

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? *Christian Formation at Prince of Peace*

Who do you say that I am?

Jesus means different things to different people. During His public ministry, people thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. Today, there are people who think that He was a great prophet, a master teacher, or a moral leader. There are those who believe that He is divine; and others think Him to be a fraud. His disciple Simon Peter said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* Jesus tells Peter, *Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* Our answer to this question of Jesus shapes our lives and makes us who we are. Peter's answer was right: he could see who Jesus really was, the Word of God made flesh. And for that the LORD promised him, *You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* As Catholics, we belong to that Church founded by Christ in communion with the successors of Peter and all the apostles. And everywhere that Catholics gather, we share a common answer to that famous question posed by Jesus in Matthew 16.15.

But for us to really understand the right answer to that question of Jesus, it is not sufficient merely to belong to the Catholic Church. We must know, live and serve God through His Church. Parishes, which are local communities of Catholics, have a serious responsibility to make sure that all who are baptized into the Catholic Church or come into full communion with her are able to give a reason for the hope which is within them and to help others answer well the question of Jesus: *Who do you say that I am?*

Christian Formation is how a parish shares in that responsibility. In our parish, we have numerous opportunities for Christian Formation by which members of our community can be better disciples of Christ. This guide can serve as an orientation to what our parish offers and why.

Children's Catechesis

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22.6). Every parent¹ who has a child seeks to give him everything he needs to have a good life. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and this is no more true than in the religious sphere. Children become familiar with their religion in proportion to how it is lived in the home. If a Christian witness is absent from or weak in the home, then it is hard for a child to grow up to be a strong believer. A good moral and spiritual life is impossible without the intimate involvement of parents in their children's Christian Formation. Without it, much of what the parish provides, being contradicted in the home, will be to no avail.

A sower went out to sow his seed . . . the seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil come and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away . . . And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8.5, 11-13, 15).

Families of all shapes and sizes come to our parish because they have heard the word of God. It is the parish's responsibility to make sure that that seed of the word falls on good ground, and all of the Christian Formation opportunities of the parish are designed to help make that happen.

Catholic parents are required by the Canon Law which governs the law of the faithful *to choose those means and institutes which, in their local circumstances, can best promote the Catholic education of their children* (CIC 793.1). Even when a Catholic marries a non-Catholic, dispensation for such a marriage is granted only upon the signing of a solemn promise in which the Catholic party vows, "I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics." Ordinarily this precept is fulfilled by a religious home environment, involvement in the life of the parish and attendance at Holy Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and enrolment in a Catholic home schooling program or a Catholic school.

The obligation for this type of Catholic education of children is very serious indeed. Only with great discernment and after having consulted with the spiritual leaders of

¹ It should be understood that a legal guardian also fulfills the role of a parent in this scheme

one's parish should a family for grave reasons choose to send a child to a non-Catholic school, on account of the religious indifferentism or hostility to the Catholic faith often found in them. But there are reasons for which sometimes it is expedient for a child to be sent to such a non-Catholic school, and so the parish seeks to assist the parents to raise their children in the faith.

The principal means by which this religious education of children takes place outside of a Catholic school is in our Religious Education Program. **Every week during the school year, grades 1-8** are available for children who need this type of formation. It is a time for organized *catechesis*, study of the Bible and Catholic faith and morals. While it principally an intellectual formation, it must have as its complement a spiritual component as well.

Parents who wish to enroll their children in our Religious Education Program must be registered and active parishioners of the parish upon registering in the Program every year. Catholic parents must also sign a Covenant with the parish clergy and the catechists which shows that they understand the fundamental principles of Christian formation at our parish and that they will be diligent in participating in whatever the school program requires as well as being active members of the parish, with special attention to Mass attendance and reception of the sacraments.

Some parents may not wish to sign the Covenant. This does not bar children from participating in the classes of the program, but non-cooperation on the part of Catholic parents and children will mean that children may not receive the sacraments of Penance and First Holy Communion. For Confirmation, there is a joint Covenant between parents, the confirmand, the parish clergy and the school. Either way, no child between grades 1 and 8 who is registered in the parish should be absent from homeschool, Catholic school, or the Religious Education Program. The parish clergy and the Director of Christian Formation will periodically contact families whose children are not involved in any type of Catholic schooling to remind them of their obligation and to offer their assistance.

Sometimes a child has a physical or mental challenge which necessitates a program of Christian Formation for these sacraments which is not a part of the normal school programs. Families are invited to contact the parish clergy and the Director of Christian Formation for that.

In every realm of children's catechesis, parents are involved. They are required to assist with homework and projects, attend certain meetings, volunteer for events of the program, and learn certain prayers and Catholic practices along with their children. It may seem like a lot of work for the parents, but the parish is really just helping them to do their job better, and often parents testify to how much they have learned and how their faith has deepened as a result.

Sacramental Preparation

Sacraments

The Council of Trent defined a sacrament as "an outward sign of inward grace, instituted by Christ for our salvation." Jesus came to save us, and we can be saved only if we have a personal relationship with God, and God gave us the seven sacraments as helps to our salvation. Each is a sacrament of **faith**: it expresses the faith of the believer even as it increases it. The sacraments, however, are not just individual expressions of the faith; they are expressions of the faith of the whole Church. That is why the sacraments are celebrated during the liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, and why the requirements for their reception are given to us by the Church. Christian Formation prepares us for the sacraments (*catechesis*) but also helps to deepen the faith increased through the sacraments (*mystagogy*). All Christian Formation is sacramental in character, as it brings us to understand better the Christ whom we encounter through the sacraments.

Baptism

The teacher Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the cover of night and is told, *Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (John 3:5). Baptism is the sacrament by which we are cleansed from original or personal sin and we enter into the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. One has to be baptized in order to be considered a Catholic or to receive any of the other sacraments. By baptism we become children of God and the life of the Holy Trinity is poured into us. Anyone who has not already been validly baptized can be baptized. For adults and children beyond the age of reason, the process of preparation for baptism is described in the section below entitled "Catechumenate." For children below the age of reason, parents must spontaneously request baptism for their child.

Every Catholic in the world belongs to a particular community of Catholics ordinarily called a parish. One becomes a member of a parish by registering,

contributing by use of the envelope system, and being involved in the life of the parish. By the envelope system the parish clergy can track who is fulfilling the precepts of the Church to assist at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and to support the work of the Church. It is an indication of the minimum practice required of every Catholic.

When a parishioner wishes to have a child baptized, he comes to special Baptismal Formation classes on the nature of the sacrament of baptism and on how to raise children as Catholics. The parish clergy may dispense some parents from these classes based on their history with the parish and their reputation as serious Catholics. All others must ordinarily be registered and active in the parish for at least six months before baptism can take place, unless a letter is provided from another parish priest saying that the parents who were formerly members of his parish were indeed registered and active parishioners of his parish. A child cannot be baptized unless the parish clergy can be reasonably sure that the child will be raised in the faith, and that the request for baptism is not based on merely a desire to fulfill the expectations of other family members or friends, or superstition. In the case of serious illness or emergency of the child, however, all such preparations and prerequisites are waived and can be fulfilled after the baptism of the child. All Catholics should be aware of their responsibility to provide for the baptism of their children in such a situation, even if they must do it themselves.

First Penance and Holy Communion

Parents who have been bringing their children every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation to Mass will naturally want to see their children with them at the Altar to receive Holy Communion. Any child who has reached the age of reason may enroll in the parish's program for preparation for First Penance and Holy Communion. In order for the child to receive the sacraments, however, he and his family must have signed the Covenant and kept its stipulations, and the child must *of his own free will* request to receive the sacraments. Furthermore, the child and his Catholic parents must pass a test of basic knowledge in order to receive the sacrament. Normally, baptized children in the second grade or above may be enrolled in the program, but any Catholic child who has not received the sacraments who can fulfill the requirements may be enrolled.

Confirmation

Confirmation completes the sacraments of initiation and is given as a sacrament specifically to bestow the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. At this parish it is the culmination of an intense period of catechesis which seeks to impart a thorough knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine, as well as the ability to defend the faith. Only children who of their own free will desire to request the sacrament may enter the program of preparation for confirmation. If their parents are supportive of the decision, they must sign the Covenant and keep its stipulations. If their parents are not supportive of the decision, the children may still receive the sacrament as long as they fulfill their part of the Covenant and all of the other requirements. The child must pass a test of basic knowledge in order to receive the sacrament, and Catholic parents are asked to pass the same test, although their failure to do so does not bar their children from receiving the sacrament. Normally, baptized children in the eighth grade or above who have already received First Penance and Holy Communion may be enrolled in the program, but any Catholic child above the age of reason who has received the above sacraments who has not already received confirmation and who can fulfill the requirements may be enrolled. Children whose religious education stopped after second grade to be resumed in eighth will be at a serious disadvantage, and remedial classes may be necessary for them to catch up what has been lost.

Preschool and Young Children

Let the little children come unto Me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Mark 10.14). Our Blessed LORD loved the smallest of His creatures, and families should make sure that their children are part of the Church from their baptism. While families are always encouraged to come together to Sunday Mass, sometimes children become uncomfortable during Mass. In order to preserve an atmosphere of reverence for worship, parents are requested to take their children out of Mass to the narthex, the Quiet Rooms in the church or outside when necessary. A nursery is provided for infants through four year olds and a K5 program during the school year at the 10a Mass. The K5 program centers on learning our Catholic faith through experiential education in the Bible and a Montessori based Mass study.

Teenagers

The High School Youth Group of the parish is not primarily a catechetical school but rather a *School of the LORD's Service*. The Group is geared principally, although not exclusively, towards post-confirmation high school youth or to those preparing for confirmation. The activities of the Youth Group are faith-centered and vary anywhere from apologetics classes and fun trips to Holy Hours and community service. The idea is to impart a comprehensive Christian formation of the entire person: *intellectual*, by deepening catechesis; *spiritual*, by training teenagers in the life of prayer and devotion; *personal*, by giving them the opportunity to spend time and work with other Catholic teenagers in friendship and *apostolic*, by getting them involved in evangelization and community service projects.

Adult Ongoing Formation

Our Catholic faith is very enriching, and the more that we understand it, the more our participation in it can be rewarding. Our parish offers several an Adult Religious Education series on Thursday nights while the Religious Education Program is in session. Adult religious education is done in modules of various studies, and covers everything from topics in moral theology and dogma to annulment processes and Church history. We also offer an adult Bible Study throughout the week, as well as periodic classes on various topics and themes.

All registered and active members of the parish are encouraged to study their faith and to support one of the parish's adult ongoing formation programs.

Inquiry Classes

Many people become curious about the Catholic faith because of something they have read or someone they have met. Sometimes they are unbaptized, or are baptized Christians of any number of ecclesial communities, practicing and not so practicing. Others are Catholics who are returning to the faith after an absence of some time, or those who do not feel themselves to be adequately catechized. For them we offer an inquiry into the faith class called *Introduction to Catholicism*. It is a lecture/seminar style class which systematically explores the basic tenets of Catholic faith, morals and practice. The class is open to anyone who wishes to attend. Often Catholics who are returning to the faith are encouraged to take this

class, as are non-Catholic parents of Catholic children and non-Catholics who are considering marrying Catholics.

Catholic Christianity, Peter Kreeft
Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechumenate and the RCIA

Teenagers and adults who are not baptized and who wish to be baptized attend the Introduction to Catholicism classes and are also involved in the Catechumenate program. In this program, which meets every night after the Introduction to Catholicism class, catechumens preparing for baptism discuss those things which will help them to be better Christians. Emphasis on biblical literacy and Catholic moral teaching helps them to be better Christians, as well as participating in some of the rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Ordinarily, catechumens are received into the Church by baptism at Easter.

We Believe, Alfred Gilbey,
Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition

Conversion and the RCIA

Those who have been validly baptized in another Christian community but who are discerning coming into full communion with the Catholic Church meet with the Conversion program. In this program, which meets every night after the Introduction to Catholicism class, candidates for reception into the Church discuss those things which will help them be better Catholics. Emphasis on apologetics and Church history helps them to be better Catholics, as well as participating in some of the rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Ordinarily, converts are received into the Church by profession of faith and confirmation at Easter or Pentecost.

Belief of Catholics, Ronald Knox
Triumph, Wm Crocker

Re-membering

Once a year a campaign is put on by the parish to attract Catholics who have lapsed from the practice of the faith. Newly received converts to the faith are invited to be a part of a program where inactive Catholics are invited back to Church and they participate in a month-long program of discussions to help them transition back into the practice of the faith. Many of the Catholics who then return to the practice of the faith are asked to attend the inquiry classes.

Scripture Study

“Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of Christ,” the Church Father Saint Jerome once said. As Catholics, we know that the Word of God is transmitted through Scripture and Tradition. It is vital for Catholics to know the Bible well in order to defend and live their faith. Study of scripture is offered throughout all of the religious education programs for children and adults, but there are also opportunities for adult bible study as well as *lectio divina*, where Catholics get together every week to read through, pray together and share their thoughts on the scriptures for Sunday Mass.

Catholic families must include daily Bible reading as part of their spiritual program, and the parish will often have campaigns to make sure that everyone has access to a Bible and to Bible resources for prayer and private study.

Catholic Identity

The traditions of the Church are ways in which the living Tradition of our faith is incarnate. Often the parish will sponsor seminars, workshops, conferences and speakers on various topics of Catholic life. The parish also warmly embraces a rich devotional life, but giving free scope for parishioners to pray traditional Catholic devotions. Our parish has Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet, the Miraculous Medal novena on a regular basis as well as seasonal devotions such as Stations of the Cross and others.

The cultural aspect of our universal Catholic identity is also very important to our community. We celebrate all of the rich diversity of the cultures within our community by special feasts and celebrations throughout the year. They are all suffused with a religious and a celebratory theme.

Evangelisation and the Social Apostolate

The parish community does not exist for itself. *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28.19). We have a duty not only to live our faith, but to invite others to join us. Each member of the community is asked to share his faith with others, and to provide resources, especially reading materials, for those interested in the Catholic faith. The parish also brings in speakers and sponsors various initiatives for evangelization.

One of the main ways in which we as a Church evangelizes is by means of the social apostolate. Our partnering as a parish and as individual Christians means that all of our parishioners are involved in the Church's ministry to the world. Every religious education program we have includes a Christian service component, which translates faith into action and gives disciples opportunities to evangelize and help the less fortunate. Those involved in these programs are encouraged to become a part of the many ways in which our parishioners minister to the wider community and to souls. The parish does not exist for itself, but to bring the love of God to all people.

Being a Christian Disciple and Your Parish

This is your parish family. As a part of it, you have the tremendous opportunity to become a part of a network of fellow believers in Jesus Christ, allowing you to grow spiritually as you may never have before. If you have never gotten involved so much in a parish before, now is the time. Please feel free to contact the Director of Christian Formation, the Director of Christian Formation, or the parish clergy with any questions about any of the programs we have here. Together we can build the kingdom of God made of hearts united in one LORD, one faith and one baptism. Our answer to the LORD's question then becomes, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*

Contacts

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