

St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Triangle Virginia

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On-Going Formation

▶ The Expected Messiah
The Conversion of St. Francis
The Dignity of the Human Person

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2024 On-Going Formation Theme

- Living in Friendship with Jesus and Francis: Manifesting Our Savior and Our Seraphic Father in Our Daily Lives



“Forgiveness is redemptive suffering.”





The Expected Messiah

The Mystery of Jesus Christ (pages 25-47)

Jesus of Nazareth is *the Christ, the Son of the Living God*

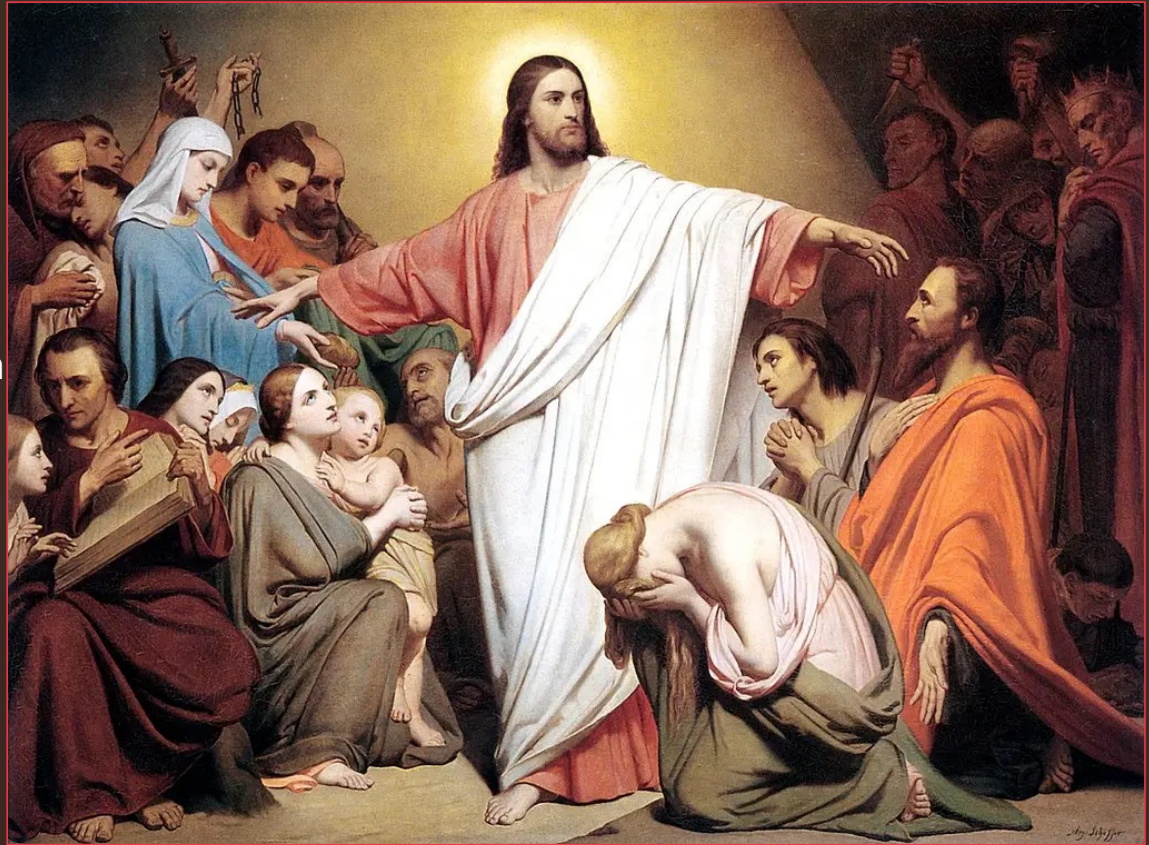
- Revelation concerning the mystery of Christ covers both his person and his work of salvation: the two are inseparable.
- Christ is, by his very nature, the mediator between God and man.
- Messianic truth includes not only the personal history of Jesus of Nazareth and the mystery of his identity but also the history of mankind as a whole, particularly its sinfulness and its need for salvation.
- "...it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear."



The Unbreakable Connection between Christology and Anthropology

St. John Paul II recognized this unbreakable connection when he said,

“How precious man must be in the eyes of the Creator, if he gained so great a Redeemer and if God gave his only Son, in order that man should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man’s worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say, the Good News. It is also called Christianity.”



The Unbreakable Connection between Christology and Anthropology

“God entered the history of humanity and, as a man, became an actor in that history, one of thousands of millions of human beings but at the same time unique! Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended man to have from his first beginning; He has granted that dimension definitively—in the way that is peculiar to Him alone, in keeping with his eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God—and He has granted it also with the bounty that enables us, in considering the errors of the human intellect, will, and heart, to repeat with amazement the words of the sacred Liturgy: ‘O happy fault...which gained us so great a Redeemer.’” (page 25)



Man made in God's image

- **“Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity.** Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world.
- **“...Man is not deceived when he regards himself as superior to bodily things and as more than just a speck of nature....**When he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being led astray by false imaginings. On the contrary, he grasps what is profoundly true in this matter. (*Gaudium et spes*, 14)



Man made in God's image (continued)

- Man's special likeness with God has to do with his spirit. "...[H]e has a spiritual and immortal soul capable of intellectual knowledge and possessed of a free will; this permits him to have a loving dialogue with God..."
- Soul and body, although different things, constitute a single, substantial unity.
- Death ruptures the substantial union of body and soul, that is, it separates man's two co-principles: the soul, endures after death, bearing away with it the personal history of the subject; it also retains the capacity to perform personal acts (e.g., enjoying the vision of God, purification in Purgatory, etc.)...



Man made in God's image (continued)

- Man certainly *is* but he is also *becoming*.
- God desires man to know and love his Creator not only through the imperfect knowledge and love that his human strength can rise to, but also through supernatural energies, for God “of His infinite goodness has ordained man to a supernatural end, that is, to be the sharer of divine blessings...”
- “To enable man to know, desire, and attain this highest of goals, God gives man, when he is still on earth, supernatural grace...in which we become partakers of the divine nature...[which] makes us more the like Supreme Holiness of God...”
- God is present in man by the mere fact that man is a creature; but through grace man is present in God...



The Fall of Man

- Consider Genesis 3
- “God had given a **commandment** that man was supposed to freely observe as a **sign and expression of his dependence on his Creator.**
- “The commandment was a test—not so much in the sense that **God** wanted to ***test man***, but because he **wanted man to receive the glory of his supernatural goal not as a gratuitous gift but as something merited** by man himself, through his good actions.
- “In other words, **the fact that God put man to the test is a sign of His love for man: He wanted to give him glory in a way that fully accorded with human freedom.**” (page 31)



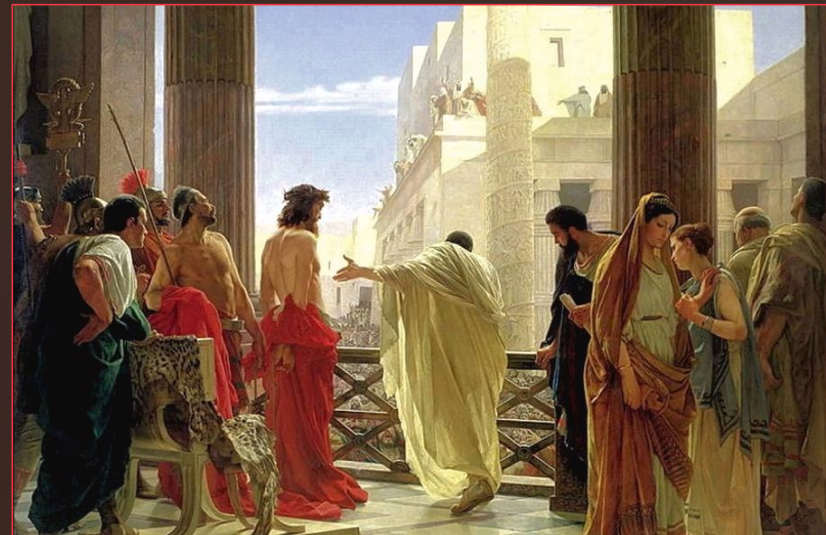
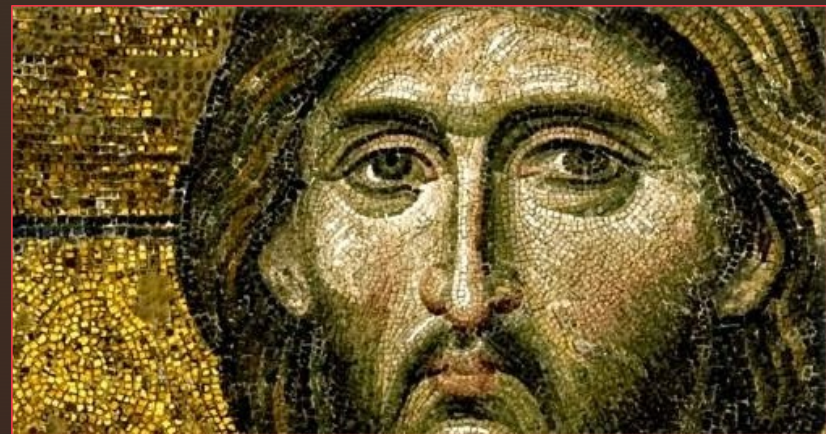
Sin

- **“Sin is not just an action of man which, being an action, ceases and has no permanence; sin is also the state that man then finds himself in—devoid of supernatural grace and therefore with his will distanced from and opposed to the will of God.”**
- **Salvation is forgiveness of sin**, re-acquisition of grace and the corresponding **conversion of the human heart to the love of God**.
- **There is no other way to be**: either one is in grace or one is in sin.
- **Only God can save man, by giving him grace, which destroys sin**.



Jesus is God's Perfect Gift

- Christ is the center of human history.
- The Incarnation took place “when the time had fully come” (Gal 4:4)...it was the Incarnation itself which was the cause of that moment being the one in which *the time had fully come*.
- With Jesus, “eternity penetrates time, not so as to downgrade itself in time, but to introduce time into eternity.”
- Christ is also the goal of human history.
- To say that Christ is the goal of history also means that only in union with Him can each man (and through men, the whole material universe) attain his true goal, his fulfillment.
- God created all things in Him so that everything could be united through Him.



The Conversion of St. Francis

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God (pages 12-27)

The Conversion of St. Francis

For one day, as he was as usual calling on upon God, it happened that the answer came. And the answer was this: “Francis! Everything you have loved and desired in the flesh, it is your duty to despise and hate, if you wish to know my will. And when you have begun thus, all that which now seems to you sweet and lovely will become intolerable and bitter, but all which you used to avoid will turn itself to great sweetness and exceeding joy.” (Dennis, et al., 13)



“It was in this that he felt his greatest weakness, and in it he was to win his greatest victory.” (Dennis, et al., 13)

▸ The Conversion of St. Francis (continued)

- Francis' "...**first impulse was to turn and flee** as fast as he could. But there were the words he had heard in himself so clearly before him – “what you used to abhor shall be to you joy and sweetness.”
- Here was the time to take the Lord at His word – to show his good will...**And with a mighty victory over himself**, Francis sprung from his horse, approached the leper...and kissed the fingers of the sick man....”
- **“But the Lord had kept His word.** Sweetness, happiness, and joy streamed into his soul – flowed and kept flowing, although his soul seemed full and more full.



“It was in this that he felt his greatest weakness, and in it he was to win his greatest victory.” (Dennis, et al., 13)

Reflection

- When have you experienced a mighty victory over yourself?
- When have you experienced the Lord keeping his word in your life?
- **“But the Lord had kept His word.”** Has your soul ever overflowed with the sweetness, happiness, and joy that comes from surrendering to the will of our Loving, Merciful, and Generous God.



“At first he had despised the thought the thought of touching the abhorred leper, but now the invitation to reconciliation was irresistible. **Francis’ deeply entrenched habit** of pushing the leper to the edges of his space, as far away from him physically and emotionally as possible, **was forever broken.**” (Dennis, et al., 15)

Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

- In Francis' new upside-down order, his encounter with the leper was indeed an encounter with this Jesus in the poor.
- **“The story of the leper symbolizes Francis’ journey across a tremendous psychological and emotional barrier.”** (Dennis, et al., 16)
- In his freedom from that barrier, Francis was able to “...move forward in leaps and bounds on his own journey, and to surmount barriers that separate the clean from the unclean, the desirable from the undesirable, the haves from the have nots. Once he was given the grace to do that, **everything was changed for him.**



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

Genesis 1:25-27

25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind[a] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,[b] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

- Moving from the mountain top to the ark of the covenant to the temple to the neighbor, the Jewish and Christian traditions have called us to celebrate **the sacrament of the “other,”** especially the most marginal, as the blessed location of the indwelling of the Spirit.
- **“God’s temple is human history;** the ‘sacred’ transcends the narrow limits of the places of worship. **We find the Lord in our encounters with [others], especially the poor, margined, and exploited ones.** An act of love towards them is an act of love toward God. This is why [one] speaks of the ‘sacrament of our neighbor,’ who as a visible reality reveals to us and allows us to welcome the Lord.”



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

- “Dehumanizing poverty and marginalization are ugly blights upon the contours of creation. Our encounter with those who are crucified and who are struggling for liberation brings us, as it brought Francis, face to face with excruciating pain and offers much food for reflection.”



“Do we believe in these times that God incarnate is suffering crucifixion and redeeming us still?” (page 22)

- Poverty is ugly and dehumanizing: it is an evil that must be eliminated. Yet, in encountering the poor, we often discover beauty and graced humanity. Indeed, in encountering the poor ones of our world, we find God.



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

- The invitation to accompaniment is a fragile invitation into the heart of our Christian faith – and invitation to witness the Spirit present in the suffering and fidelity of the poor today.
- At some times the invitation is to an individual – a “stranger” inserted into the reality of a marginal world.
 - A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND
- Our lives are inextricably linked to each other.
 - We are one body.
 - Romans 12:5 – “...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”
 - 1 Corinthians 10:17 – “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

- “We are invited to move step by step from our positions of privilege into greater solidarity with the poor and with **Christ who is incarnate in the margins of society.**” (page 23)
- Like Francis, we have to overcome the barriers that keep us divided from the other members of Christ’s one body.
- “As we accompany marginalized people – the poor ones or “lepers” of our world today – physically or politically, we begin to experience the truth that **we are also embraced and accompanied by them.**” (page 23)



Encounter with Jesus in the Poor

“...we learn that [the poor] are the Beloveds of this world who are drinking from the Cup of the One Who Accompanied us all. Their suffering and their efforts to claim a more human existence are one with the suffering of Jesus and with his announcement of the inbreaking Reign of God. The lives of these marginal ones continue the crucifixion and promise of resurrection. As a redemptive presence in our broken world, the poor accompany us.”



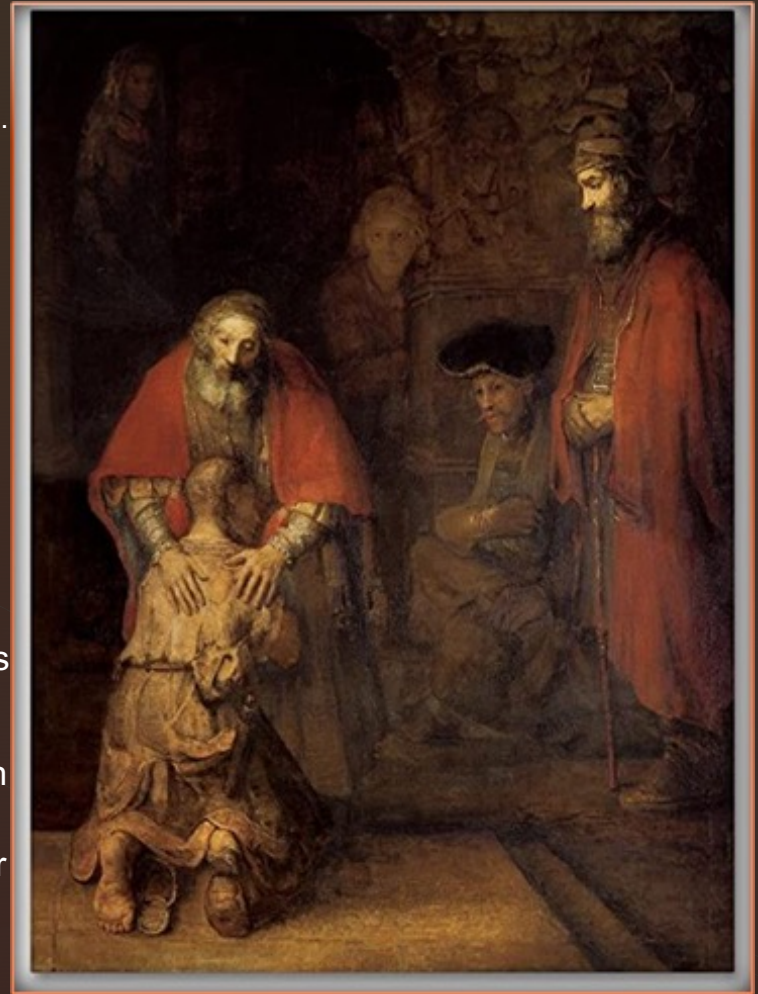
The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part Three, Section One

The Dignity of the Human Person

The Dignity of the Human Person

- (1700) The dignity of the human person is:
 - rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God (article 1).
 - fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude (article 2).
- Man must freely direct himself toward the fulfillment of his vocation to divine beatitude. **He must choose to live in beatitude with God.** (article 3).
 - Man make this choice through deliberate actions (article 4)
 - **Through those actions**, man either does, or does not, **conform to the good promised by God** and attested by moral conscience (article 5).
- Man contributes to his own, interior growth through his choices → Man's whole sentient and spiritual life is the means through which he realizes this growth (article 6)..
- **Through the gift of grace (God's life in man)**, man grows in virtue (article 7) and avoids sin. However, if man sins, he entrusts himself (just like the prodigal son) to the mercy of our Father in heaven (article 8).
- **This is how man achieves the perfection of charity.**



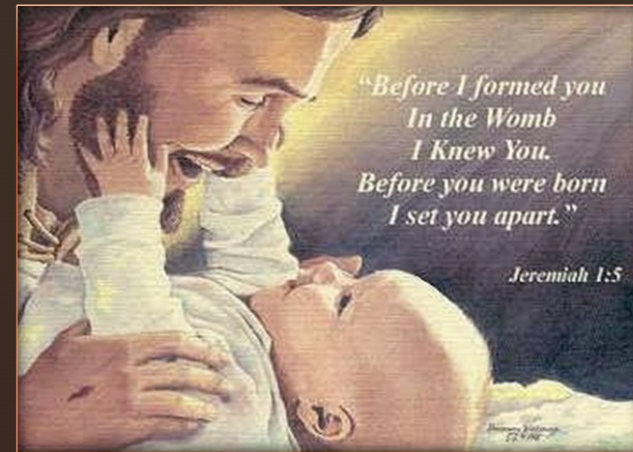
Article 1 - Man: The Image of God

- (1701) “Christ,...in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, makes man fully manifest to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation.”
 - Christ shows man who he is...who he is supposed to be.
- It is in Christ, “the image of the invisible God,” that man has been created “in the image and likeness” of the Creator.”
 - **Christ is our “pattern man.”** He is the example of how we all should be...how we all should live.
 - **We must conform ourselves to the pattern of Christ’s example.**
- It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior, that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.
 - Man’s choosing to conform himself to Christ is the corrective action that **corrects and repairs the damage done by sin.**
- (1702) The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves.
 - Just as Christ is the image of the invisible God, **we all are images of Christ both in our individuality and in our community.**



Article 1 - Man: The Image of God (continued)

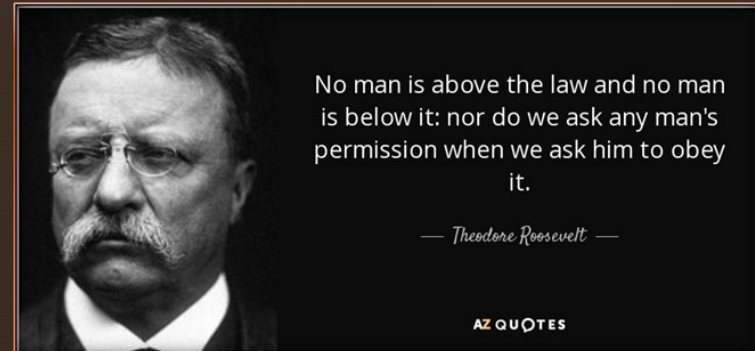
- (1703) Man is endowed with “a spiritual and immortal” soul.
 - The man is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”
 - From his conception, God’s plan is for man to enter eternal beatitude with Himself.
- (1704) Man participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit.
 - Through his reason, man can understand the order of things established by the Creator.
 - Through his free will, he can direct himself (make choices which lead him) toward his true good.
 - Man’s achieves his joy and his perfection “in seeking and loving what is true and good.”
- (1705) By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an “outstanding manifestation of the divine image.”



Article 1 - Man: The Image of God (continued)

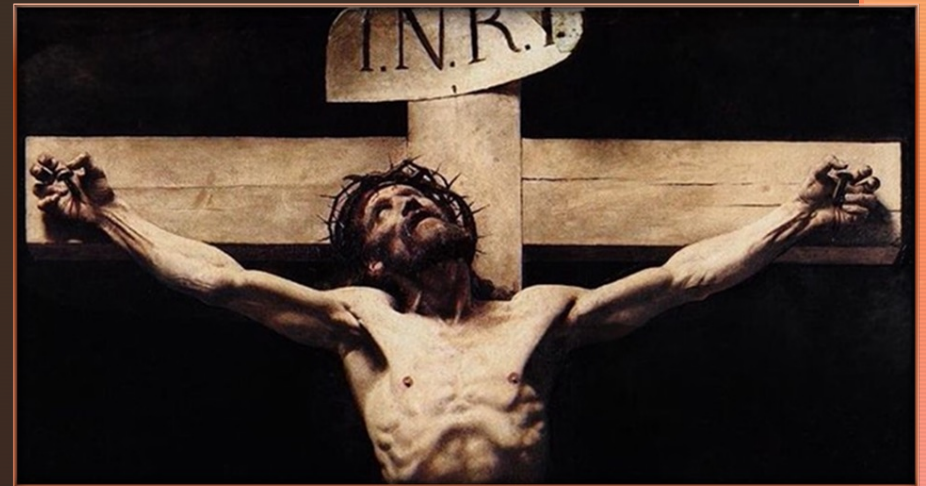
- (1706) By his reason, **man recognizes the voice of God** which urges him “to do what is good and avoid what is evil.”
 - **Everyone is obliged to follow this law**, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor.
 - **Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.**
- (1707) “Man, enticed by the Evil One, abused his freedom at the very beginning of history.”
 - **Man** succumbed to temptation and **freely chose** that which was contrary to the good.
 - Although **man still desires the good**, his nature bears the wound of **original sin** which **disposes him to choosing evil** and failing to recognize that it is evil.
 - He is now inclined to evil and subject to error:

“Man is divided in himself. As a result, the **whole life of men**, both individual and social, shows itself to be a **struggle**, and a dramatic one, **between good and evil**, between light and darkness.”



Article 1 - Man: The Image of God (continued)

- (1708) By his Passion, **Christ delivered us** from Satan and from sin.
 - **Jesus merited for us the new life in the Holy Spirit.**
 - Jesus' **grace restores** what sin had damaged in **us**.
- (1709) He who believes in Christ becomes a child of God.
 - This **filial adoption transforms man** by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ.
 - It **makes him capable of acting rightly and doing good.**
 - In **union with his Savior**, the disciple attains the perfection of charity which is holiness.
 - Having **matured in grace**, man's moral life blossoms into eternal life in the glory of heaven.



In Brief (Summary of *Catechism* 1700-1715)

(1710)

“Christ...makes man fully manifest to man himself and brings to light his exalted vocation.”

(1711)

Endowed with a spiritual soul, with intellect and with free will, the human person is from his very conception ordered to God and destined for eternal beatitude. He pursues his perfection in “seeking and loving what is true and good.”

(1712)

In man, true freedom is an “outstanding manifestation of the divine image.”

(1713)

Man is obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him “to do what is good and avoid what is evil.” This law makes itself heard in his conscience.

(1714)

Man, having been wounded in his nature by original sin, is subject to error and is inclined to evil in exercising his freedom.

(1715)

He who believes in Christ has new life in the Holy Spirit. The moral life, increased and brought to maturity in grace, is to reach its fulfillment in the glory of heaven.

Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude

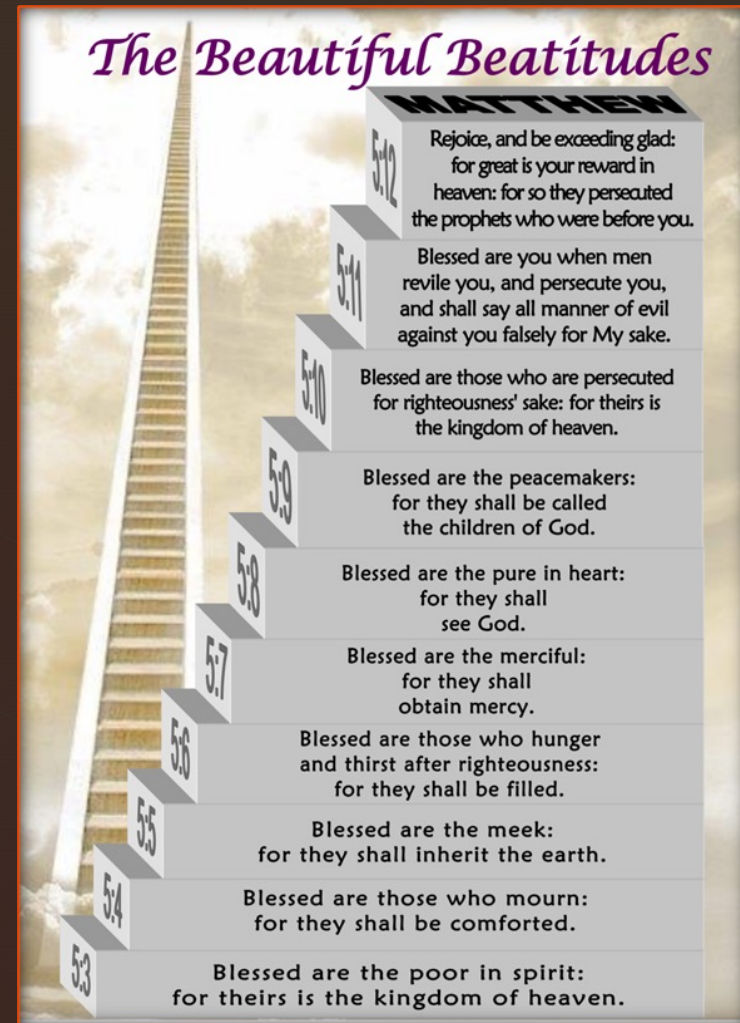
Section I. The Beatitudes

- (1716) The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching.
 - They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham.
 - The Beatitudes fulfill the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory, but to the Kingdom of heaven



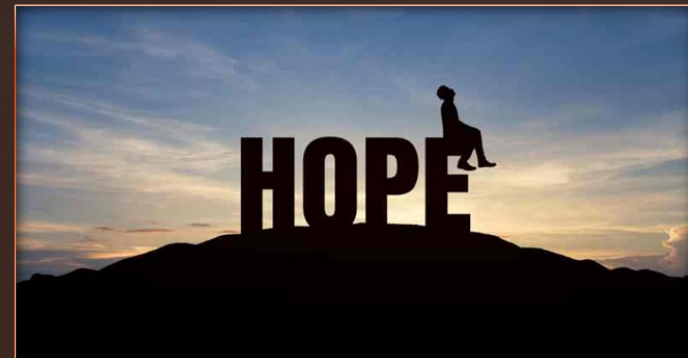
Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

- The Beatitudes:
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
 - Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
 - Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.
 - Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.
 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
 - Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

- (1717) The **Beatitudes** depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity.
- They describe in **characteristics of Jesus** in a way that we, the faithful, can emulate.
 - They **express the vocation of the faithful** associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection.
 - They shed light on the actions and **attitudes** characteristic **of the Christian life**.
 - They are the ***paradoxical promises*** that **sustain hope** in the midst of tribulations.
 - They proclaim the **blessings and rewards already secured**, however dimly, for Christ's disciples
 - They have begun in the lives of the **Virgin Mary and all the saints**.
 - The saints are our examples of living Beatitude.



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

Section II. The Desire for Happiness

- (1718) The Beatitudes respond to the **natural desire for happiness**.
 - This **desire is of divine origin**: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it:
 - St. Augustine states, “**We all want to live happily**; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated.” (emphasis mine)
 - St. Augustine also states, “How is it, then, that I seek you, Lord? Since **in seeking you, my God, I seek a happy life**, let me seek you so that my soul may live, for my body draws life from my soul and my soul draws life from you.” (emphasis mine)
 - St. Thomas Aquinas observes, “**God alone satisfies**.” (emphasis mine)



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

- (1719) The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude.
- This vocation is addressed to:
 - each individual personally
 - the Church as a whole
 - the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live from it in faith.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
– 1 Peter 2:9



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

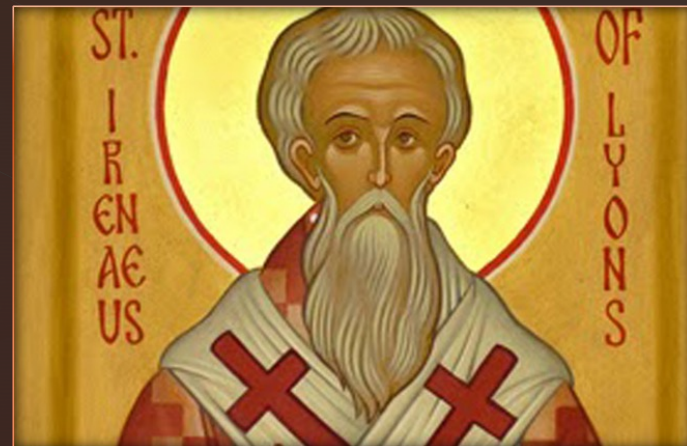
Section III. Christian Beatitude

- (1720) The New Testament uses several expressions to characterize the beatitude to which God calls man:
 - the coming of the Kingdom of God
 - the vision of God: “Blessed are the poor of heart, for they shall see God”
 - entering into the joy of the Lord
 - entering into God’s rest:
 - “There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise. Behold what will be at the end without end. For what other end do we have, if not the kingdom which has no end.” (St. Augustine)



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

- (1721) God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise.
 - Beatitude makes us “partakers of the divine nature” and of eternal life.
 - With Beatitude, man enters into the glory of Christ and into the joy of the Trinitarian life.
- (1722) Such beatitude surpasses the understanding and powers of man.
 - It comes from an entirely free gift from God: whence it is called supernatural, as is the grace that disposes man to enter into the divine joy.
 - “‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ It is true, because of the greatness and inexpressible glory of God, that ‘man shall not see me and live,’ for the Father cannot be grasped. But because of God’s love and goodness toward us, and because he can do all things, he goes so far as to grant those who love him the privilege of seeing him....For ‘what is impossible for men is possible for God.’” (St. Irenaeus)



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude (continued)

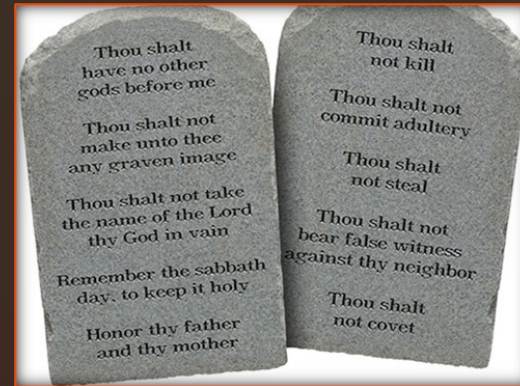
- (1723) The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices.
 - It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else.
 - It teaches us that true ***happiness is not found:***
 - in ***riches*** or well-being (***wealth***)
 - in human fame or ***power*** (***power***)
 - in any ***human achievement***—however beneficial it may be—such as science, technology, and art (***honor***)
 - in ***any creature*** (***pleasure***)
 - ***Happiness is found in God alone, the source of every good and of all love.***

“All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability....It is a homage resulting from a profound faith...that with wealth he may do all things. Wealth is one idol of the day and notoriety is a second....Notoriety, or the making of a noise in the world—it may be called ‘newspaper fame’—has come to be considered a great good in itself, and a ground for veneration.” (St. John Henry Cardinal Newman)



Article 2 – Our Vocation to Beatitude

- (1724) The Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and the apostolic catechesis describe for us the paths that lead to the Kingdom of heaven.
 - Through living these instructions, we grow in our moral lives, conforming ourselves to the will of the Father, and increasing our dispositions to choosing God above all things.
- Sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we tread them, step by step, by everyday acts.
 - We can only live and grow in the moral life through the grace of the Holy Spirit who is our consoler, our helper, our guide, and our strength.
- By the working of the Word of Christ, we slowly bear fruit in the Church to the glory of God.
 - The moral life is a persistent discipline. It is a constant commitment...a constant choice...to live in accordance with God's Will.
 - When we fail (and we will) we must immediately seek God's mercy (through the Sacrament of Reconciliation) and seek to reunite ourselves with our Loving Father.



In Brief (Summary of *Catechism* 1700-1715)

(1725)

The Beatitudes take up and fulfill God's promises from Abraham by ordering them to the Kingdom of heaven. They respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart.

(1726)

The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life filiation, rest in God.

(1727)

The beatitude of eternal life is a gratuitous gift of God. It is supernatural, as is the grace that leads us there.

(1728)

The Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods; they purify our hearts in order to teach us to love God above all things.

(1729)

The beatitude of heaven sets the standards for discernment in the use of earthly goods in keeping with the law of God.

Questions?

Peace Prayer of

Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may
not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

