

Supplemental Information for  
*Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism*  
*Life In Christ – Walking With God*  
To group leaders of  
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs  
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Session 7: “Love of God”

### **Suggested Environment**

Note again that we are reverting to the table arrangement suggestion from year one but I would continue to make the *USCCA (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults)* a part of each table arrangement since many of you who used it think highly of it and I will recommend sections for some of the sessions in this second half of year three to share or to read before you lead the session.

### **Lifting Our Hearts**

You may want to draw the group’s attention to the words, “It is difficult today, God, to be faithful to your commands.” Maybe just have them think about that line before you say the prayer together. You will find in the first section of Exploring the *Catechism* a reminder of our need for grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to live the challenges we have in following God’s commands. Perhaps an echo of this challenge can be discussed later during the session, and note the final beginning of the prayer as we ask the Holy Spirit to enter our gathering and assist us in living and following God’s laws for us. This first weekend’s Gospel concludes the section of Matthew where Jesus is instructing the disciples on what it means to be his follower (the end of the Sermon on the Mount). I think it is interesting that we conclude this part of ordinary time and enter Lent next week with this eschatological message (meaning about end times, in this case, our lives). The advice we will hear focuses on building our house (meaning our lives) on “rock” or a solid foundation and what better foundation than to observe God’s commandments. In reality this first session has some great insights into our lives and how we live them and makes a wonderful beginning for Lent as does the Scripture selected by the authors, the rich young man who asks Jesus what must he do to have eternal life.

### **Sharing Our Good News**

Just a nice opportunity maybe to catch up on what others have continued to do to learn and grow since we ended the first part of this section of year three, “Life in Christ—Walking with God” so anything anyone may have done to continue their growth and understanding would be great to share.

## **Exploring the Catechism**

I would suggest that you have the group members, who by now all should have a *Catechism*, open it to pages 496 and 497. It is helpful to see the actual texts in which God's commandments are given to his chosen people. Notice they are found in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. I think it is important to read both sections CCC 2053 and 2054 because they are tied so closely with the Scripture reading to follow. Notice how 2053 closes this intro paragraph on a positive note.

To make sense of the idea that the Ten Commandments have their full meaning within the New Covenant we have to understand the sense of that paragraph following the statement of the first three commandments. Since the first three deal with our response to God for his love, it helps to see the remaining seven as dealing with our response to one another in love. The New Covenant means the full paschal mystery, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, in other words, what God has done for us by sending his Son to be one of us. That is the greatest act of love we know of and sets the stage for Jesus telling us that all the commandments are summed up in his great commandment of love, love of God and neighbor as self. You might point out that our Pope has used this mystery of our salvation often in his writing and in his messages to audiences at the Vatican. He loves to point out that Jesus became man to show us what being truly human means and through keeping God's commandments and the great commandment of love we not only imitate our savior but we become truly human and the image of our God, the creator shines forth.

It is also important to notice how 2054 suggests strongly that the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience are connected to being a disciple and following the commandments of our God. My hope would be that you would be able to sound a positive note at the end of the day (session) so that the group might see the commandments as less negative (not as a collection of negatives) but as positive direction for being truly human and promoting, establishing a basis of love, care, and concern for one another as well as paying homage and honor to our God. So it makes sense in light of these challenges to us that sent the rich young man away sadder that we acknowledge our need for God's grace through Word and Sacrament (especially the Eucharist) to live the type of life a disciple is called to live.

## **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

### **Matthew 19: 16-21**

16

<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

17

He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. <sup>13</sup> If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

18

19                   <sup>14</sup> He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, " 'You shall not kill; you shall  
not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness;  
honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as  
yourself.'"  
20                   <sup>15</sup> The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still  
lack?"  
21                   Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, <sup>16</sup> go, sell what you have and give to  
(the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."  
22                   When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many  
possessions

Again, the commentary on this passage is beautifully reflected in those two citations from the CCC mentioned above.

### **Sharing Question**

To the question that is asked I would add one such as “Where has God’s grace seemed present to me as I have tried to live out this command to love God?” Sharing personal stories can be a really valuable testimony of God’s present in our lives, sometimes especially when we can see God acting through others, through those who love and care for us.

### **Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)**

There are several major ideas that I think are important to stress in this section. The first is summed up in the phrase “to nourish and protect our faith.” Clearly we need the gift of faith to see these commandments in the life of a God who loves us and is giving us this direction for our benefit. Quite correctly the challenges of our secular world make it even more important for us to nourish that life of faith within us. Remember last year when we talked about faith as a gift and sometimes individuals would ask, well, it it’s a gift, why doesn’t everyone have it? Recall that while the gift may be given to us by parents, seem reasonable from what we see in a created world, or even witnessed powerfully to us by the lives of others, it still takes an act of will, an act of humble acceptance and acknowledgment on our part to enter into a life of faith. And conversely, a person has to renew that act of faith and accept that gift every day of their lives.

The second important point I think centers in the discussion that can arise from the first sentence in that last paragraph on page 42: “One of the primary ways to be set ablaze with our faith is through prayer.” Prayer is the dynamo that powers our spiritual life and helps it grow. It may be helpful to encourage the group to share their favorite way of praying since prayer is both personal and communal (our public prayer at Mass). I know that sometimes individuals are reluctant to discuss what can be very personal but I think the witness we give one another of the strength and power we experience in prayer, both formula prayers like the Rosary and perhaps scriptural prayer (meditating on God’s Word) is so worthwhile. I also think we have to acknowledge our need, profound need, to gather at least weekly to offer prayer to our God and also to draw strength from our common witness together when we gather as a community of believers. So rather than seeing our weekly Sunday Mass as obligation, maybe we can look on it as the day we gather to be nourished and strengthened in our personal lives by Word and Grace but also by our mutual encouragement and example.

The third point that I think is found in this section is in the words: “acts of faith, hope and charity.” I think those have the power to not only lift our minds and hearts to God but to confirm us and strengthen our wills as we choose to be disciples and followers. This has such obvious ties into the Lenten season as we prepare to use alms giving, prayer, and fasting as ways we can grow our faith and strengthen our wills to be better disciples.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

Good questions and don’t we so often begin our acknowledgement of the gift of faith by a profound thanksgiving to our God? Even in the face of major challenges we so often find ourselves grateful for that sense of God with us, our faith, and so often I’ve heard individuals say, “That was what got me through this,” whatever it was. One additional thought: I would be interested in your group’s response to a question like, “Why do we think many people have stopped attending Mass on a regular basis?” Statistics from Europe are really concerning with an average of only 10 percent attending Mass on Sunday’s for Catholics in Germany—one country I recently saw a report in online news. No wonder Pope Benedict has talked about Europe as “missionary” territory. Feel free to send comments on this question back via email.

### **Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)**

This really short section does point out our need to respect the use of God’s name but let me add an additional thought. If that last line in the paragraph is accurate, namely, that a name is really an icon or image of a person; then, when we call ourselves Christians, we have a terrific challenge to meet. If we don’t live as Jesus has shown us and invites us to, are we taking his name in vain? Add that thought to the question following this section. I can remember so well a wonderful Irish neighbor we had in Green Bay years back when Catholics and Protestants were killing one another in Northern Ireland saying to me, “What a horrible scandal those Christians in my home country are to the world!”

I might add as an aside that several popular authors who have written books advocating atheism during the last several years have used the “scandal of those professing religion” as an argument against religion itself. Some have even gone so far as to draw time lines pointing out all the terrible things humans have done to one another in the name of religion. And that carries on today in the faith of those who advocate “holy wars.” So perhaps you may be able to develop an understanding beyond one limited to God’s name in vain as swearing.

### **Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)**

I would recommend reading and sharing with the group the following sections from the *USCCA* (the Red Book): pp. 365-366 “Why Go to Church on Sunday” and pp. 367-369 “Restoring Sunday.” Both are not long although reading them during the group time might be a challenge. I think they would help your own preparation for this session and I know many of our members have their own copies so share this thought with them.

For those groups where the question of Sunday obligation is of direct interest, *CCC 2180 to 2183* is very worthwhile. Two lines I would suggest you underline and draw out discussion around them: “Our presence at Mass not only gives glory to God, but also strengthens the faith of our brothers and sisters” and “the witness of faith we give to one another enhances our growth in all the Christian virtues.” I think this has been touched on earlier in my comments but it bears repeating. It is also important to have a strong sense of the meaning and almost the feeling of strength that comes from our mutual presence. This is also important since you have all heard the word “solidarity” used as a descriptive aspect of the type of relationship that should come from the power of like minded and believing individuals gathered for a common cause and purpose. So our solidarity becomes stronger as strength in unity and common purposes pull us together. There is really a dual effect—we are strengthened personally and our group efforts are made more effective by our common strength. A good recent example: Egypt has new leaders because of the solidarity of discontent its people felt.

I also would encourage you to focus thought on the bottom paragraphs on page 43 where the idea of “rest” plays a role and see if Sunday is really a day of rest in your group participants’ view. In my own case I remember when our children were so involved in athletic activities that weekends were a blur of travel and games and other commitments. Be sensitive to your group age brackets since I’ve found as an older adult that I can actually on some Sundays, kick back and do very little in the afternoons at least. That may be a blessing of aging.

The real issue of course is touched on at the top of page 44. That merits discussion also since the question of staying centered, of keeping God in the center of what we do, in all the distractions we face in life remains our constant issue.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

So these two questions about how we celebrate the Lord’s Day and greater balance are quite important. Perhaps someone in the group has struggled with the issue of balance in their life and has come up with some good strategies? I can recall from my days as a hospital administrator that when I would go on a four day retreat it would take me at least two days to

get my mind shut off from the to-do lists I always had going. And that was before cell phones were common. So invite discussion on how group members have found balance or even a bit of sacred space and time to nurture their faith and prayer life.

### **Living the Good News**

For some reason I am drawn to that third bullet point, in light of what I have heard and seen at our parish as parents and even seniors struggle to find “peaceful moments.” The real challenge isn’t just to find a one day event when I can honestly say I’ve set time aside for prayer, rest, or even meditation. It is somewhat the challenge of a New Year’s resolution, identifying a need and then a target that I can commit to over time. I think you’ll find that section of “Restoring Sunday” from the *USCCA* helpful in perhaps adding to the discussion of this area.

### **Lifting our Hearts**

You will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. You might model this session by praying “Lord, for the grace to continue growing in my understanding and appreciation of my faith, let us pray to the Lord.” You’ll also find the prayer from the U.S. Bishops’ document “Go and Make Disciples” inspiring at the end of this session.

**Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to [allaabs1770@gmail.com](mailto:allaabs1770@gmail.com)**