus Christ, with his absolutely faithful love, gives Christian husbands and wives the strength necessary for their union, faithfulness and perseverance. This requires the cultivation of a noble love, mutually sustained, an altruistic love: a love that is made manifest in mutual aid and generous donation of self. Dialogue and forgiveness have recurring roles throughout their shared life. By enjoying gratifying moments together, and sharing times of deep and serene dialogue, the couple can renew their love for one another.

In married life, carnal relations are the sign and expression of the communion between two people. Demonstrations of tenderness and body language are based on the marriage alliance and are given as a form of deep communion of soul, psychology and body.

⁵³ Pope St. John Paul II. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 37. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 30 Dec, 1988).

⁵⁴ cf. Pope Benedict XVI. *Speech to Charity Council about Christian Vision of Human Person*. Vatican City, 21 January, 2013. <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pontiff-explains-church-s-yes-to-marriage-of-man-woman>

In the transmission of human life and in the education of their offspring, married couples see themselves as collaborators and interpreters for God the Creator's love: the human being is a gift from God welcomed in the loving intimacy of marriage between a man and a woman.

II The sacredness of human life

Every life is singular and unrepeatable, and every single human life has the same possible value. If one life were unimportant, then no life would be important. "[H]uman life, from its conception to natural death belongs to God and not to the human being... [He is the one who] gives the human being that sacred character and personal dignity which ... inspires... profound respect"⁵⁵ No matter the person's condition, be it one of health or sickness, physical integrity or disability, richness or misery, the person possesses the inviolable dignity of existence.

The effective recognition of the personal dignity of every human being demands we respect, defend and promote the rights of the human person: these are natural, universal and inviolable rights. Nobody, no individual, no group, no authority, no state can modify those rights, and much less eliminate them because these rights come from God Himself.

III Participating in family life as a community of love

In virtue of the mutual and total donation of self which is the nature of conjugal love, and which is the very substrate of the family, the relationships which are established amongst the other members of the family are inspired in love and are characterized by tenderness and mutual support. Far from closing the family in on itself, this authentic love educates all of the members of the family in solidarity and opens the family to society. The small domestic family and the larger human family are not in opposition to each other, but instead share an intimate and original relationship.

Family members, each according to his or her circumstances, are called to give the best of themselves to the entire family: one for all and all for one.

The family is a dynamic, open community of births and deaths, success and failure, extensions and reductions - all called to continue investing in the group without closing in on themselves.

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI. *Speech to the Brazilian Bishops on their Ad Limina Visit*, 14 November 2009.

Conclusion:

"We proclaim that all human beings exist purely and simply by the love of God who created them, and by the love of God who preserves them at every moment. The creation of man and woman in his image and likeness is a divine event of life, and its source is the faithful love of the Lord. Hence, only the Lord is author and master of life, and human beings, his living image, are always sacred, from their conception, at all stages of existence, until their natural death, and after death. The Christian view of human beings makes apparent their value, which transcends the entire universe: "God has shown us unsurpassably how he loves all human beings, and thereby confers infinite dignity on them." (*Aparecida Concluding Document*, 388.)

Summary:

- The matrimonial covenant is a vocation and a mission which comes from God Himself. God, having created man and woman in His own image and likeness, having called them into existence out of love and in love, has at the same time, called them into mutual love, to give to each other as partners.
- "[H]uman life, from its conception to natural death belongs to God and not to the human being... [He is the one who] gives the human being that sacred character and personal dignity which ... inspires... profound respect" (Benedict XVI. *Speech to the Brazilian Bishops on their Ad Limina Visit. Op. cit.*).
- Far from closing the family in on itself, this authentic love educates all of the members of the family in solidarity and opens the family to society.

Points to Remember:

- When we consider the origin and final destination a person's dignity, it shines with its full brightness.
- The effective recognition of the personal dignity of every human being demands respect.
- We proclaim that every human being exists purely and simply because the love of God brought him or her into being.

Additional Reading:

Pope St. John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae: on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*, 2. 25 March, 1995.

Bibliography:

John F. Kippley. *Marriage is For Keeps: Foundations for Christian Marriage*. The Couple to Couple League, April, 1995.

Pope St. John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae: on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*. (Citta Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 25 March, 1995).

Self-Check:

1. What is the origin of the human person's dignity?

Our being made by God in his image and likeness, and redeemed by Christ's most precious blood.

2. What is the source of the conjugal mission and vocation?

They come from God Himself. God, having created man and woman in his image and likeness, having called them into existence out of love and in love, has at the same time, called them into mutual love, to give to each other as partners.

3. Give an example of an eminent form of giving, which confirms the dignity of the other person.

Forgiveness is an eminent form of self-giving. It recognizes the dignity of the other person, recognizing him or her for who he or she is, beyond what they he or she may have done.

4. In marriage, what are carnal relations a sign of?

They are the sign and the expression of the communion between persons. The demonstrations of tenderness and body language are based on the marriage alliance and are given as one of the deepest forms of communion of body, mind and soul.

5. What does the married couple become when they transmit human life?

They become the collaborators and interpreters of God the Creator's love.

6. How is it that every life is singular and unique?

"[H]uman life, from its conception to natural death belongs to God and not to the human being... [He is the one who] gives the human being that sacred character and personal dignity which ... inspires... profound respect" (Benedict XVI. *Speech to the Brazilian Bishops on their Ad Limina Visit*, 14 November 2009).

7. What does the effective recognition of the human person demand?

It requires respect, the defense and promotion of the rights of the human person, since these are natural, universal, inviolable rights.

8. To what is each member of the family called?

To give the best of him or herself to the whole family: all for one, and one for all.

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9. Why do we say that the family is a dynamic community?

The family is dynamic and open because to the family come births deaths, the family rejoices with success and grieves its failures, there are extensions to the family and reductions; all are called to continue to invest in the group, without closing in on themselves.

10. What sign do the Sacred Scriptures and traditional Church practice see in having large families?

Big families are seen as a sign of divine blessing and parents' generosity.

Session 12:

Culture is the Motor that Gives Impulse to History

Doctrinal Goal:

With this session students will learn that cultures contribute both good and bad elements, and will learn a model for the correct attitude to be held in facing these.

Experiential Goal:

Students will identify various elements contributed by their culture and opt for those which correspond to an authentic Christian.

Lesson Plan:

- I Distinguishing between the good and bad elements in our culture**
- II Maintaining an attitude of faith and fidelity to Christ and the Church**
- III By knowing our faith we can enter into a dialogue with the world**

Lead-In Question:

Have students comment on what positive or negative elements current world culture contributes to our lives.

Warm-Up Activity:

Have students get into small teams. They should discuss three negative elements of their culture and present proposals for their solution.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"As Jesus Christ said in His prayer for His apostles: "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil. They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world." Church makes this prayer its own. The fact that we are distinct from the world does not mean that we are entirely separated from it. Nor does it mean that we are indifferent to it, afraid of it, or contemptuous of it.

"When the Church distinguishes itself from humanity, it does so not in order to oppose it, but to come closer to it...The Church does the same thing. It does not regard God's mercy as an exclusive privilege, nor does the greatness of the privilege it enjoys make it feel unconcerned for those who do not share it. On the contrary, it finds in its own salvation an argument for showing more concern and more love for those who live close at hand, or to whom it can go in its endeavor to make all alike share the blessing of salvation."⁵⁶

I Distinguishing between the good and bad elements in our culture

The faithful Christian is open to all that is true, honorable, just, and pure in culture, just as Saint Paul expressed in his *Letter to the Philippians* (4:8) referring to Greek culture. We hold onto and appreciate what is lovely, but we must speak out against what is absent of God, or what negates Him, or what attempts to obfuscate the value of the person and religion. When a culture attempts to deny the religious dimension of a person or a people, that very culture deteriorates, sometimes to the point of disappearing.

The love of truth, no matter who holds it, is a principle that governs the behavior of the faithful Christian. Today the gravest disease of our culture is precisely the lack of truth: success, result, pragmatism have removed the primacy of the truth at all levels. The renouncement of truth and the escape to group conformity are not the way to grow and develop as people: such a community of persons is merely built on sand.

'Walk as children of light ... and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness' (*Eph* 5:8, 10-11). In our present social context, marked by a

⁵⁶ Pope Paul VI. *Encyclical on the Church: Ecclesiam Suam*, 62, 63. 6 August, 1964.

dramatic struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death", there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs." ⁵⁷

II Maintaining an attitude of faith and fidelity to Christ and the Church

We can remain faithful to Christ and the Church by keeping our faith firmly rooted and by looking at the signs of the times as through God's eyes.

God has enabled the Christian people, the faithful and their pastors, to do this by imbuing them with a 'supernatural sense of faith', that is to say a supernatural instinct - initiated and maintained by the Holy Spirit - for the detection, judgment and discernment of what comes from God and of what are solely human traditions, such as cultures, and the capacity to firmly adhere to a life of faith.

"The light of the Spirit, while sharpening our intelligence for things divine, also gives us a sharper, more penetrating vision of that which is human. Thanks to this light we can better see the numerous signs from God which are written in Creation. We can then discover the supernatural dimension of the events in human history. We can even prophetically decipher the present and the future: the signs of the times, the signs of God in our cultures!" ⁵⁸

III By knowing our faith we can enter into a dialogue with the world

This supernatural sense of faith, as a gift from God, requires knowledge of the doctrine of our faith. It is therefore imperative to dedicate our best efforts to garnering knowledge of our faith, in order that we may live it with joy and spontaneity.

"With all of the means which the people have at their disposal to know, think and cultivate themselves, to remain ignorant of their religion, in other words to not know what you should most know, is a serious fault: it is a sort of betrayal of our Christian vocation. So, you will hear your parish priest and other pastors saying over and over again, 'Instruction, instruction!'"⁵⁹ The

⁵⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II. *Encyclical letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life: Evangelium vitae*, 95. (Citta Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 25 March, 1995).

⁵⁸ Pope St. John Paul II. *Regina Caeli*, 2. 16 April 1989)

⁵⁹ Pope Paul VI. *Homily on the Fifth Sunday of Lent* in the parish of the Immaculate (Tiburtino-Rome), 27 March, 1966.

younger generations - whose attitudes are distinct from traditional spirits, although far from being closed to spiritual values - must be presented with Christ's word in all of its vim and vigor.

A deep knowledge and living of our faith qualifies us for dialogue with the world, the preeminent means for sharing our faith and our deepest convictions. We must:

- Work to construct bridges between reason and faith;
- Encourage a frank and cordial dialogue between science and faith;
- Establish fluid and fruitful relationships between culture and the Christian faith.

Essentially, dialogue must consist of the search for what is true, good, just and lovely for all men, all groups, and all societies. This requires, above all, openness and welcoming; each party should present their point of view, but also carefully listen to the other, with their problems, rights and injustices, and the reasonable solutions they propose. Many a time we need to inject a good dosage of right practice and prudence

Conclusion:

Our particular contribution to culture is the charity we live: "see how they love one another" (*cf Tertulian's Apology*, Chapter XXXIV). A society that is decent and just, worthy of mankind can have nothing other than love as its basic foundation: love, the great commandment reached and loved by Jesus Christ. Only love leads to personal and social perfection, and only love changes societies and orients them towards true peace. This is why the Christian project for cultures and human societies can be called the "civilization of love".

Summary:

- The love of truth, no matter who holds it, is a principle that governs the behavior of the faithful Christian.
- "The light of the Spirit, while sharpening our intelligence for things divine, also gives us a sharper, more penetrating vision of that which is human." (Pope St. John Paul II. *Regina Caeli*, 2. *Op. cit.*)
- It is, therefore, imperative to dedicate our best efforts to garnering knowledge of our faith, in order that we may live it with joy and spontaneity.

Points to Remember:

- "Walk as children of light ... and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness" (*Eph 5:8, 10-11*).
- The faithful Christian is open to all that is true, honorable, just, and pure in culture.
- A deep knowledge and living of our faith qualifies us for dialogue with the world.

Supplementary reading:

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. *Culture and Truth: Some Reflections on the Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio*. 13 February 1999.

Bibliography:

Pope St. John Paul II. *Encyclical Letter on Faith and Reason: Fides et Ratio*. 14 September, 1998.

Hans Urs von Balthasar. *A Short Primer for Unsettled Laymen*. Ignatius Press, 1987.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*. Ignatius Press: May, 2013.

Self-Check:

1. What happens when a culture attempts to deny the religious dimension of the person or of a people?

The culture itself disintegrates, and may even disappear.

2. What is the guiding principle of the Christian?

The love of truth, no matter who happens to hold it.

3. According to Pope St. John Paul II, what must be the Christian's stance before the culture of death and the culture of life?

"In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death", there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs." (*Evangelium Vitae*, 95. *Op. cit.*)

4. Why has God given us a supernatural sense of faith?

So as to be able to detect, judge, discern what comes from God, and what simply arises from human's traditions, such as cultures.

5. What is Pope Paul VI's thought on the formation or instruction of the lay faithful?

We simply cannot afford to be ignorant of our religion: to remain so is a serious fault, as it betrays our Christian vocation.

6. A profound intellectual and experiential knowledge of faith - what does this prepare us for?

For dialogue with the world, a wonderful means of sharing our faith and deepest convictions.

7. What does the dialogue between faith and reason basically consist of?

It is a search for that which is true, good, just and lovely for all mankind, for every group and society.

8. As Christians, what is our greatest contribution to culture?

It is the charity which we live: "see how they love one another". A society that is decent and just, worthy of mankind can have nothing other than love as its basic foundation: love, the great commandment reached and loved by Jesus Christ.

Session 13:

The Christian Meaning of Human Work

Doctrinal Goal:

After completing this session, students will realize that work is a path to saintliness: it helps to spiritually mature both man and woman, making them more responsible for themselves and for others.

Experiential Goal:

After finishing this session, students will be more conscientious with their work, aware that a job well done can lead them to God.

Lesson Plan:

- I Work perfects us as human beings**
- II Work maintains our families**
- III Work leads the progress of societies and cares for creation**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students if they work and what they do.

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students why it is that when we don't work we feel something is missing.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the Gospel. Along with the humanity of the Son of God, work too has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way. At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption. In the human growth of Jesus 'in wisdom, age and grace,' the virtue of industriousness played a notable role, since 'work is a human good' which 'transforms nature' and makes man 'in a sense, more human.'" ⁶⁰

I Work perfects us as human beings

Humans, through our work, transform things, and above all, perfect ourselves as people, becoming more human, by purifying ourselves of our imperfections and developing our personal potential. The lay faithful seek to do their work with professional competence and human honesty as they see this as a way towards their saintliness. "Work exists... for resurrection."⁶¹

Work is to be done with our gaze fixed firmly on God, seeing in our toil a contribution to His creative work, an act of worship and thanksgiving. We can, too, offer our work to God as the matter of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: the fruit of our work is symbolically, the bread and the wine which we offer.

II Work provides the means needed to maintain our families

"The family finds in work the support it needs for its development and union; work is the central factor conditioning and qualifying life, giving it rhythm and serving as an element of cohesion and stability.

"Thus, work is within the realm of what mankind loves, of that for which he lives, in other words, it belongs to the realm of love...Work must not disunite the family, but instead must

⁶⁰ Pope St. John Paul II. *Apostolic Exhortation on the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church: Redemptoris Custos*, 22, 23. (Citta Vaticana: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 15 August, 1989).

⁶¹ Ciprian Kamil Norwid, cited by John Paul II in his *Homily for the Holy Mass for the Workers from Upper Silesia and Zagłębie, Czestochowa*, 6 June 1979.

assist and strengthen it." ⁶² The love of spouse and children, which inspires and give impulse to most human beings in their work, confers on our labor a greater dignity, making it easier and more pleasant to undertake, even when it is extremely tiring.

In modern society, where the right of men and women to paid work is a governing principle, we must recognize and appreciate the work - which is not immediately lucrative - of many men and women who dedicate themselves to the needs of their home and family.

Work, in its social dimension, is a service for the good of all and is called to be in harmony with the particular good of each individual. The balance between family and work, in the case of both men and women, is achieved through a sincere reflection on the needs of all members of the family.

III Work leads the progress of societies and cares for creation

Work seeks to improve our quality of life, helping humanity reach, by these means, the higher goals to which God calls us. Current progress makes this truth all the more evident: work has as its object improvements on a universal scale. Although, certainly, much remains to be done to adjust work so it supports these goals so cherished by the Creator Himself.

The more mankind gains power over nature, the greater becomes our individual and collective responsibility. Respect for natural creation calls all of us to sustainable ecology, the patrimony of all of our children.

Mankind imitates God, in our work and in our rest, since God Himself has wished to present His act of Creation in the form of work and rest. In the world in which we live, rest is a vital necessity so that we can regain our strength of body and spirit. This is especially true for those who live in the city, where the often frantic living conditions leave little room for silence, reflection and relaxed contact with nature. Holidays are also days when more time can be spent in prayer, reading and meditation on the deep meanings of life, in the serene context of one's own family and loved ones.

Conclusion:

Work is a pathway towards saintliness since it helps us mature spiritually, making us more responsible for ourselves and for others. Prayer lends wings to our work, purifies our intentions and defends it from dishonest ambitions. Work permits us to discover, after the fatigue, the

⁶² Pope St. John Paul II. *Angelus*, 2. 25 October 1981.

invigorating strength of the encounter with God, in Whom mankind finds all of his true and great stature: *ora et labora* - pray and labor.

Summary:

- The lay faithful seek to do their work with professional competence and human honesty as they see this as a way towards their saintliness.
- "The family finds in work the support it needs for its development and union; work is the central factor conditioning and qualifying life, giving it rhythm and serving as an element of cohesion and stability." (Pope St. John Paul II. *Angelus. Op. cit.*)
- Mankind imitates God, in our work and in our rest, since God Himself has wished to present His act of Creation in the form of work and rest.

Points to Remember:

- "Human work, and especially manual labor, receive special prominence in the Gospel." (Pope St. John Paul II. *Redemptoris Custos. Op. cit.*)
- "Work must not disunite the family, but instead must assist and strengthen it." (Pope St. John Paul II. *Angelus. Op. cit.*)
- Respect for natural creation calls all of us to sustainable ecology, the patrimony of all of our children.

Additional Reading:

Pope St. John Paul II. *Encyclical Letter on Human Work: Laborem exercens*, 9. 14 September 1981.

Bibliography:

Randy Hain. *The Catholic Briefcase: Tools for Integrating Faith and Work*. Liguori Publications, November, 2011.

Self-Check:

1. What meaning does the Gospel attribute to work?

Human work receives special prominence in the Gospel. Work has been taken up in the mystery of the Incarnation, and has also been redeemed in a special way. (*cf.* Pope St. John Paul II. *Redemptoris Custos*, 22, 23.)

2. How does work perfect us as human beings?

Humans, through our work, perfect ourselves as people, becoming more human, by purifying ourselves of our imperfections and developing our personal potential.

3. Can work become prayer?

Yes. Work is to be done with our gaze fixed firmly on God, seeing in our toil a contribution to His creative work, an act of worship and thanksgiving.

4. What is the relationship between work and family?

"The family finds in work the support it needs for its development and union; work is the central factor conditioning and qualifying life, giving it rhythm and serving as an element of cohesion and stability." (Pope St. John Paul II. *Angelus*, 2. 25 October 1981)

5. What is the social dimension of work?

Work, in its social dimension, is a service for the good of all and is called to be in harmony with the particular good of each individual.

6. How is a balance between family and work achieved?

Through a sincere reflection on the needs of each member of the family.

7. In what sense does work lead to holiness?

Work is a pathway towards saintliness since it helps us mature spiritually, making us more responsible for ourselves and for others.

8. What is the connection between prayer and work?

Prayer lends wings to our work, purifies our intentions and defends it from dishonest ambitions. Work permits us to discover, after the fatigue, the invigorating strength of the encounter with God.

Session 14:

Politics as the Demanding Expression of a Life of Charity

Doctrinal Goal:

After completing this session, students will understand that the Christian who is involved in politics must honestly seek the good of all.

Experiential Goal:

Upon completion of this topic, the student will positively view the work of those lay faithful who participate as authentic Christians in political service.

Lesson Plan:

- I Service to others**
- II Service performed in sync with one's own conscience**
- III Political participation means being responsible for all**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students: "What thought comes to your mind when you hear the word 'politics'?" Discuss their answers.

Warm-Up Activity:

Ask students: "Is it possible for a Christian to participate in politics - and still act as a Christian? What is your opinion?" Discuss.

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

Faced with people's desire for power, their vanity and pride as they aim to be the first, Jesus decides to gather the twelve disciples around Him and begins a stupendous lesson with the words, and in the style of the prophets, with a symbolic gesture. His words are categorical: the first in the Kingdom of God must be the last in the kingdom of men and the servant of all. Jesus commented on this definition of the true disciple and of Himself many a time: "Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (*Mk 10:42-45*)

I Service to others

The faithful Christian who acts in politics - and who wishes to act 'as a Christian' must work to seek the good of each and every person, especially society's most disadvantaged members, taking care to overcome the temptation of serving self-interest and without recurring to illicit means.

Although more today than ever assuming the responsibilities of authority may seem to us to be particularly burdensome, requiring the humility of making oneself the servant of others, it is nevertheless necessary to remember the solemn words which the Lord Jesus directs to those who are tempted to don the vestments of the authority of worldly prestige: "But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (*Mt 20:26-28*)

In the exercise of political power this spirit of service is fundamental, and together with competence and efficiency, is the only thing capable of making the activity of politicians 'transparent' or 'clean', which is exactly what people demand.

In order to serve society, the Christian politician must perform his or her daily tasks with honesty in the community's administration, with professionalism, with diligence in solving the problems that affect the citizens, and with openness to the needs of all the members of the community.

II Service performed in sync with one's own conscience

Coherence in the living of our Christian lifestyle must also extend to our political life. A Christian must live and breathe as a Christian - always, at all levels, no hesitation, no concessions, in all of our actions, not just in name.

The Christian politician cannot put his conscience to one side. The Christian's conscience has been and always will be shaped by the Christian faith.

Living and acting politically in accordance with our conscience does not imply settling down comfortably in positions far removed from any political commitment, or adopting a sort of confessionism, but instead must be the expression of Christian contributions so that, through politics, a social order that is more just and coherent with human dignity may be established.

Lay people who give witness to their faith in the public arena often experience difficulties and being misunderstood. Yet this is part of the road to saintliness which Jesus Christ proposes when He invites us to follow Him.

In practicing politics, as viewed in its most noble and authentic sense as the administration of the public good, the lay faithful can find an arduous, but privileged, road towards their own sanctification.

III Political participation means being responsible for all

"Justice must indeed be the fundamental concern of political leaders: a justice which is not content to apportion to each his own, but one which aims at creating conditions of *equal opportunity* among citizens, and therefore favoring those who, for reasons of social status or education or health, risk being left behind or relegated to the lowest places in society, without possibility of deliverance."⁶³ We must all feel responsible for all. "The manner and means for achieving a public life which has true human development as its goal is solidarity... [Solidarity] is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual."⁶⁴ The principle of subsidiarity also equips members of society (individuals, families, organizations) with the opportunity to autonomously solve their problems, focusing political action on questions of majority interest. "This concerns the active

⁶³ Pope St. John Paul II. Jubilee of Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and Politicians. *Jubilee Address*, Saturday, 4 November 2000.

⁶⁴ Pope John Paul II. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World: Christifideles laici*, 42. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 30 December, 1988).

and responsible participation of all in public life, from individual citizens to various groups, from labor unions to political parties. All of us, each and everyone, are the goal of public life as well as its leading participants." ⁶⁵

Conclusion:

"For the lay faithful, political involvement is a worthy and demanding expression of the Christian commitment of service to others."⁶⁶ "Politics is one of the most noble of activities in the service of others because it expresses, in a concrete manner, an effective commitment for the good of the entire community"⁶⁷: "The Church praises and esteems the work of those who for the good of men devote themselves to the service of the state and take on the burdens of this office." ⁶⁸ "A Christian politician has more of an obligation to be saintly than does a simple layperson." ⁶⁹

Summary:

- The faithful Christian who acts in politics - and who wishes to act 'as a Christian' must work to seek the good of each and every person, especially society's most disadvantaged members.
- Coherence in the living of our Christian lifestyle must also extend to our political life. A Christian must live and breathe as a Christian - always, at all levels, no hesitation, no concessions, in all of our actions not just in name.
- We must all feel responsible for all. "The manner and means for achieving a public life which has true human development as its goal is solidarity" (*Christifideles laici*, 42).

⁶⁵ *Christifidelis laici*, 42.

⁶⁶ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 565. Reprint. (Citta Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 2005).

⁶⁷ Message from the Bishops of the State of Mexico Prior to the 5 July 2009 Elections. 11 May 2009.

⁶⁸ Pope Paul VI. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et spes*, 75. (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 7 December, 1965).

⁶⁹ Domenico Del Río: *Floreillas del Papa Wojtyla*. San Pablo, 1st ed., 2006.

Points to Remember:

- When exercising political power this spirit of service is fundamental.
- The Christian politician cannot put his or her conscience to one side: conscience has been and always will be shaped by the Christian faith.
- "For the lay faithful, political involvement is a worthy and demanding expression of the Christian commitment of service to others."⁷⁰

Additional Reading:

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. (Citta Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004).

Bibliography:

Marc D. Guerra. *Christians as Political Animals: Taking the Measure of Modernity and Modern Democracy*. ISI Books: June, 2010.

⁷⁰ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 565

Self-Check:

1. How should a Christian who wishes to participate in politics behave?

The faithful Christian who acts in politics must seek to work for the good of each and every person, especially society's most disadvantaged members.

2. What should Christian politicians be mindful of when they enter into public service?

In order to serve society, the Christian politician must perform his or her daily tasks with honesty in the community's administration, with professionalism, with diligence in solving the problems that affect the citizens, and with openness to the needs of all the members of the community.

3. What is basic to the exercise of political power?

In the exercise of political power a spirit of service is fundamental, and together with competence and efficiency, is the only thing capable of making the activity of politicians 'transparent' or 'clean', which is exactly what people demand.

4. How should Christian politicians make decision?

They must live and act politically in accordance with their conscience: this does not imply settling down comfortably in positions far removed from any political commitment, or adopting a sort of confessionism, but instead must be the expression of Christian contributions so that, through politics, a social order that is more just and coherent with human dignity may be established.

5. The lay faithful experience difficulties and being misunderstood when they give Christian witness in the public arena. What is the fate of these difficulties and sensation of not being understood?

They are a part of the road to saintliness which Jesus Christ proposes when He invites us to follow Him.

6. What are the sources of renewal which the Christian in politics must frequent in order to coherently live service to the common good.

Prayer, daily Communion and reading of the Gospel, love and devotion for the Virgin Mary.

7. What does authentic solidarity consist of?

It is the firm and perseverant determination to persist in favor of the common good, that is to say, for the good of all.

8. What is the principle of subsidiarity?

It is the principle which equips members of society (individuals, families, organizations) with the chance to independently solve their problems, permitting political action to focus on questions of majority interest.

9. What is the relationship between the lay faithful and politics?

For the lay faithful, political involvement is a worthy and demanding expression of the Christian commitment of service to others.

10. What is needed to be a Christian politician?

It requires a higher degree of saintliness than that required of a simple believer. To be a Christian, you must be a saint. To be a Christian politician, you must be more of a saint. (Domenico Del Río. *Floreillas del Papa Wojtyla. Op. cit.*)

Session 15:

Catholic Identity

Doctrinal Goal:

Having accomplished this session, students will have a deeper grasp of the importance of knowing oneself to be Catholic in a superficial and materialistic world.

Experiential Goal:

Students will feel proud to belong to a family created by God, the Church, to shed light on the darkness in the world.

Lesson Plan:

- I The Catholic's very own identity**
- II To be lived in unity**
- III With a profound sense of belonging to the Church**

Lead-In Question:

Ask students: "What identifies us as citizens of the country where we live?"

Warm-Up Activity:

Discuss with the students: "What identifies us as authentic Catholics?"

Doctrinal Body

Introduction:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?...You are the light of the world... Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father." (*Mt 5: 13-16*)

"There is a generalized lack of integral faith education which has led some to associate Christian life with the fulfillment of certain rites, in particular with reference to Sunday Mass; to accept certain secularist practices which unconsciously identify anything religious with private worship; and to an ever increasing difficulty in understanding the social dimension of faith. Thus, the divorce between faith and life has become more entrenched, giving rise to a difficult situation which runs the gamut from an inability to understand and respond in the light of faith to the diverse realities and proposals which appear in contemporary society, to the extreme of abandoning the faith even when there is a heartfelt wish to find a solution to diverse spiritual and moral problems."⁷¹

I The Catholic's very own identity

"There is a Catholic way of being that is foreign to faith and contrary to the truth. It is a way of being that thinks about and proposes adaptations to the teachings of the Church according to one's own wishes, to the desires of the world...

"This is the way many self-declared Catholics think, when, in reality they are moving further and further away from the faith of the Church." They may call themselves Catholics, "but they oppose Catholic sexual doctrine...they defend the lawfulness of using contraceptives, think nothing of premarital sex, accept divorce,..." gently "condemn abortion...[and] consider words such as 'cross', 'abnegation', 'renunciation of self' to be negative; they prefer a more 'positive and optimistic' morality, renouncing ideas which have been 'revoked' (to speak of sin is incomprehensible they say) and who welcome new psychological and spiritual proposals which come from the East." They feel that ideas change with the times, "and that it is worthwhile adapting to new fashions of thought in a world which lives subject to the discoveries of Darwin, Freud and the new prophets. "These are Catholics who interpret the sacraments in sociological

⁷¹ Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops: *From the Encounter with Jesus Christ to Solidarity with All*, 109. *Pastoral Letter*, 25 March, 2000.

key, who reject the idea of Transubstantiation, who request that women be admitted into the priesthood", and think it would just be better if priests married.

"As authentic Christians, we must overcome this mentality which does so much harm to the Church and, often imperceptibly, to ourselves; because there is no other Church than the one Christ founded on the Rock of Peter and the Apostles; there is no faith outside of the loving acceptance of Scripture and Tradition as presented to us by the Pope and the bishops who live united amongst themselves and with the Pope...There are not a thousand 'Catholic' doctrines made up according to everybody's tastes, there is only one Gospel of Jesus Christ and one single Church built and guided by the hand of Peter and his successors." ⁷²

II To be lived in unity

There is an increasing tendency to lead parallel, double, fragmented, piecemeal lives in which family, education, work, entertainment, politics and religion occupy separate compartments that barely communicate amongst themselves. On the one hand, people have a so-called spiritual life, with its values and requirements; and, on the other hand, a distinct family life, work life, social life, political commitment and culture.

The faith that has been passed on is in danger of being reduced to interludes and fragments of one's existence. People fall victim of conventionalism - religion is scaled down to brief episodes, and sporadic, ritualistic, devotional gestures; Christian piety is threatened with subjectivism, having lost its roots in the sacramental and magisterial objectivity of the Church; and they are duped by moralism - faith is reduced to a series of moral rules and behaviors. In all of these cases, Catholic faith is not conceived of or experienced as the fruit of a surprising and fascinating encounter with Christ, who embraces and converts the entire life of the baptized person.

The lay faithful must mature so as to achieve an organic synthesis of our life, all our life becoming one single unit, with harmony between our Christian faith and personal life, living as a disciple and missionary of the Church of Christ and as a citizen of a human society.

So that they may respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must consider the activities of daily life as an opportunity to unite with God and do His will, and as an occasion to serve others. This synthesis of faith and personal life will lead the authentic, faithful Christian to discover in a most natural manner the true synthesis between faith and reason, harmony between the supernatural

⁷² Cf. Fr. Fernando Pascual, L.C. *Católicos protestantizados* [= Protestantized Catholics]. Article in Spanish only on Conoze.com, 17 September, 2009. <http://www.conoze.com/doc.php?doc=2322>.

and the natural, between the Christian faith and the sciences, intelligence and heart, past and present: these are not alternatives, but rather complementary one to the other.

III With a profound sense of belonging to the Church

Modern life has us experience, and sometimes imposes on us, all sorts of engagements which stand out for their partisanship, superficiality, and not rarely, lack of ethics. The result is a rise in fragmentation, disintegration of personality and dramatic identity crises.

Modern man and woman, obliged to play many different roles which are often incompatible, ends up disoriented and no longer knows who he is, and abandons himself to living a solitary life of faith alone, with no community to sustain him.

One of the challenges which this post-modern era tosses at the Church is precisely this: how to cultivate in today's Christians a sense of belonging to the Church, indispensable premise in all processes of faith formation and education.

Conclusion:

"At the turn of this new millennium, we Christians must awaken from the lethargy of our superficiality, distraction and indifference. We must gaze upon the bravery, determination and passion of the confessors of the faith. We must recover our certainty of faith in Jesus Christ. Courage and confidence based on the Lord's promise: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age. (Mt 28: 20)" ⁷³

Summary:

- There is a Catholic way of being that is foreign to faith and contrary to the truth. It is a way of being that thinks about and proposes adaptations to the teachings of the Church according to one's own wishes, the world's mentality, humanity's progress, and the times.

⁷³ Pontifical Council for the Laity. National Congress of the Secular Apostolate - Witnesses of Hope. Madrid, 12-14 November, 2004. *Talk by H. Ex. Msgr. Stanislaw Rilko on European Laity, Situation and Perspective.* 14 November 2004.

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- So that they may respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must consider the activities of daily life as an opportunity to unite with God and do His will, and as an occasion to serve others.
- One of the challenges which this post-modern era tosses at the Church is precisely this: how to cultivate in today's Christians a sense of belonging to the Church, indispensable premise in all processes of faith formation and education.

Points to Remember:

- "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? " (Mt 5: 13)
- This synthesis of faith and personal life will lead the authentic, faithful Christian to discover in a most natural manner the true synthesis between faith and reason.
- We Christians must awaken from the lethargy of our superficiality, distraction and indifference.

Additional Reading:

Vatican Information Service: *Catholic Identity in Movements and Communities*. Friday, 31 October, 2008. Retrieved online at <http://visnews-en.blogspot.mx/2008/10/catholic-identity-in-movements-and.html>.

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Hahn, Scott and Kimberly: *Rome, Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism*. Ignatius Press. July, 1993.

Mark Shea, Diane Erikson, Paco Gavrilides. *Today's Disciples - The Essential Role of the Laity in the Church*. Catholic Faith Explorers Series. Ignatius Press: January, 2015.

Self-Check:

1. What is the way of thinking of a person who calls himself Catholic, but, in fact, is not?

His thoughts are foreign to faith and contrary to the truth. He thinks and proposes adaptations to the teachings of the Church according to his own desires and the current mentality of the world.

2. What does it mean when we refer to Catholics with parallel lives?

These are people who lead parallel, double, fragmented, piecemeal lives in which family, education, work, entertainment, politics and religion occupy separate compartments that barely communicate amongst themselves. This lifestyle is on the rise.

3. What should the faithful Catholic do in order to achieve an organic synthesis in his or her life?

The faithful layperson must mature so his entire life becomes one single unit, seeking harmony between his Christian faith and personal life, living as a disciple and missionary of the Church of Christ and as a citizen of a human society.

4. How should the lay faithful view our daily activities as we respond to our vocation?

As an opportunity to unite with God and do His will, and as an occasion to serve others.

5. What is one of the challenges which the post-modern era throws down before the Church?

How to cultivate in today's Christians a sense of belonging to the Church.

6. Faced with a defiant world, what attitude should Christians adopt?

Christians must awaken from the lethargy of our superficiality, distraction and indifference. We must gaze upon the bravery, determination and passion of the confessors of the faith. We must recover our certainty of faith in Jesus Christ.