



St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Triangle Virginia

20240309

# On-Going Formation

The Coming of Christ in the Fullness of Time

Francis and Relinquishment

Moral Conscience

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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.”



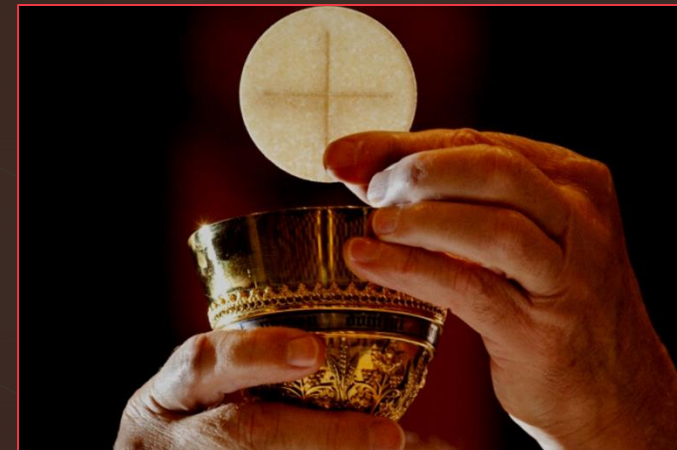
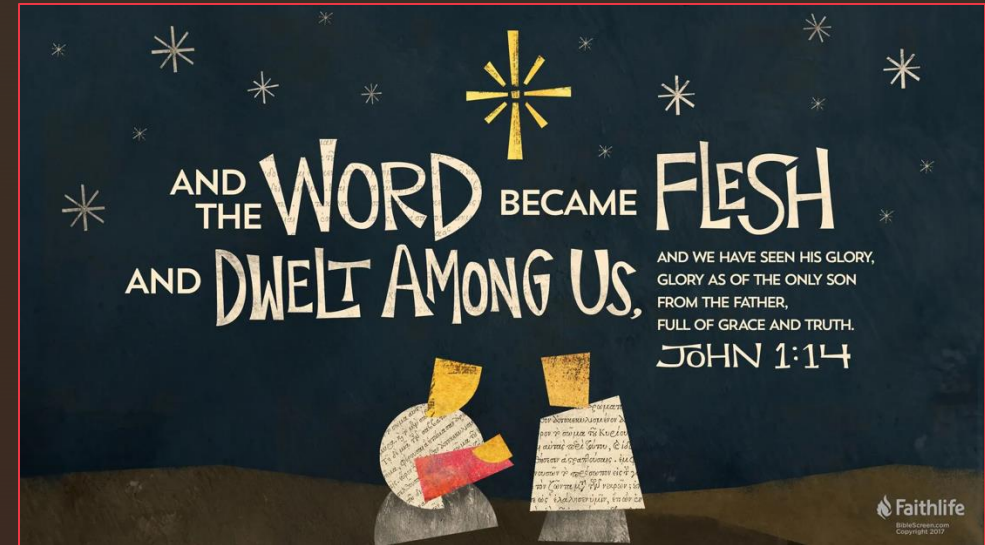
# The Coming of Christ in ▶ the Fullness of Time

The Mystery of Jesus Christ (pages 49-89)



# The Incarnation: God's Plan of Mercy

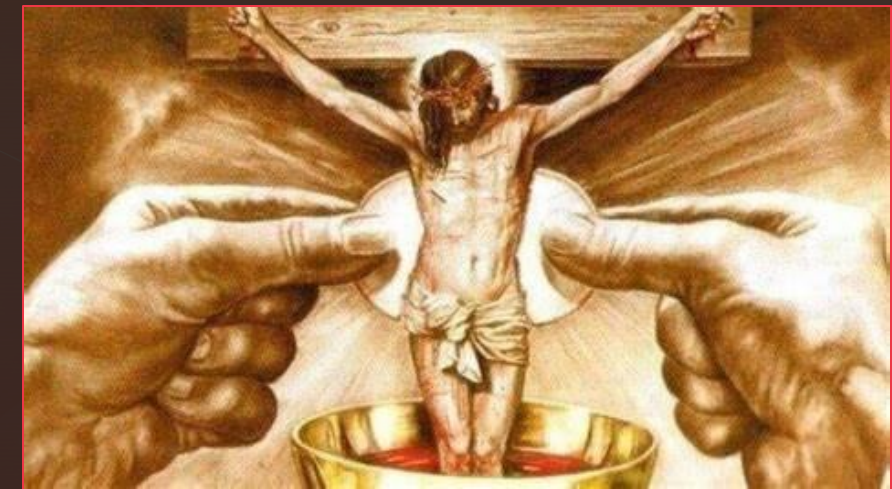
- God's plan of salvation is the fruit of His mercy.
- God sent His son into the world to assume a concrete human nature, making Himself like us in all things but sin.
- He is truly God with us, the promised Christ or Messiah anointed by the Holy Spirit.
- By sacrificing himself as the suffering Servant, he is the Redeemer of the human race & the Son of Man who will at the end of time establish the definitive Kingdom of God.
- Jesus is perfect God and perfect man. Through the Incarnation one and the same subject unites the divine and the human in Himself, in the unity of a person.



It is a matter, then, of God, in the Person of the Word, uniting Himself to the human nature so intimately that the sufferings and joys, all the actions of this nature, are sufferings and joys, actions of God.

# Jesus Really Did Exist

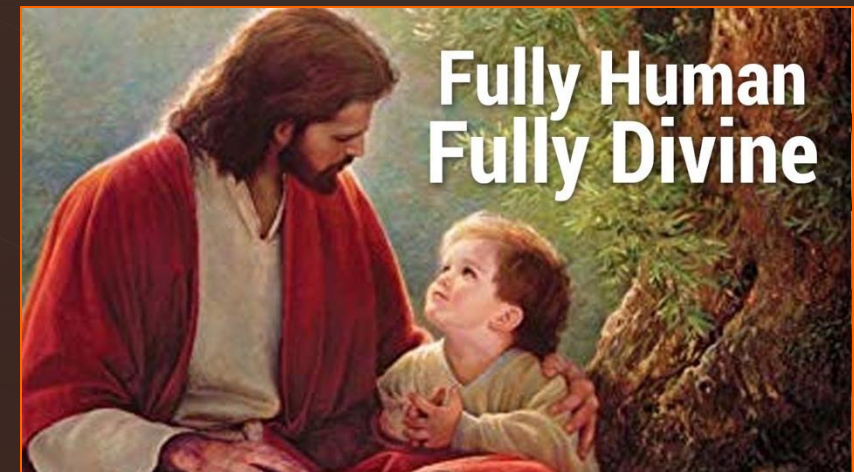
- Our faith in Christ is faith in a Person (the eternal Son of the Father) who at a particular point in history “...by the power of the Holy Spirit became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.”
- The life of Jesus on earth is a fact proven by historical research, particularly from analysis of the New Testament, whose historical validity is not in doubt.
- The Gospels were written as testimonies of true eyewitnesses.





# Jesus Christ, Perfect Man

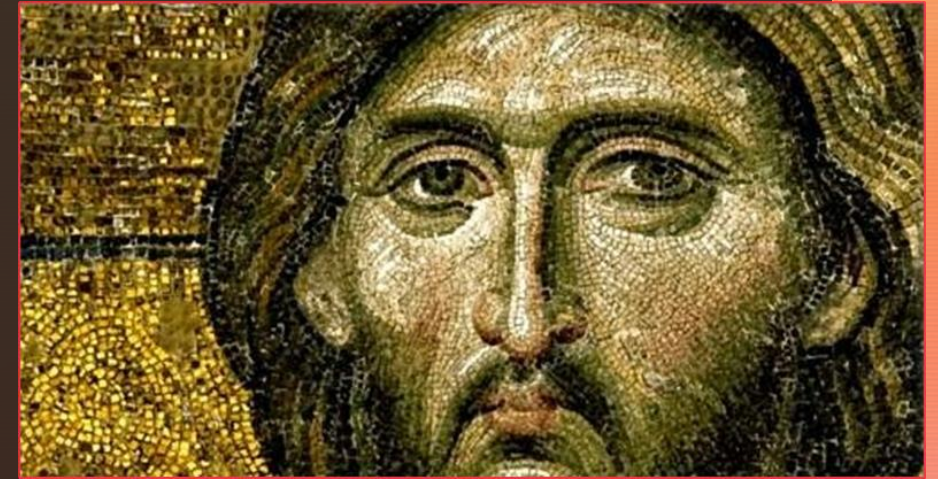
- The virginal conception of Jesus
  - The Dogmatic Letter of Pope Leo I (AD 449), explicitly says that Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin mother who bore him without loss of virginity as she conceived him without loss of virginity.”
  - Mary is truly the Mother of God. Theotokos = “God bearer”.
  - “...virginal conception, considered as human maternity suited to divine paternity”, makes it very plain that Christ is an exclusive gift from God the Father.”
- Christ had a real body
  - Docetists appear in the first century, denying that Christ had a real, material body.
  - They refused to believe that Christ had a real human body.
- Christ had a real soul (Below are two major heresies)
  - Arius and Apollinaris of Laodicea did not believe that Christ had a real human soul.
  - Arius tried to prove that the Son, in his divinity was inferior to the Father by using Scripture passages to show that Christ had some weaknesses proper to human nature.
  - Apollinaris – in Christ was a body, an animal soul, and the Word, who acted as the human spiritual soul.
  - The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus had a true, human spirit, a spiritual soul showing human feelings—feelings of indignation, of sadness, of joy.





# Jesus Christ, Perfect Man (continued)

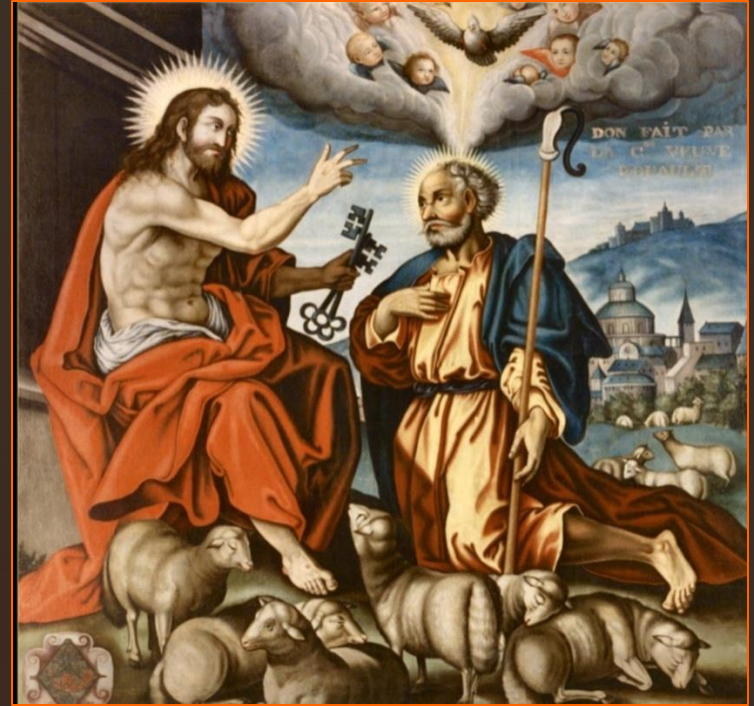
- Jesus, a man of our race
  - “Jesus’ solidarity in history with the human race reveals that divine justice shone in the redemption by arranging things so that atonement for sin would come from the sinful race itself; moreover, it heightened the dignity of man, because the Evil One was conquered by a member of the race whom he defeated at the dawn of history; and God’s omnipotence was revealed because from a weak stock and one wounded by sin he formed the perfect humanity of Jesus and raised it to his dignity.”
- Human features of Jesus in the Gospels
  - “It is a matter...of discovering in Christ a truly human face, and always remembering that this is the human face of God.”
  - “Self-forgetfulness’ is one of the marked characteristics of Jesus: his only desire is to bear witness to the Father and do his will saving the lost sheep.”
- The Mother of the Redeemer
  - Mary’s motherhood is closely connected with her fullness of grace because she understood it as a total gift of self in the service of the saving plans of the Most High.
  - This service is a true maternal mediation on behalf of men.
  - This mediation shows that Christ’s triumph involves uniting others with Him in such a way that he causes them to cooperate in the Redemption.





# Jesus Christ, God and Son of God

- The Church's belief in the divinity of Christ
  - From the confession of St Peter ("You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God": Mt 16:16) right up to our own days, the Church has never ceased proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, is true man and at the same time true Son of God—the Only-begotten of the Father.
  - Ebionites – (Christians of Jewish background and of Judaizing tendency) regarded Christ as a mere man, though the holiest of men, because of "the stumbling block of the cross".
- The divinity of Jesus announced in Old Testament
  - Isaiah announces that the Messiah will be called "Immanuel" (God with us) – See Isaiah 7:14 (also see Isaiah 9:6)
  - Jeremiah – "Yahweh, our righteousness" (Jer 23:5-6)
- The divinity of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels
  - The entire New Testament testifies to Christ's divinity.
  - Jesus presents Himself as the object of absolute, unconditional election.





# Jesus Christ, God and Son of God (continued)

- The divinity of Jesus in St. Paul
  - Phil 2:5-11 (See page 73)
  - **Kenosis** = voluntary self-emptying
- Christ, the Word and Son of God in St. John
  - Jesus in fact attributes eternal pre-existence to himself: “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58).
  - The expression “**I am**” (Greek “**ego eimi**”), which Jesus often used, had a very powerful meaning for the Jews, because it was the name for God revealed to Moses; the name the Jews avoided saying out of reverence.
- The testimony of the Father’s of the Church
  - “There is no doubt therefore, not only from the point of view of the faith but also from historical analysis, that when the Council of Nicea solemnly defined the divinity of Christ, it was providing not a “new interpretation” of the New Testament, or opting for one among many early Christologies; rather, it was reaffirming the faith the Church held since the beginning.”



# The Incarnation, the work of the Trinity

- Jesus Christ is God made man; more exactly, he is the Son, the Word, who has made Himself one of us.
- Divine actions *ad extra* (actions whose effects are “outside God”, in other words, on creatures) are the joint (or “common”) work of the three Persons together, for the divine Being is one only and unique; it is the infinite power of God.
- The real distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit belongs to the inner life of God.
- In every divine action, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act, through the omnipotence common to them.

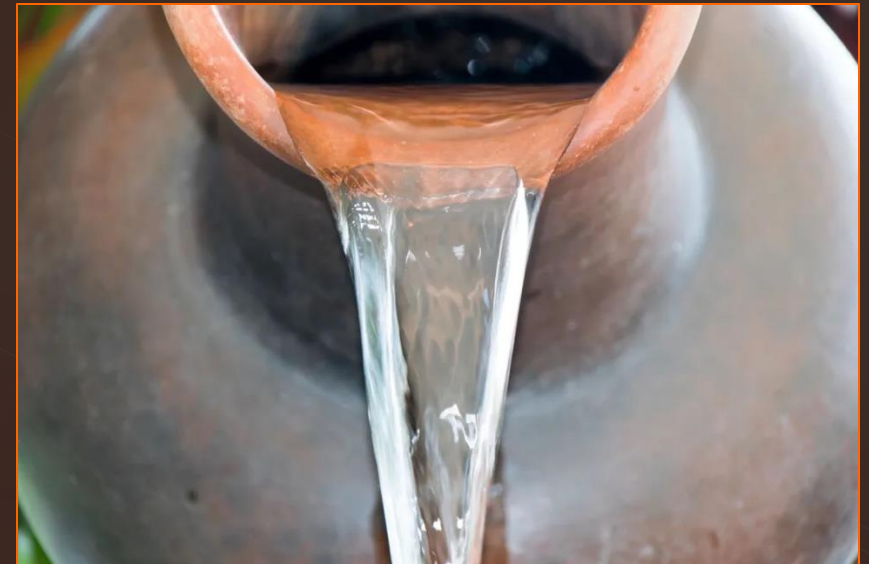
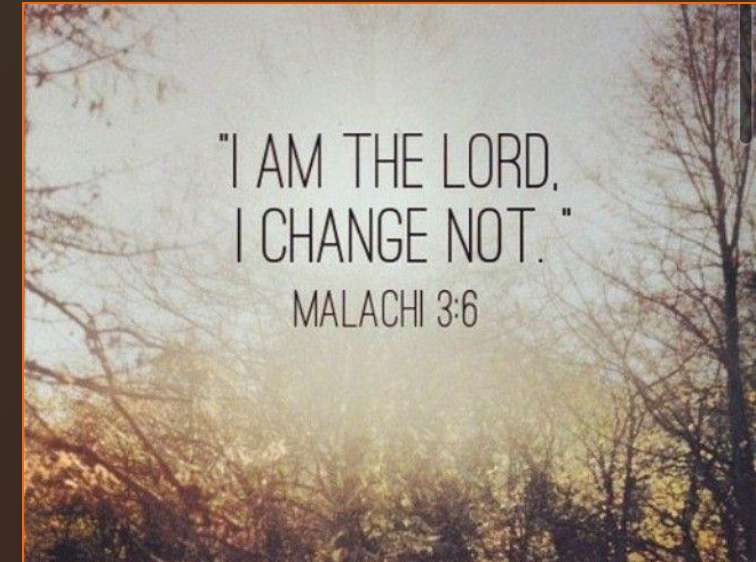


**“In all this there is an ineffable mystery...because the act of the Incarnation, since it is an action *ad extra*, has its terminus *ad intra* (= “inside” the Trinity), since Jesus’ humanity is assumed (“introduced”) into the Trinity as the humanity of the Son, and not of the Father or the Holy Spirit: the Father sends the Son to mankind, and the Holy Spirit is the perfect Anointing of the humanity of the Son.”**



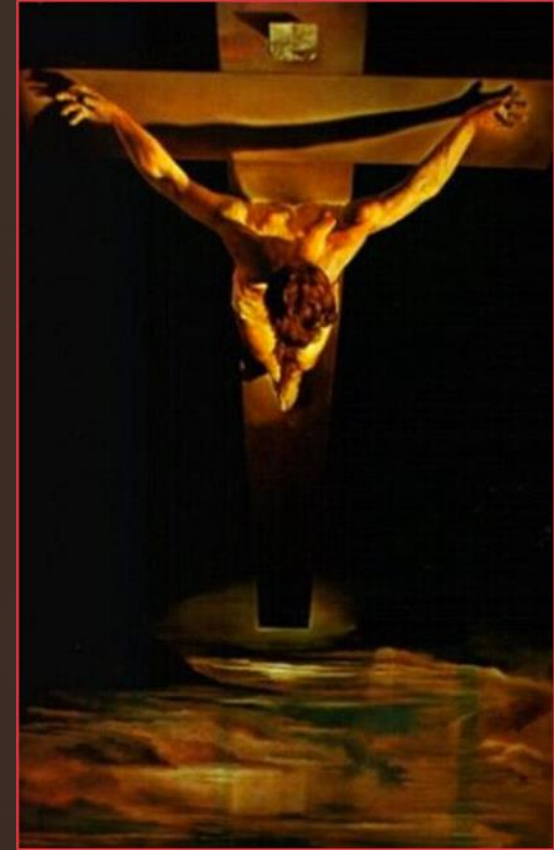
# The Immutability of God, and Incarnation

- Our faith teaches us that God is immutable: “we firmly believe and simply confess that there is one true God, eternal, immense, unchangeable.”
- Using classical language, we can say that in the Incarnation the only newness occurs in the assumed human nature, which at the Incarnation begins to exist and to be humanity, the divinity experiences no change.
- Divine immutability means that it is impossible for there to be any kind of change in God. This is a mystery.
- What is the true meaning of kenosis, of the Son of God's self-emptying in the Incarnation? (Two dimensions)
  - God assumed a non-divine nature, manifesting Himself to the world through a human nature, while at the same time both revealing and hiding His divinity.
  - The Son of God renounced, in his human nature, the glory due it as God's humanity. He chose to be a Suffering Servant, dying on the cross and obeying the Father's plan.



# The Appropriateness of the Incarnation

- Love is the deepest reason behind every action of God.
- ***Bonum est diffusivum sui*** (“Goodness spreads itself”)
- Every action of God ad extra is simply a communication of his goodness and of his perfection. Three stages:
  - Through creation; Through grace; Through the Incarnation
- It is customary, at the beginning of Christology, to highlight the way the mystery of the Incarnation fits in not only with men’s needs (the need of a Saviour) but also with the goodness and fatherhood of God; to stress the wonderful insight it gives us into God Himself.
- The Incarnation is a manifestation of God’s infinite love for man, of his inexhaustible mercy, of his great kindness.



“...since friendship consists of a certain equality, it seems that there cannot be a friendly union between things that are very unequal. Consequently, in order to have a more familiar friendship between God and man, it was appropriate for the latter that God should become man. In this way knowing God visibly we should feel ourselves ‘caught up in love of the God we cannot see.’”





# Francis and Relinquishment

Ongoing Conversion

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God (pages 28-44)

# Ongoing Conversion

- Mark 10:17-24 – The rich young man.
- Last time we talked about Francis' conversion in his encounter with the leper. This time, we will look at Francis' rejection of the worldly life.
- Francis' father brought him before the Bishop. "The conflict between father and son grew until it reached the breaking point...."
- This was a decisive moment in Francis' conversion, when Francis took a leap of faith from his world into that of the poor through a radical relinquishment of status and security.



"The story of Francis stripping himself naked in the bishop's courtyard conveys to us an essential moment in his conversion process. As Francis stood there naked, completely vulnerable before the bishop, his family, and the people of Assisi, he divested himself of much more than just his clothes and belongings...he relinquished family identity, reputation, and economic security."



# Ongoing Conversion (Continued)

- Francis did not pursue poverty as an ascetic ideal of self-denial. For Francis this relinquishment was a practical means of relocating himself in relationship to the poor.
- One cannot distinguish Francis' conversion experience from this journey toward the poor: they are one and the same.
- In our own time, does relinquishment play an essential role in our own ongoing conversion?
- Hearing this story of how Francis lived his radical discipleship, we gain new perspectives on how to live our call to follow Jesus.
- How can this Word become flesh in our lives?



“A man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”



# The Invitation to Discipleship

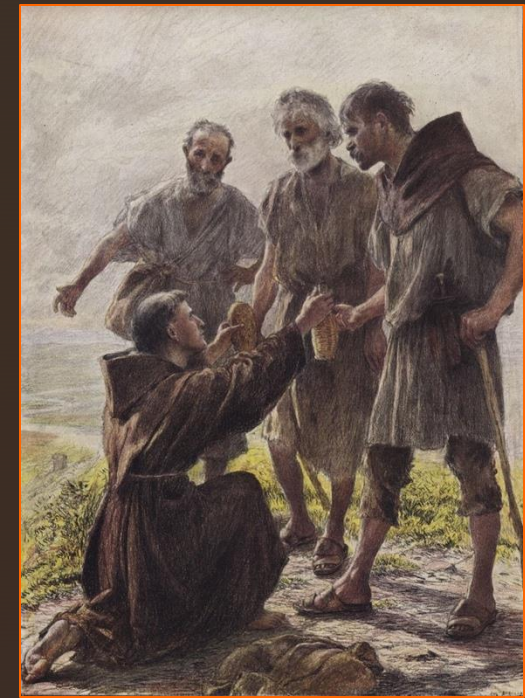
- After the initial exchange between Jesus and the rich man, Jesus looks upon the rich man with love.
- Jesus' initial aloofness yields to genuine love for the individual standing before him.
- Recognizing the potential for discipleship, Jesus issues to him an invitation.
- "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me."
- The sadness of the rich, young man betrays his inner struggle and he fails to respond to the invitation.
- Francis does not fail.
- Jesus uses the metaphor of the camel and the eye of a needle...[to describe] the conflict between wealth and discipleship.





# Losing Ourselves, We Find Ourselves

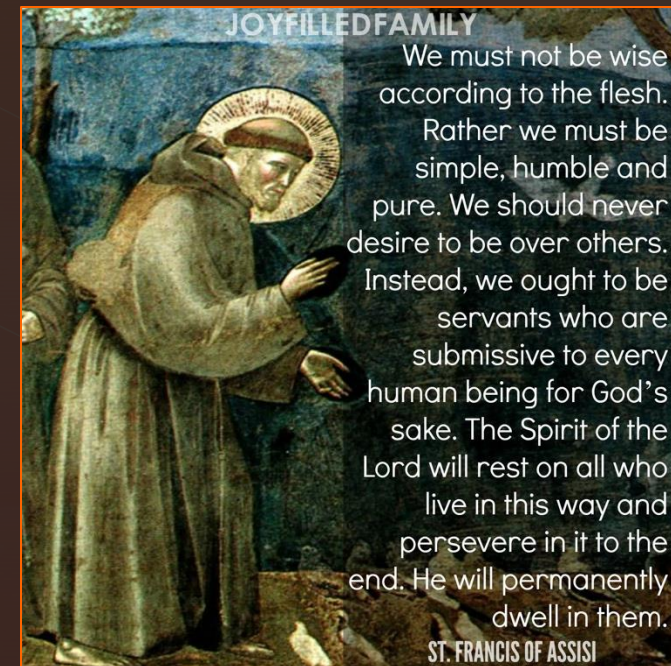
- The way of relinquishment is the lifelong process of removing the obstacles to loving and just relationships with our neighbors on this earth and moving toward more genuine community among all God's children, the kind of brotherhood Francis envisioned.
- As we help to remove the obstacles to the liberation of others, we are simultaneously removing obstacles to our own liberation.
- We are called to a wholeness as human beings that is much greater than our identity as individuals.
- Relinquishment and the Abundant Life
  - The call to relinquishment is grounded in the promise of abundant line and in the language of salvation.
  - It is the essential gospel dialectic of losing one's life in order to find it.
  - The work of relinquishment is difficult for individuals to realize in isolation. This is why we have fraternity.





# Losing Ourselves, We Find Ourselves (Continued)

- Francis, who renounces his claim on all things, is free to enjoy all things as gift.
- We can neutralize the challenge and promise of Jesus and of Francis by elevating Jesus and Francis into the realm of sainthood and perfection, a realm seemingly far beyond our reach.
- “We tell the stories of Francis and of Jesus because we cannot do what we cannot imagine. By telling these stories, may we at least come to imagine that a different way is possible; that we can actually live the gospel; that we can be free of the tyranny of possessions; that we can experience joy in the simple gifts of life and of each day; that we can surrender our lives to a purpose larger than ourselves; and that we can dare to hope for the transformation of the world.”



JOYFILLEDFAMILY

We must not be wise according to the flesh. Rather we must be simple, humble and pure. We should never desire to be over others. Instead, we ought to be servants who are submissive to every human being for God's sake. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end. He will permanently dwell in them.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI



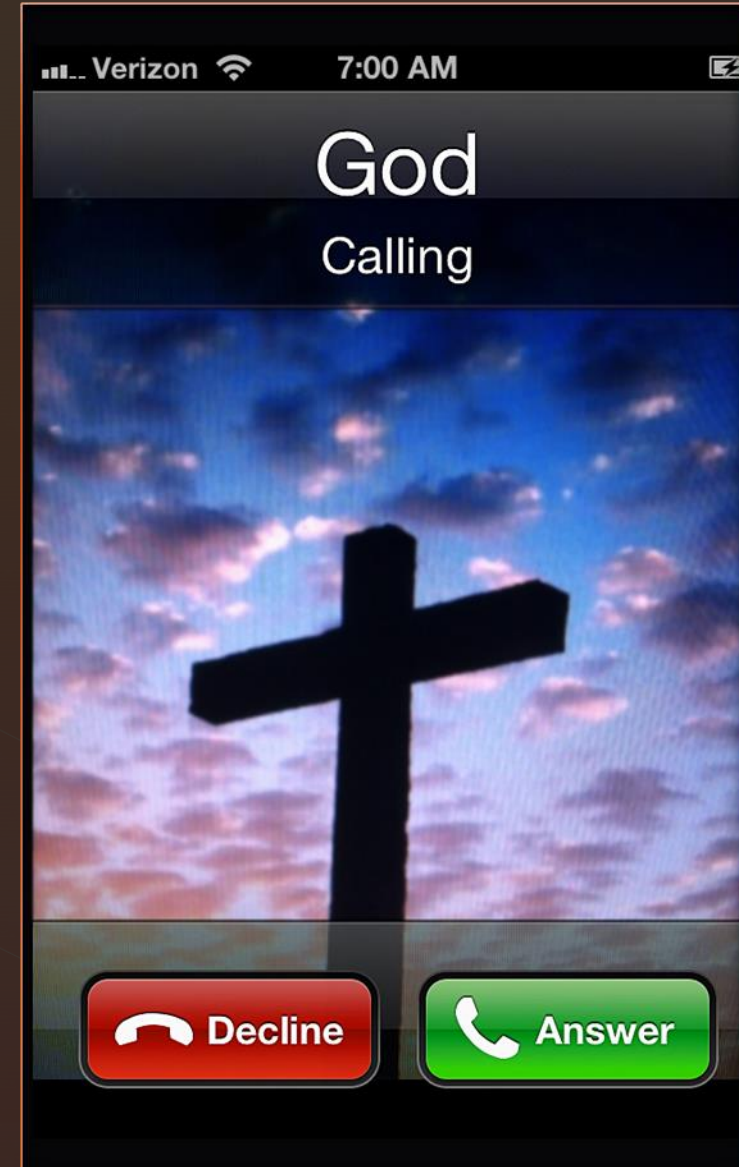
The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part Three, Chapter 1, Article 6

# Moral Conscience

# Moral Conscience

- (1776) “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. It’s voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment....For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God....His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.”





# I. The Judgment of the Conscience

- (1777) Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil.
  - It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil.
- It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn.
  - It welcomes the Commandments.
- When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.



# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- (1778) Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed.
- In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right.
  - It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law.





# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- “Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise....[Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.”
  - John Henry Cardinal Newman



# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- (1779) It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience.
- This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination, or introspection:
  - “Return to your conscience, question it....Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.”  
(St. Augustine)





# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- (1780) The dignity of the human person implies and requires ***uprightness of moral conscience***.
  - Conscience includes:
    - the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis)
    - the application of moral principles in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods
    - judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed
- The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the ***prudent judgment*** of conscience.
- We call the man ***prudent*** who chooses in conformity with his conscience.



## VIRTUE PRUDENCE

*"The wisdom of a prudent man is to discern his way, but the folly of fools is deceiving."*

*Proverbs 14:8*



# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- (1781) Conscience enables one to assume responsibility for the acts performed.

- If man commits evil, the just judgment of conscience can remain within him as the witness to the universal truth of the good, at the same time as the evil of his particular choice.

- The verdict of the judgment of conscience remains a pledge of hope and mercy.

- In attesting to the fault committed, it calls to mind:
  - The forgiveness that must be asked,
  - The good that must still be practiced,
  - The virtue that must be constantly cultivated with the grace of God.

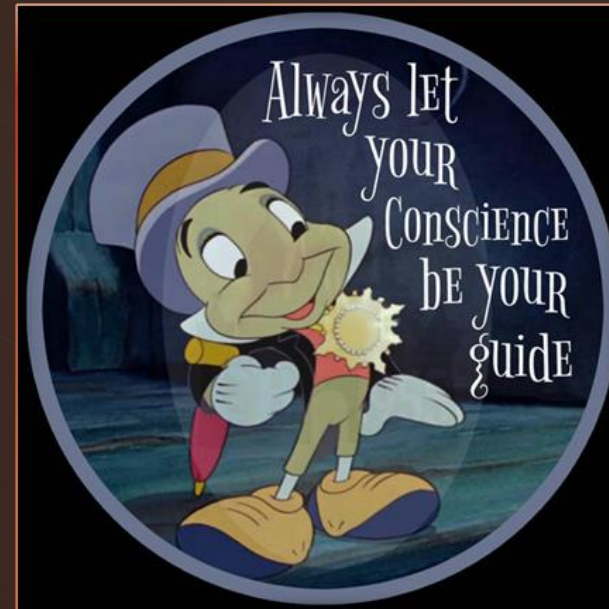


“We shall...reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”  
(1 John 3:19-20)



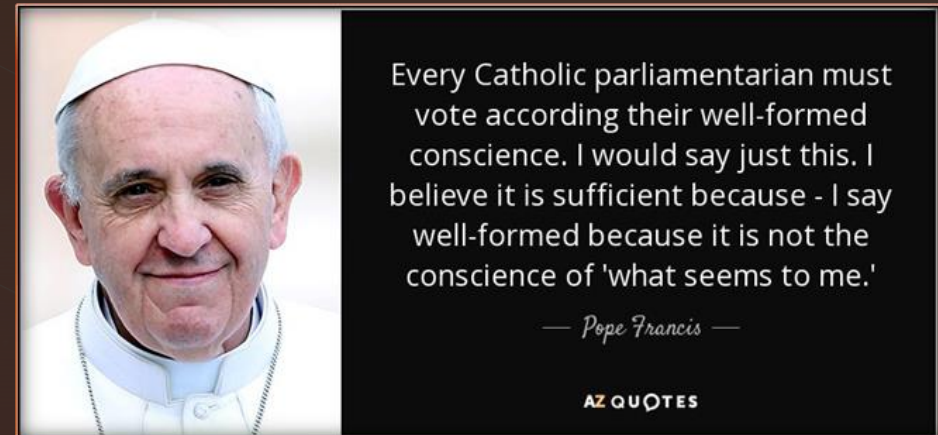
# I. The Judgment of the Conscience (continued)

- (1782) Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions.
- “He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.”



## II. The Formation of Conscience

- (1783) Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened.
- A **well-formed conscience** is upright and truthful.
  - It formulates its judgments according to reason.
  - It formulates its judgments in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator.
- The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.





## II. The Formation of Conscience (continued)

- (1784) The education of conscience is a lifelong task
  - From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience.
  - Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness, and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults.
- The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.



## II. The Formation of Conscience (continued)

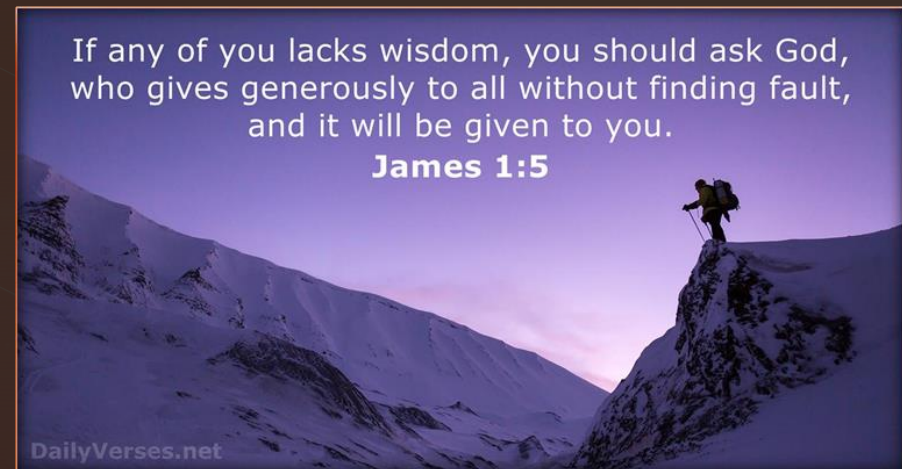
- (1785) In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path.
  - We must assimilate the Word of God into our faith and our prayer.
  - We must put the Word of God into practice in our lives.
- We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's cross.
  - We are:
    - assisted in our examination by the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
    - aided by the witness or advice of others, and
    - guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.





### III. To Choose in Accord with Conscience

- (1786) Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.
- (1787) Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult.
- Man must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law.



### III. To Choose in Accord with Conscience (continued)

- (1788) To this purpose, man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by:
  - the virtue of prudence,
  - the advice of competent people,
  - and by the help of the Holy Spirit and his gifts.
- (1789) Some rules apply in every case:
  - One may never do evil so that good may result from it.
  - The Golden Rule: “Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.”
  - Charity always proceeds by way of respect for one’s neighbor and his conscience.



Therefore “it is right not to...do anything that makes your brother stumble.”  
(Rom 14:21)

“Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience...you sin against Christ.” (1 Cor 8:12)



## IV. Erroneous Judgment

- (1790) A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience.
  - If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself.
- Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.



## IV. Erroneous Judgment (continued)

- (1791) This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility.
  - This is the case when a man “takes little trouble to find out what is true and good,” or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin.”
  - In such cases, the person is culpable for the evil he commits.
- (1792) The following can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct:
  - ignorance of Christ and his Gospel,
  - bad example given by others,
  - enslavement to one’s passions,
  - assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience,
  - rejection of the Church’s authority and her teaching,
  - lack of conversion and of charity.





## IV. Erroneous Judgment (continued)

- (1793) Invincible Ignorance
  - On the contrary, if the ignorance is invincible, or the moral subject is not responsible for his erroneous judgment, the evil committed by the person cannot be imputed to him.
  - It remains no less an evil, a privation, a disorder.
- One **must work to correct errors of moral conscience.**
- (1794) A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time “from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.”
- The more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by objective standards or moral conduct.



# In Brief (Summary of *Catechism* 1795-1802)

(1795)

**“Conscience is man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths.”**

(1796)

**Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.**

(1797)

For the man who has committed evil, the **verdict of his conscience** remains a **pledge of conversion and of hope**.

(1798)

A **well-formed conscience is upright and truthful**. It formulates its judgments **according to reason, in conformity with the true good** willed by the wisdom of the Creator. **Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience**.

(1799)

Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.



# In Brief (Summary of *Catechism* 1795-1802)

(1800)

A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience.

(1801)

Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt.

(1802)

The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed.

# 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.

