

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
March, 2011

Session 9: “Safeguarding Life and Truth”

Suggested Environment

By now you’ve gotten my pitch to encourage your group members to acquire a copy of the red covered book, *USCCA (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults)*, so I’m dropping my recommendation to make it a part of each table arrangement. I still will be recommending sections for some of the sessions in this second half of year three to share or to read before you lead the session. I have no specific recommendations to enhance the table arrangement this week unless you just happen to have a picture of St. Bonaventure handy. He is a doctor of the faith and is often given the nickname, “Apostle of the Truth,” because of his theological and intellectual dedication to truth as revealed by the apostolic Church. Should you want a great link to information about him and a perspective on truth to review before your session you can go to this link at [Catholic Online](#).

As a session leader I would recommend your reading and perhaps encouraging your members who have the red *USCCA* to read the section entitled “Life Issues that Confront Us” (pages 390-397). Key doctrinal statements on each of the commandments are also succinctly found on the following pages: Commandment Five (*USCCA* pp. 400-401) and Commandment Eight (*USCCA* pp. 436-437).

Lifting Our Hearts

There is a line in this prayer that I think captures an important aspect of the session. The line is “peace does begin with me” so let me encourage you to say, perhaps after calling everyone to prayer “Let’s maybe taken a minute here to let our hearts and mind seek peace, peace from all the lists of to-do’s we carry with us. All that we wish to accomplish will be done with care and concern if we begin with peace in our own hearts. For it takes a peaceful heart to be open to God’s truth and the struggle and journey to find truth and to be living witnesses as Christians in the world.”

Sharing Our Good News

As usual an opportunity to see what group members did or thought about doing following last week’s session.

Exploring the Catechism

We are focusing on commandments five and eight this session. Notice we are jumping right into a wonderful section of Matthew—the Sermon on the Mount. As I’ve mentioned in homilies over these last weeks, we are into a section of the Matthew that some have called the first homily of Jesus—an outline of what it will mean to be a disciple of his and a follower. Earlier in this spring session of commentaries, I pointed out the transformation of the Old Testament commands through the words of Jesus and his example into his great command of love of God and neighbor. In that regard, I would suggest you highlight the challenge that is so obvious from an attitude of “not killing” to “loving those who might hate you.” I will have a thought in the sharing question section on this challenge.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

Matthew 5:21-24, 38-42, 43-48

5:21-24

21 ¹⁵ ¹⁶ "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.'

22 ¹⁷ But I say to you, whoever is angry ¹⁸ with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna.

23 Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you,

24 leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

38-42

38 ²⁵ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

39 But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on (your) right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.

40 If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well.

41 Should anyone press you into service for one mile, ²⁶ go with him for two miles.

42 Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

43-48

43 ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you,

45 that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

- 46 For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors ²⁸ do the same?
- 47 And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? ²⁹
- 48 So be perfect, ³⁰ just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Note that the small numbers in blue are links to footnotes that you will find on the web site of the United States Catholic Conference. Here is footnote 15 to give you an example of what they look like and what they contain. You may find some of them a bit more technical than you can use but note in this first one (15) the specific idea of “extending” the depth or coverage/intent of the Mosaic Law:

¹⁵ [21-48] Six examples of the conduct demanded of the Christian disciple. Each deals with a commandment of the law, introduced by You have heard that it was said to your ancestors or an equivalent formula, followed by Jesus' teaching in respect to that commandment, But I say to you; thus their designation as "antitheses." Three of them accept the Mosaic law but extend or deepen it ([Matthew 5:21-22](#); 27-28; 43-44); three reject it as a standard of conduct for the disciples (Matthew 31-32; 33-37; 38-39).

See also footnote 27 for a further example of Jesus extending a command beyond what the OT proscription commanded.

Sharing Question

The sharing question introduces the idea of talking about our struggles with some of the negative aspects of our behavior that fall under these commandments. Perhaps you can broaden that discussion beyond the initial question posed by pointing out the very last line of the suggested reading: “So be perfect, ³⁰ just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This footnote found by using the highlighted link for 30 will tell you that Luke’s version of this teaching urges us to be “merciful” as God is merciful even to those who are wicked. I think it helps to see the call to be perfect as a constant and consistent effort on our part to take the high road so to speak, to always move towards the ideal, with the constant tension of knowing we still live with the stain of original sin. After all, if God can extend love and forgiveness towards the wicked and hateful, aren’t we called to extend mercy/love towards those who hate us? Remember always those words from the prayer Jesus taught us: “forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others/those who trespass against us.” Fr. Chiola once centered a homily on the theme, “Christianity is not for wimps.” It certainly is worthwhile to discuss the struggle to live toward the ideal because that what we are called to do as a disciple.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

I think it is really important to read CCC 2258 to begin this section that focuses on life issues. I think this part is very well done and I would urge reading and sharing thoughts on each paragraph. Note CCC 2267 that is mentioned in the bottom paragraph and top of pages 54-55. Recently I heard someone on a local talk radio make the statement in a call that “even the Catholic Church does not forbid the death penalty...” The caller went on to argue that the

Governor Quinn should not sign the bill ending that penalty in our state. I would simply take the discussion if it goes in that vein back to what Cardinal Bernadine taught so effectively many years ago. Our position on life should be a “seamless garment” covering life from beginning to end and that the death penalty does not have to be a part of what society should use or endorse today. Here is a link to the USCCB web site with their press release on [Illinois’ repeal](#) of the death penalty

Perhaps we can use the discussion of the evil of abortion to point out the 40 days for life campaign under way and the need, even if we cannot be actively involved, to constantly pray for the protection of life in society.

The one regret I have about this section of exploring the catechism is that there are so many wonderful and challenging issues here, for example, the short paragraph that touches on decisions about medical treatments—ordinary versus extraordinary. Here is a link to a good [article from Our Sunday Visitor](#), written for lay people, on this issue and several other issues that are in this section of exploring the Catechism. If you have someone interested in the wider scope of ethical and religious directives that are involved in healthcare, here is a link to the [directives on Catholic Health Care](#) promulgated by US Conference of Catholic Bishops. If you feel overwhelmed by the depth of these topics, take a quick assessment of what the group might collectively decide should be the focus of discussion.

Note also the very short paragraph and the CCC sections 2280-2283 that touch on suicide. This section of the *Catechism* is worth reading also because of our community experience these past months.

This section ends with some very self-explanatory comments on war and the arms race. Note that the tone of the quote from *Gaudium et spes* (one of the major documents from Vatican II) is very critical of the arms race, meaning both the nuclear arms race and the extent to which countries spend huge sums of money in military budgets. The Council took place in the 1960’s, at the very height of the nuclear arms race and with the experience of the Cuban missile crisis in the background. Bishop Wilton Gregory, formerly of Bellville, as president of the USCCB issued a statement of the conference in 2004 on nuclear weapons and here is a link to that statement: [“A Statement on Nuclear Weapons.”](#)

Sharing Our Faith

Both questions in this section are very worthwhile and I would encourage any discussion on either. My one frustration is again the spectrum of topics and their importance to expect realistic and thoughtful conversation particularly if a group member has had a very challenging experience say with a struggle over when to stop a medical treatment. Since the subtopic for this year’s Why Catholic is “walking with God,” the stories we tell of how we have managed to walk/live with our faith in the face of some of these issues is most important. Sometimes it is helpful to admit this type of frustration as a group leader and even perhaps say at the beginning, “There’s so much here, is there one, two areas that we should focus on?” My concern in that vein was expressed above and the same approach will work to focus this sharing section by elucidating a group consensus to move forward.

Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)

This section too is fairly self explanatory and I would go so far as to ask if anyone has an issue with the clear need for followers of Christ to be truthful, especially to one another and to themselves. I think a similar question could be asked for the next section that highlights the media as at the service of the common good and the need to be vigilant to the “unwholesome influences” of the media. I don’t think you should feel overwhelmed to touch on every CCC of these last two sections since I am certain life and moral issues as mentioned above are so much more critical to our lives as disciples. I say that because there is real depth and challenge in that section of the *USCCA* entitled “Life Issues That Confront Us” and if members of your group do have time to read those, you’ll find a lot of fruitful issues to discuss. And depending on the flow of conversation, I would suggest that an effective time at the end could conclude with a combined sharing our faith section for these two together. That is if time hasn’t run way over because of the depth and sincerity of discussion on topics covered pp. 54 to mid p. 56.

Sharing Our Faith

So let me make a suggestion here for a two phased approach. Notice the direction the first bullet point takes. It is a call to share how we have witnessed through lived example one of those values in an area under discussion. Again, our stories of how our faith has sustained us or prompted us to action are so important in a group process because they have the effect of encouraging and strengthening not only the one whose story it is but also those who hear it. So, for example, if earlier someone shared a very important example of a struggle say with a suicide in the family or a life issue, don’t hesitate to say something at this point like, “I want to thank you for sharing that story with the group. It’s wonderful to see how your faith helped you to cope with that or moved you in a certain direction (whatever the issue may have been).” To paraphrase that second sentence in the first bullet point, “In telling our stories of our deeds, we are witnessing our lived faith to others and encouraging them to do the same.”

My second phase for this section will have to tie in with the dynamic of what may have occurred during your discussion and it may point towards a specific action step leading into the next section of living the good news. Your awareness of the group consensus, if there is one, can be most helpful in prompting what will feel like just a natural flow to an action in one direction or another.

Living the Good News

There are some wonderful directions that may easily flow out of a sincere and heartfelt session listed here. Note the baby’s crib set up in the main vestibule of the church this past week, seeking donations to support moms who have chosen to have their child. As I mentioned above, I have a feeling that the issues in this session are so important to us that it will be hard to focus only in one direction. Fundamental to our lived witness is the defense of life.

Lifting our Hearts

This is a beautiful prayer so appropriate to our effort as a church in this 40 Days for Life campaign. Let me encourage you to again offer group members a chance to go around the circle and offer prayers and intentions for what is in our hearts. Let me also remind us all that while abortion is ever on our minds, there are many challenges to be face and prayed about in the area of “death with dignity” advocates. We need witness and prayer for the seamless garment defense of life.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to

allaabs1770@gmail.com