

SESSION 5 / CHOOSING A LIFE IN CHRIST

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

Theme Just as our gardens need our regular care, our interior life needs on-going attention. Recollecting on our day each evening helps us to identify those times we were not Christ-like and prompt us to ask for his mercy and forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers us an opportunity to reset.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God, send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might perceive,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying the Apostles' Creed (page 48)

Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Luke 22:54-62 (5 mins)

A variety of short prayers before the reading of Scripture can be found on page 46.

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Meditate on the Word Luke 22:54-62 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

The Internet is awash with short videos depicting people who visit charity shops with the intention of finding furniture ripe for restoration. Time and again, someone's cast off: an old dresser, sideboard or family table with well worn, stained surfaces, dents and missing knob are brought home by those with a vision, a strategy to give it a new life. Cleaning, stripping and sanding are all part of the process to remove outdated trim and old finishing. In all of this, there is a lot of hard work and elbow grease with attention to the details – the joints, the corners and the legs. Sanding back to the wood provides the smooth surface for the new paint colour or updated detailing that will give the piece a new life - pride of place in someone's home for many years to come.

Unlike the inanimate old furniture that can't initiate either a deep cleaning or a transformation, we, however, only have to ask for a life in Christ. Parents ask, promising to raise their children in the Catholic faith, that their young children are baptised. This baptism is transformational because, cleansed of original sin, and given the gifts of faith, hope and love, the child experiences an initial conversion, and is given the graces needed for holiness and eternal life. Adults who are baptised and received into God's family similarly experience this joy of transformation, of conversion, this rising to new life in Christ. Bestowed with our special dignity as children of God, our journey, indeed our mission, begins.

Yet, the wound of Original Sin persists. The struggle of conversion persists. Somewhat like the furniture that over time loses its lustre and becomes scratched and dented, we are tempted to follow the path of our ancestors who frequently ignored the Old Testament prophets. Surrounded by tribes and nations who worshipped pagan gods, they chose to follow the crowd, to worship gods other than the one true God. We too are full of frailty and weakness. Creating our own 21st Century idols, we persist in putting our own desires for power, pleasure or possessions ahead of God.

Jesus came with a message not just for St Peter and other Jews living in the first century but for you and me when he proclaimed, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:15). Moreover, Jesus knew that we would struggle and, as he always does, he gave us what we need. From the moment of our Baptism, the Holy Spirit quietly guides us. In the silence of our hearts, we are prompted to examine our consciences to identify those times we were not Christ-like and to seek out the Sacraments, to ask for the grace of Christ's mercy and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that we may beneficially receive the graces bestowed in the Eucharist. Choosing to turn back to our loving Lord and asking, indeed begging, him to restore the light of Christ in our souls is what the Catechism terms our 'second conversion'. (CCC 1428)

St Ambrose says of the two conversions, that in the Church, 'there are water and tears; the waters of Baptism and tears of repentance' (CCC 1429).

The Catechism further explains that 'this second conversion is the uninterrupted task for the whole Church', each one of us is called to follow the path of penance and renewal. Therefore, it is fitting that our Lenten observance not only includes the Sacrament of Reconciliation but also concludes by gathering at the Easter Vigil to communally recommit to our Baptismal promises, to strive to live each day as a part of God's family, the Blessed Trinity, when we chose to live a life in Christ.

Responding to what has been heard

At the Easter Masses, we renew our Baptismal Promises as Jesus calls us to a conversion of heart (cf. Mark 1:15). As we near Easter look back on the Baptism promises you have reflected on each week during this course. If you need to, pray for the faith to be able to state your 'yes' to this truth this Easter. Pray too for those who have accompanied you these weeks.

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make the words of the Apostles' Creed resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 51. Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

- A: Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your merciful love;
according to your great compassion,
blot out my transgressions.
- B: Wash me completely from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
My transgressions, truly I know them;
my sin is always before me.
- A: Yes, you delight in sincerity of heart;
in secret you teach me wisdom.
Let me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones you have crushed may exult.
- B: Turn away your face from my sins,
and blot out all my guilt.
Create a pure heart for me, O God;
renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

From the Rite of Baptism: Candle

At our baptism a small candle is lit from the large Paschal candle, which was first lit at the Easter Vigil. It is a sign that Christ has risen and has brought light to our world darkened by sin.

The newly baptised are given a small candle as their baptismal candle, to go forth in faith, guided by Jesus. It is a reminder to imitate him daily, to progress along the way to holiness, to make visible Christ's presence on earth.

[Catechism references relating to this session 696, 1243]

From the Exsultet (the story of our salvation, sung at the Easter Vigil)

This is the night of which it is written: the night shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness. The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners, drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty. On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servants' hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.

About Visio Divina

'Our capacity for beauty leads us on a path of inner renewal as we move from the visible to the invisible mystery of God. The experience of beauty awakens our spiritual senses and prepares us for a new way of seeing the world – as "charged with the grandeur of God", in the words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.'



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the challenges experienced by disciples in maintaining a relationship of love?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

How might you deepen your knowledge and love of God in the coming days?

The Denial of St Peter (1622-24) by Gerard van Honthorst / Minneapolis Institute of Art