



## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: Lesson 5

### THE BEATITUDES continued

Eternal Father,

Your holiness separated us from You, for who can come into the presence of a pure and holy God and live? But so great was Your love for us that You sought to redeem us and all creation through the matter that You originally created as pure and holy but which had been corrupted through the sin of our original parent's Fall from grace. And so You deemed to come to us as God enfleshed—enfleshed in our mortal flesh to breathe the air we breath, to drink the water we drink, and to experience creation as we experience creation. But that was not enough. In Your love for us and through the sacrifice of God who is man, You baptized us with the precious blood of Your Son so that we might become part of the New Creation, no longer children of Adam but through Your Son, Jesus Christ, we became children of a pure and holy God. Children in whom a new heart had been planted—a heart called to purity, peace, and self-sacrificial love—a heart to love as Jesus first loved us. Send us Your Holy Spirit to be our teacher, Lord, as we study the promises made to us in the Law of the New Covenant. We pray in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

#### BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

*"We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify, lead by the hand and counsel prudently." St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio 2, 71 as quoted in CCC# 1589*

*"Blessed are those who observe his instructions, who seek him with all their hearts..."*  
Psalm 119:2 [New Jerusalem translation]

*"Who may go up the mountain of the LORD? Who can stand in his holy place? The clean of hand and pure of heart..."* Psalm 24:3-4

When we submit to the sovereignty of God in "poverty of spirit" we take the first step toward our rebirth as sons and daughters of God. In our submission as spiritual children He promises us eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven and in our rebirth through baptism we come as His New Covenant children before the throne of God. Face to face with a pure and holy God we become aware of our imperfections and taking the next step we mourn our sins and the sins of the world. Our sincere contrition purifies us and He comforts us and strengthens us in our struggle to conquer sin. Drawing close to God we desire to be more perfectly conformed to His will. We yield our selfish will to His eternal will and in a spirit of renewal our Father gives us our inheritance—as His children we conquer in meekness as we serve Him in His Church, the Kingdom of



Heaven on earth—an earth that no longer can intimidate or dominate us because we serve the Lord who dominates the earth. United with our Father in spirit and in will, He gives us a hunger and thirst for righteousness as manifested in His Son. This is the turning point in the spiritual journey, when we turn from what we need to give God to our focus on the Son of God and what He will give us. In Christ we die to sin and are raised to righteousness and Jesus feeds us on our journey with His very flesh and blood, such is the depth of His love as He continues to more deeply spiritually transform us to His image—an image that calls for a pure and holy heart as our Savior is pure and holy.

We feel the need to empty ourselves of worldly attractions and concerns and to fill our entire being with the love of Jesus our Savior, becoming an imitation of Christ in our lives. Our cry becomes the cry of David, the beloved's in Psalm 51:12 (verse 10 in some translations), *"A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit."*

Matthew 5:8, *"Blessed are the clean of heart for they will see God..."*

Under the Old Covenant Law, ritual purity prepared the Covenant people for the coming of a pure and holy Messiah, but in his homily on the Beatitudes St. Augustan points out that the external ceremonial purity as expressed in the Old Law was not enough. The singleness of heart which submits itself in perfect love to God's will is the purity God seeks. **We cannot live the "New Law" of the Beatitudes without Christ any more that the Jews under the Old Covenant could perfectly keep the Law of Moses.** In the Old Covenant circumcised flesh was a blood sacrifice which symbolized the sacrifice of self to Yahweh, but it is not circumcised flesh or the sin sacrifice of animals that pleases God.

**Question:** What personal sacrifice of every believer is pleasing to God? See Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 and David's plea to God in Psalm 51:18-19.

**Answer:** God requires repentant, humbled / "circumcised" hearts:

- Deuteronomy 10:16: *"Circumcise your heart then and be obstinate no longer..."*
- Deuteronomy 30:6: *"Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul, and so will live."*
- Psalm 51:18-19: *"For you do not desire sacrifice; a burnt offering you would not accept. My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit; God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart."*

The Greek word for "pure" is *katharos*. It is an adjective meaning "pure as in being cleansed." The heart, or *kardia* in Greek, is the most vital organ in the human body.

We think of our hearts as the internal instrument of our emotions but the ancients did not understand the function of "a heart" in this way. For the peoples of ancient times,



the Jews, Greeks or Romans, different body parts had different physiological functions. The Jews believed that anger was situated in the nose with love, compassion and most other emotions in the kidney, liver and bowels. To the people of Jesus' time the heart reflected the total substance of a man or woman; the inward part of a person as opposed to what is visible. Hearing this beatitude the Jews and Israelites listening would think of the heart as the center of the faculties and personality, the seat of knowledge and understanding—not just feelings but also thoughts, words, decisions and actions proceed from the heart. The inspired writers of Scripture recognized that depravity and deceit emerge from the human heart as sin, doing its greatest damage to the inward life from which sin then defiles the whole man or woman [see Matthew 15:19-20]. But the inspired writers of Sacred Scripture also recognized that the heart represented the hidden depths of one's spiritual being and regarded the heart as the focus of divine influence from which a man or woman could be purified by God from the inside out [see Romans 2:15; Acts 15:9 and 1Peter 3:4]. Jesus identified the heart as the seat of forgiveness when He warned the crowds, in the parable of the Merciless Servant, of the punishment inflicted on one who refuses to forgive, *"So my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart [Matthew 18:35];"* identifying the depths of one's heart as the place where the pain inflicted by others in our lives is either "bound or loosed." Jesus taught that the Covenant believer who offers his heart to the Holy Spirit is released from the earthly power to continually feel a hurt; instead the Holy Spirit turns that hurt into compassion and purifies the believer's heart by turning that hurtful memory into intercession and prayer for the offender, *"as we forgive those who trespass against us" [Matthew 5:12]* for it is *"our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, ...by his stripes we were healed" [Isaiah 53:4-5, prophecy of the Suffering Messiah].* Also see *The Lord's Prayer*, Matthew 5:43-44, and CCC # 2842-44]. Therefore, when Jesus spoke of the blessedness of a cleansed heart, His 1<sup>st</sup> century listeners understood He was speaking of the total reflection of a person called to purity in every aspect of his or her life.

**Question:** What else does Scripture teach about the heart?

1. What does the Bible teach about the heart in Psalm 17:3; 1Samuel 16:7; and Psalm 44:22 (21)?
2. What does the Bible teach about the heart in Ezekiel 36:26-27; Psalms 51: 12(10), 19 (17); and Jeremiah 4:4; 31:31-33?
3. What does the Bible teach about the heart in Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalms 105:3; and Psalm 119:2, & 10?
4. What does the Bible teach about the heart in 1Kings 3:9; Hosea 2:16; and Deuteronomy 30:11-14?
5. What does the Bible teach about the heart in 1 Samuel 12:20, 24; Deuteronomy 6:5-6; and Psalm 111:1?



**Answers:**

1. God knows the depth of each human heart: *"You have tested my heart, searched it in the night. You have tried me by fire, but find no malice in me."* Psalm 17:3 [also see 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:22(21)].
2. The heart represents the center of religious/spiritual awareness and morality, *"I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you. Taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees."* Ezekiel 36:26-27 [also see Psalms 51: 12(10), 19 (17); Jeremiah 4:4; 31:31-33].
3. It is from the heart that we must seek God, *"Yet there too you shall seek the LORD, your God; and you shall indeed find him when you search after him with your whole heart and your whole soul."* Deuteronomy 4:29. [also see Psalms 105:3; 119:2, 10]
4. It is from the heart that we listen to God and to hear Him speak to us, *"Give your servants, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."* 1Kings 3:9 [also see Hosea 2:16; Deuteronomy 30:11-14]
5. It is from the heart that we must serve Him, praise Him, and love Him *"Do not fear', Samuel answered them. 'It is true that you have committed all this evil; still you must not turn from the LORD, but must worship him with your whole heart.' [...]. 'But you must fear the LORD and worship him faithfully with your whole heart; keep in mind the great things he has done among you.'" 1 Samuel 12:20, 24; in Deuteronomy 6:5-6, "Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today." And in Psalm 111:1 "I will praise the LORD with all my heart in the assembled congregations of the upright."*

**Question:** The word "spirituality" is one of the most poorly defined and most often abused words in the Christian vocabulary. Even Buddhists and Hindus are "spiritual" people. Biblically is it correct to define "Christian spirituality" or "the Christian spiritual life" as simply a "feeling" of closeness to God? Look up the word "spiritual" or "spiritual life" in a Catholic dictionary.

**Answer:** As defined by the abridged edition of the Modern Catholic Dictionary "spiritual life" is *"the life of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the souls of the faithful and enabling them to praise and love God and serve him in the practice of virtue. It is called the spiritual life because: 1. its animating principle is the Spirit of God, the "Soul of the soul" in sanctifying grace; 2. it is the supernatural life of the human spirit; 3. it is mainly lived out in the spiritual faculties of intellect and will, although affecting the whole person, body and soul."* [page 417, Modern Catholic Dictionary, abridged edition].

It is the "spiritual" believer who seeks to serve God with a clean heart. Scripture tells us it is those of "clean hearts" who will turn to God with no reservations, with no hypocrisy, but with only genuine repentance for sin and with love and obedience. St. Jose-Maria



Escriva wrote that *“A man is worth what his heart is worth”* and St. Paul the Apostle’s prayer for the community at Ephesus was, *“May he [God] enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his holy people.”* Ephesians 1:18 [note: most translations have “eyes of your mind” but the literal translation is “heart”; see New Jerusalem page 1933 note “r”].

Psalms 24 connects the clean or pure in heart with the “righteous” believers who worship Yahweh in the Temple. According to Jewish tradition, it was Psalm 24:1-10 which was sung on the first day of each week in the Temple worship services in Jerusalem.

**Question:** If this psalm was indeed sung on the “first” day of the week, what was that day and what was its significance? Hint: the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the Old Covenant Sabbath, was Saturday.

**Answer:** The first day of the week was our “Sunday”. For the Old Covenant people it was the day Creation began. For the New Covenant people it will be the first day of the New Creation when Jesus arose from the dead!

Psalm 24:1-10 defines the character the worshippers who are clean of heart. Please read this passage.

Verses 3-6 identify who is worthy to join in the liturgical celebration.

**Question:** Who is it who is worthy to come to Yahweh’s Temple and offer worship to God as identified in verse 4?

**Answer:** The clean of heart, or literally in the Hebrew *“the one whose hands are clean”*. The singular is used but the identification is for the entire class of righteous worshippers.

**Question:** How does Psalm 24:3-6 define those of pure hearts—the righteous believers?

**Answer:** As for the clean of heart:

- They can stand before God and offer Him worship
- They do not worship idols [material or spiritual]
- They do not lie or make false promises
- Their reward will be blessings and justice
- They love God and “seek His face” = do His will

**Question:** In verses 7-10 of Psalm 24 who is the King of Glory for whom the faithful Covenant people of pure hearts wait?





**Answer:** The King of Glory is also identified in the Old Testament as Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, commander of the heavenly army. The Old Covenant faithful came to understand this aspect of Yahweh's authority to be embodied in the promised Messiah of Daniel 7:13-14, eternal, holy and mighty! This psalm was one of the messianic psalms that looked forward to the coming to the Davidic King who would rule Israel and the Church forever! We know Him as Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus' standard for purity of heart requires that the piety of the believer depends on an inward transformation and not only on an outward show of ritual piety. In Matthew 6:21 Jesus will teach that one's heart must be in heaven, where one's treasure is to be found: *"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."* Purity of heart then identifies the true internal self of the believer in union with God. Purity of heart is to will only one thing and that is conformity with God's will with all of one's being—internally and externally in one's thoughts, words and actions. This is the kind of man or woman who "knows the heart of God."

**Question:** Of all the Old Testament heroes and heroines who is identified as one who was *"after God's own heart"*? See 1 Samuel 13:14 and 16:1-13.

**Answer:** David the shepherd-boy, musician, poet-warrior, lover of beautiful woman, adulterer, and murderer who was King of Israel. He was an imperfect man who yearned throughout his life to present himself to his God in perfect purity of heart.

With all his imperfections why did God so love David? There are many incidents in the Bible stories of David's life which illustrate his relationship with God. For example:

- David's bravery in the defeat of the giant Philistine, Goliath brought him to the attention of King Saul as a valiant warrior [David had already served Saul as a musician and armor bearer; see 1 Samuel 16:18-23]. It was this first victory that would begin David's career as a legendary warrior; however, David did not claim this victory for himself. Instead he gave God the victory, as he told the Philistine enemy *"All this multitude, too, shall learn that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves. For the battle is the LORD's and he shall deliver you into our hands."* [1 Samuel 17:47].
- Unfortunately over time as David's fame as a warrior and leader of men grew so did King Saul's jealousy. Eventually Saul's enmity grew to the point that David had to flee for his life. For years he lived the miserable existence of a hunted outlaw, but he wasn't only responsible for himself, he had the added burden of leading others who had come to share his exile along with their wives and children. There was an occasion when David could have easily killed King Saul, which would have given him the opportunity to assume the leadership of Israel, something he had already been promised by God. Despite the urging of his men David passed his Covenant Ordeal by resisting the temptation [1 Samuel 24:1-23] and in restraining his men he



told them, *“The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, as to lay a hand on him, for he is the LORD’s anointed.”* David trusted in God’s plan for his life and had committed himself to the will of God in everything, in his sufferings and in his victories.

- But there was a second Covenant ordeal that David did not pass. The failure of David in the ordeal concerning the woman Bathsheba may also shed some light on the unique relationship between David and His God. A summary of the story is that David loved the woman Bathsheba who was the wife of one of David’s officers. When she became pregnant David tried to arrange for her husband to return to her bed so he would believe he had conceived the child with her. But Uriah was too conscientious a soldier and spent the night in the king’s barracks. Fearing that Bathsheba’s sin would be discovered and that she would be stoned to death, according to the ordinances of the Law [Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24], David then arranged the death of Uriah in battle and married the widow. Nathan, the holy prophet of God confronts David and through a parable in essence asked David the same question God asked Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:13, and the same question God asked Cain in Genesis 4:10: “What have you done?” When the prophet Nathan renounced David’s sin, David immediately confessed and repented his sin. In 2 Samuel 12:13 David cried out in repentance, *“I have sinned against the LORD.”* [You can read the complete story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25]. As a result of his sin, the child born of his illicit union with Bathsheba died. David mourned until the child died and then he ceased mourning and comforted his wife.

Please read 2 Samuel 12:13-25 and then answer these questions:

**Question:** If God had truly forgiven David [2 Samuel 12:13] then why was it that the innocent child born from their illicit union had to die?

**Question:** Why did David grieve and prostrate himself before the Lord in fasting and prayer so long as the child lived but as soon as the child died why is it that David ceases his mourning?

**Question:** “Why, despite his many faults, did God love David?”

**Answers:** As a result of his sincere contrition and repentance David’s sin was forgiven but there remained the accountability for sin and therefore it was God’s judgment that David had to forfeit the life of the beloved child. It may seem cruel to us but God is not cruel—for an innocent child to come “home” to heaven is not a sad event from God’s perspective. David was suffering the “double consequence” of sin. Mortal sin is a direct, knowledgeable, and willful disregard for the commands of God. Mortal sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of receiving



God's gift of eternal life without forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ. However, every sin, including venial sin, is still sin and must be purified—either here on earth through our suffering as a consequence of that sin, through contrition and penance as expressed in acts of charity, or after death in the state which the Church identifies as Purgatory. In Old Testament times the dead were consigned to *Sheol*, the grave, which contained the righteous dead separated from the unrighteous who experienced the punishment for their sins [see Matthew 18:34-35 & CCC# 633; 1030-32]. This purification of “cleansing fire” frees one of the “temporal punishment” of sin. The Catechism teaching on this subject records, *“All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven [ # 1030].”* However, in David’s case, the forgiveness of sin which resulted in the restoration of communion with God addressed the remission of his separation from God and reestablished David’s fellowship with God, but the temporal punishment of his sin remained because David was still accountable for the sin he had brought into the world [see CCC #1472 -73].

In spite of the Prophet Nathan’s pronouncement that the child would die, David sincerely continued to repent his sin and in an act of contrition he fasted and prayed that the child’s life might be spared. So long as there was hope that God would show mercy David persisted in prayer, but when the child died David completely accepted the will of God. It was David’s sincere desire to conform his will to the will of God that gave him the kind of heart that earned him the name of God’s “beloved” and a man “after God’s own heart”. David in Hebrew [*DWD* in proto-Hebrew and *dawid*, with vowels] means, “beloved.” [*Dictionary of the Bible*, John L. McKenzie, S.J.]

But purity of heart cannot come from our own internal cleansing. Jesus told his disciples “*You are pure because of the word which I have spoken to you*” [John 15:3].  
**We can only have a clean heart through the supernatural grace of God.**

**Question:** What is the supernatural gift of grace by which our hearts are cleansed?

**Answer:** God the Holy Spirit. Purity of heart can only come about through the work of God the Holy Spirit. He is our gift from the Father and the Son to be the source of living water welling up from the heart of Christ and flowing out to every believer [see John 7:38]. He puts Christ in our hearts, circumcising our old hearts and giving us a new heart conforming us to His image. It is Christ dwelling in us who gives us a truly purified interior self. When St. Paul wrote “*I live now not I but Christ lives in me*” in Galatians 2:20 he wanted us to understand that our deepest identity is to be Christ—it is the only way we will be able to return to the pre-Eden “image of God.” And what is the result? It is that whatever you do, or say, or see reflects the image of God. St. Paul wrote to St. Titus in Titus 1:15, “*Everything is pure to the pure!*” **A pure heart beats to the living revelation of Jesus Christ!**





David struggled with cleanliness of heart and often failed. But in his failure he always knew where to turn—repeatedly he turned back to God. For us the call for a cleansed heart is so much easier because Christ’s sacrificial death has purified us through His precious blood. Through the work of the Holy Spirit He has “circumcised” our hearts—He has given us new hearts conformed to His precious sacred heart and this transformation has given us a unique promise—to see the face of God.

### FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

*“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, Against Heresies, IV.20.5*

*“The LORD is just and loves just deeds; the upright shall see his face.” Psalm 11:7*

*“Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14*

**Question:** In Sacred Scripture who are the few given this very special privilege? Can you name at least one such encounter?

**Answer:** Everyone who saw the face of Jesus of Nazareth literally saw the face of God. It is also possible that Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and the 70 elders of Israel saw God during the sacrificial meal that ratified the Sinai Covenant in Exodus 24:9-11. Verse 10 records that “..they beheld the God of Israel”, and verse 11 “.. After gazing on God, they could still eat and drink.” In Exodus 33:11 Scripture records that “*The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another.*” But it is uncertain if these men literally saw God’s face because in Exodus 33:20 Yahweh warns Moses, “*But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still loves.*” And St. John writes in John 1:18 “*No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.*”

In the New Covenant Jesus tells His disciples that to see God is the promise for those of “clean hearts.” This is a promise that can have two fulfillments; one in the present and another in the future.

**Question:** In what two ways can this promise be fulfilled, present and future?

**Answer:** This promise not only concerns the promised beatific vision in the spiritual



body for those who experience a holy death and come face to face with God in the eternal kingdom, but to experience God on this earth through works of mercy and kindness in which one sees the face of God in each person to whom love and comfort is given in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

We were created, after all, in the image and likeness of God—an image that was damaged in our original parent’s fall from grace. In the Old Covenant that “image” was **partially** restored to those who remained in covenant with God and who received a divine call to obedience in a predestined role in Salvation History. For example in the Old Testament the title “son of God” was applied to those in the covenant with God continued through Adam’s righteous son Seth [see Genesis 6:2-4], as in the sons of Abraham through Isaac and his son Jacob and Jacob’s sons who were the physical fathers of the 12 Tribes of Israel [Exodus 4:22; also Hosea 11:1]; for those who received a special anointing by God, as in a king of Israel from David’s line [2 Samuel 7:12-17; Psalm 2:7]; and for angels as divine messengers [the Greek word *angelos* means messenger and was also a term designated for prophets] who were also called “sons of God” [see Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 38:7]. But that perfection of grace that was lost to humanity in the Fall was restored through Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection by God the Holy Spirit so that in the New Covenant in Christ our image and likeness of God can be restored. St. John promises the faithful in 1 John 3:2-3 *“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him [Jesus]. For we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he [Christ] is pure. It is Christ dwelling in us who makes us pure.* [see CCC# 359]

The Dominican scholar Father Raymond of Capua, the spiritual director, friend, and biographer, of St. Catherine of Siena [1347-1380] records St. Catherine told him at one time she had a devotion to repeating Psalm 51:12 (verse 10 in some translations), *“A clean heart create for me, God; renew in me a steadfast spirit.”* Then one day she had a vision in which the Lord came to her, removed her physical heart and inserted a new heart, telling her that He was giving her His own heart. Later when Catherine was gravely ill, Father Raymond visited her. As he sat by her bed he saw her countenance change and he suddenly realized that he was looking into the face of Christ Himself [Life of Catherine of Siena, by Raymund of Capua]. St. Catherine had what St. Paul of Tarsus had also discovered and that is purity of heart means dying to self and living for Christ. To have purity of heart we must claim what St. Paul claimed for himself in Galatians 2:19b-20, *“I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.”* The Blessed Therese of Calcutta understood what it truly meant to die to self and live for Christ. The Christ living in her heart allowed her to see the face of Christ in the face of every suffering man and woman she washed and clothed and bathed and helped to die with dignity.



The inspired writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews links “seeing God” with holiness, with comes through purity of heart, and peacemaking: *Seek peace with all people and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord.*” Filling our hearts with Christ produces a purity of spirit that produces in our hearts peace that overflows out of our hearts and touches each person we meet— a right relationship with God leads to the desire for a right relationship with others. When our clean hearts overflow with Christ’s love we are promised “...*the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” [Philippians 4:7]. The result is that we become His emissaries; bearers of Christ bearing peace.

### BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

*“...the children of God are peacemakers, because nothing resists God, and surely children ought to have the likeness of their father.”* [The Sermon on the Mount, St. Augustan [Augustine], Book I chapter 2.9

*“The peace shown by peacemakers brings a harvest of justice.”* James 3:18

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* Matthew 5:9

St. Augustan wrote that the peacemakers are not only peaceful, but that they are active makers of peace. They encourage peace around them by healing alienations and discord and bringing about reconciliation. But this peace begins within them as they conform themselves to the image of God, and then the peace they generate diffuses from them to the world! [Augustan, *Sermon on the Mount*, Book I chapter 2.9]. This is the kind of peacemaking we must seek. Internal peace transformed into militantly spiritual and joyously unquenchable peace shared with our family, our friends, and the world as our witness of a life conformed to the Prince of Peace!

**Question:** Peace, or *Shalom* in Hebrew, is the traditional Semitic salutation. Jesus’ usual greeting was the typical Semitic, “*Peace be with you*” [used 5 times in the Gospels]. But how do these three New Testament passages speak of “peace”: Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15; and Romans 15:33?

**Answers:**

- Phil 4:7 “*Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*” = peace of God
- Colossians 3:15 “*And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.*” = peace of Christ,
- Romans 15:33 “*The God of peace be with all of you.*” = God of peace



Peace in the context of these 3 passages is a gift of God. But in John's Gospel when Jesus speaks of "peace" He also defines the concept of peace by linking "peace" to His mission.

**Question:** In these three passages in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of peace. In the context of His mission how does Jesus define "peace" in each of these passages: John 14:27; 16:32-33; 20:19-29?

**Answer:**

- John 14:27, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."* = the promise of peace defined as the gift of salvation
- John 16:32-33, *"Behold, the hour is coming and has arrived when each of you will be scattered to his own home and you will leave me alone. But I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have troubles, but take courage, I have conquered the world."* = the peace that comes from faith in Christ.
- John 20:19-29, *"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' [...]. 'Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' [...]. Blessed are those who have not seen and believed."* This is the typical greeting again, but it takes on a message of rejoicing in the miracle of the Resurrection of the Messiah and the promise of salvation as it is given through the breath of Christ from which the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit [verse 22].

**Question:** In the celebration of the Mass when do we remember Jesus' call to peace?

**Answer:**

1. When the priest, "in the person of Christ" extends his hands to us and says "Peace be with you", in the same way that Jesus greeted His disciples.
2. Also in the "sign of peace" which comes after the words of Consecration.

As we move into the Communion Rite we, as the Body of Christ, recite the Lord's Prayer and then we are called by the priest to make the "sign of peace". All the preceding prayers in the celebration of the Mass have been directed to God the Father. But now, after the rite of washing his hands to show his ritual cleanliness and purity of heart, the priest for the first time directly addresses God the Son. As the congregation continues to stand after the Lord's Prayer the priest, with his hands extended toward the faithful, prays for peace:



*“Lord Jesus Christ, You said to Your Apostles: ‘I leave you peace, my peace I give you.’ Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever.”*

After the priest, on our behalf, makes the petition for peace to Jesus our Savior, the congregation responds with a mighty *“Amen”*.

**Question:** In this one petition there are really 3 implied pleas for peace. What are they?

**Answer:** In this petition we are not only praying for our personal peace but also for peace for the whole faith community as well as peace for the universal Church.

Note: The sign of peace, also known as the “kiss of peace” is an ancient rite that can be traced back to the very earliest years of the Church. St. Justin, in his letter to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius c. 150-155AD wrote a description of Christian worship in which he mentions the “sign” or “kiss” of peace” [see *Apologies*, St. Justin Martyr, Book 1.67]

After our *“Amen”*, meaning for us, “we believe” or, “it is true”, we receive the priest’s greeting: *“The peace of the Lord be with you always”*, to which we respond *“And also with you.”* Then the priest encourages us to, *“Let us offer each other the sign of peace.”* At this invitation the congregation exchanges some sign of love and peace with families, and then to the extended members of our covenant family sitting next to us. But this is more than just an opportunity to express love, friendship, and unity.

**Question:** What other last opportunity is there for us in this rite that precedes Communion?

**Answer:** It is a last opportunity to mend hurt feelings and to forgive and be forgiven before coming forward to receive the Lord Jesus in Holy Eucharist. In this rite we are in effect carrying out the 5<sup>th</sup> petition of the “Lord’s Prayer” *“...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..”*, just as Jesus instructed us in Matthew 5:23-24: *“Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you. Leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

At this point in the Mass we should feel our very souls flooded with the sense of peace and faith that is a consequence of our desire to be united with Christ and His Church. As the priest breaks what was the bread, but which is now the Body of Jesus our Savior, and as we sing our hymn to the Lamb which ends with the phrase *“Lamb of God your take away the sins of the world: grant us peace”*, our hearts should be beating loudly within our breasts. This is the time of the victory song of the Lamb when the heavenly choirs of angels and saints are singing: *“Alleluia! The Lord has established*





*his reign, God, the almighty. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready!* [Revelation 19:6b-7] It is at that point in the Mass as we prepare to go forward to Communion that we should abandoned ourselves completely into the will of God through Christ Jesus who imparts to us “*a peace beyond understanding*” as with great joy we ready ourselves to go forward to receive Christ as children of the Most High God!

### FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD

*“But to those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself.”* John 1:11-13

*“...for they will be called children of God.”*

This promise is literally “*sons of God*”, a title that occurs only here in Matthew’s Gospel. (see Matthew 5:9)

**Question:** This promise has what two dimensions not previously available for the Old Covenant laity. What are these two dimensions which humanity lost in the Fall from grace?

**Answer:**

1. that degree of intimacy known as divine sonship/daughtership which had not been experienced since the time of our first parents before the Fall
2. a restored likeness to God, a child “in the image of the Father” – the image of grace that was the condition of Adam and Eve in the garden before the Fall from grace.

It will help to understand the dimensions of this promise to look carefully at what St. John wrote in his Gospel concerning this rebirth into the family of God: *“But to those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself.”* John 1:11-13 [New Jerusalem Translation]

Think of the power of the statement in this verse!

**Question:** *“..to those who believed in his name..”* What does this phrase mean? Hint see John 20:31 & 1John 5:1

**Answer:** To those who believed Jesus is the Son of God the Messiah of Israel. To these who believe God gave the power of divine son [and daughter]-ship. 1Jn 5:1 “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God...”

It is also important to understand that to the ancients one’s name expressed the sum of the qualities that marked the nature or character of that person. To believe in the name



of Jesus Christ is to accept as true the revelation contained in that name: that Jesus is fully man and fully God come to redeem the world. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great biblical scholar and theologian wrote about this passage: *“those who believe in his name are those who fully hold the same of Christ not in any way lessening his divinity or his humanity.”* [St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary of St. John*, 1:12-13].

*“he gave the power to become children of God..”* The word in Greek that is translated here “power” is *exousia*. In other Bible translations it may be rendered as “right”. The use of *exousia* in this passage does not indicate only the possibility or the ability to become *“children of God”*, but legitimate right derived from the authority of the Word. And it is only through the Word that we have this *“power.”*

That Christ gave us the “power” is the same way of saying that He gave us a free gift and that gift was sanctifying grace.

**Question:** How is this “free gift” extended to us through the Church?

**Answer:** This gift is a supernatural infusion of grace, which is extended through the sacrament of Baptism to everyone. The only condition is that we have faith. The great St. Athanasius explained it this way: *“The Son of God became man in order that the sons of men, the sons of Adam, might become sons of God.....He [Adam] is the son of God by nature; we, by grace..”* [St Athanasius, *The Incarnation*]. This is the gift of divine son-ship and we cannot truly call ourselves “Children of God” until this miracle regenerates us with “new life” into the family of God. It is what Jesus will reveal to Nicodemus in chapter 3 of St. John’s Gospel.

*“...born not from human stock, or human desire or human will..”* The more literal translation is: *“were begotten not of bloods [plural], nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.”*

**Question:** In the Gospel of John 1:11-23 St. John defines this supernatural birth into divine son-ship in the negative by listing 3 ways we were not born into God’s Covenant Family. What are they?

**Answer:**

1. not of blood
2. not of the will and
3. not of the flesh

The Greek word for blood is actually in the plural form = *“bloods”*. To the ancients all bodily fluids were part of the life force. In other words this is not a birth by the standards of nature: not by sperm= descent, not by desire or lust, and not generated by



procreation through human power. This is purely a supernatural birth from above; a free gift of faith and grace.

- # 1265 of the Catechism states: “ *Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte “a new creature”, an adopted son of God, who has become a “partaker of the divine nature,” member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.*”
- #460 of the Catechism teaches: “*The word became flesh to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’: ‘For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man’ so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.’ ‘The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.*”
- [also see the other CCC references on the Sacrament of Baptism #1213-1274].

**Question:** In the Old Testament are all the children of Adam called “sons of God”?

**Answer:** No, it is a title reserved only for the angelic beings of Yahweh’s heavenly court; for Covenant keepers, especially for Israel as God’s holy nation [rarely used in the Old Testament]; and for the kings of the House of David from whose line the Messiah would come.

Note: In the Old Testament the term “sons of God” was infrequently used but never did Covenant believers take upon themselves the right to address Yahweh as “Father”. This is a privilege imparted to us in the New Covenant only through God the Son.

It is interesting that peace making and sonship/daughtership are brought together in this blessing. In 1 Chronicles 22:9-10 peacemaking and sonship are brought together in King David’s son Solomon when Yahweh promises David, “*However, a son is to be born to you. He will be a peaceful man, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. For Solomon shall be his name, and in his time I will bestow peace and tranquility on Israel. It is he who shall build a house in my honor; he shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish the throne of his Kingship over Israel forever.*” The Hebrew word for peace, “*shalom*” is reflected in Solomon’s name, which in Hebrew is *Shelomo*. The “son” or “daughter” who is reborn through baptism into the New Covenant family of God must be a son or daughter who manifests the peace of God in Christ, and this peace of God in Christ is manifested in us through a supernatural power.

**Question:** Through what supernatural power is this peace of Christ manifested in us?

**Answer:** Through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Most Holy Trinity, through God the Holy Spirit.



**Question:** In Galatians 5:22-23 St. Paul speaks of the “fruit of the Spirit”. How is this blessing of peace connected to that passage?

**Answer:** St. Paul speaks of “peace” as the third fruit of the Spirit. These “fruits of the Spirit” are perfections that God the Holy Spirit forms in the children of God as the first fruits of eternal glory. Galatians 5:22-23 lists 9 “fruits of the Holy Spirit, “...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, as God’s children we are commanded to bear much “fruit” by Christ who has grafted us onto Himself as the “true vine”. The “fruit” or works we bear is an outpouring of the gifts the Holy Spirits imparts to us. The peace we generate is part of that outpouring. St. Basil wrote *“Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of heaven, and adopted as children, given confidence to call God ‘Father’ and to share in Christ’s grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory.”* [quoted from CCC # 736].

For New Covenant believers it is necessary that we die to this world and its self-centered doctrine of what constitutes happiness and that we instead live for Christ and the blessedness that comes from being a child of God. *“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.”*<sup>1</sup> John 3:1-3

### **Questions for group discussion:**

**Question:** Is what comes out of one’s mouth a good way to determine “purity of heart?” What are those words from one’s mouth that indicate a “heart cleaning” is in order through repentance and prayer?

**Question:** Is what one’s mind and eyes are drawn to also a factor in determining “purity of heart?” Why?

**Question:** Some family traits are inherited: eye color, hair color, natural abilities. Other traits are learned: truthfulness, sincerity, honesty, dealing with anger, etc. What traits have we inherited through our baptism from our Heavenly Father? What traits are learned from Mother Church? How should we struggle against that inherited trait from the family of Adam called “concupiscence”? Concupiscence = a word from the Latin, *con* = thoroughly + *cupere*, to desire. As defined by the Modern Catholic Dictionary concupiscence is *“The insubordination of man’s desires to the dictates of reason, and the propensity of human nature to sin as a result of original sin.”* There are two aspects to concupiscence:



1. Concupiscence of the Eyes = *“Unwholesome curiosity and an inordinate love of this world’s goods. The first consists in an unreasonable desire to see, hear, and know what is harmful to one’s virtue, inconsistent with one’s state of life, or detrimental to higher duties”* and the other is
2. Concupiscence of the Flesh = *“The inordinate love of sensual pleasure, to which fallen man is naturally prone.”*

**Question:** How do you practice internal peace? How do you express your peace externally? What are some strategies that promote peace within yourself, within your marriage, within your family and within the community?