

Supplemental Information for  
*Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism*  
*The Profession of Faith: What We Believe*  
To group leaders of  
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs  
February/March, 2010

### Session 7: "The Public Life of Jesus"

Welcome back to Why Catholic for the second half of year two. I do want to repeat several thoughts from the introduction to the first six sessions. First, I would strongly encourage you as a group leader to re-read the introductory material. There are some good thoughts in the Faith-Sharing Principles section and a reminder of what small group leaders should be and what they should avoid. Second, please note the suggestion, and I think it is an excellent one, to have available the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) together with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) available. By now, group members have invested in the CCC and I would encourage investment in USCCA also.

The revised text cites both resources often and the USCCA offers many times a fuller explanation of key points. Certainly as a group leader you will want the USCCA as part of your "environment." Also you should note that the text does not have bold letters indicating material almost directly from the CCC, but if you read carefully and compare you'll find the CCC there. Note also that chapters have key ideas/concepts boxed with a heading "Spotlight on..." These are worth pointing out to your group and reviewing. Note also that these later chapters seem to use the blue boxes to more directly highlight sections of the catechism, whether it is the CCC or the USCCA as well as include some other material in several of them. Let's prayerfully ask for the Spirit's presence this year as we try to develop a deeper understanding of our faith.

### **Suggested Environment**

Note again that there is a recommendation for the USCCA to be a part of each table arrangement. Since many of our sessions will take place in Lent, it is appropriate to have a violet/purple color displayed as part of your environment. And just as an interesting piece of information, violet, which is used in Lent and Advent, signifies more of a penitent cast or serious time of the Church year. If you are curious as to the significance of the colors that are used on vestments, here's a [link that explains them](#). We began the post Christmas season on January 10<sup>th</sup> with the Baptism of Jesus which is considered the beginning of his public life. If you can find a nice artistic reproduction on line of the Baptism of Jesus, you might just consider printing a copy of it and including it within your environment. If you use Google's image search function, you will be amazed at the variety of images on line. Here's just one I found that seems to capture a spirit:



### **Lifting Our Hearts**

As I mentioned at the beginning of the second year's sessions, it would be good to welcome everyone back and maybe offer a spontaneous prayer for the success of the journey this spring, 2010. Certainly introduce any new members of the group that may have been added. And I certainly think it would be well to ask everyone when you say the prayer together, to keep the success in mind of all the other groups meeting, those within our parish and those meeting throughout the diocese.

### **Sharing Our Good News**

The usual sharing of how we've all done on the precious session is not quite operative here, since we're starting after quite a break but I would encourage some sharing if anyone cares to about the first half of this our "Profession of Faith." If nothing else you might just simply mention the tremendous scope of those topics we've previously covered, ranging from "Desire for God" through the "Trinity" to "The Incarnation." This session on the public life of Jesus certainly is a natural one to follow where we finished last year on the "The Incarnation" and certainly we've still memories of the Christmas celebration of Christ's birth that highlights the Incarnation.

## Reflection One “First we encounter”

Leah’s story in this first reflection brings out a very important point. In fact, I would encourage you to suggest your group members underline the very last sentence of the story: “Leah began that day to understand one important thing: before you can live as Jesus lived, you must encounter God.” This can serve as the focal point in the subsequent discussion of the next several paragraphs—headed with that intriguing question “What are you looking for?”

The story that is told in the next several paragraphs is taken from the Gospel of John, John 1: 35-41, and highlights the beginning of the selection process for the apostles. Put simply, John the Baptist says to several of his followers when Jesus passes, “Behold the Lamb of God.” One of those followers is Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. As Andrew followed Jesus, our Lord turned and asked him, “What are you looking for?” Andrew then spent the remainder of the day with Jesus and when he found his brother Simon later that day or evening, he exclaimed, “We have found the Messiah!” He brought Peter to Jesus and Jesus renamed Peter “Cephas” and the rest is history as they say.

You might make the point that here is an example of a Gospel speaking to us across time. Recall the very first session of this book—a desire for God seems to be within us, within all of humanity. So what are we looking for if we acknowledge that desire for the divine? Perhaps if the answer is that we want to know more about this person who was called the Lamb of God, then our challenge is to learn as much about him as we can as he lives out his very brief public life. And maybe we can hear Jesus asking us that very question, “What are you looking for?” And our answer is not simply we want information but we want the kind of encounter with a person whose life is so compelling that we want that life as a model for our own. So as the USCCA says on p.79, “If we want to know Jesus, we should know the Scripture.” And that means that we should become students of the Gospels.

Several other points are important. One is in the blue box on page 50 titled “Gospel Portraits.” In the middle of that box are the words: “The proclamation of the Kingdom of God was fundamental to Jesus’ preaching. The Kingdom of God *is his presence among human beings*, calling them to a new way of life as individuals and as community.” Encourage this to be underlined. Discuss particularly that his presence is a way of life that is tangible and even observable to others. Since that way of life was based on love, it was not at all what the Jews of the time expected from the Messiah—it was not earthly power or rule.

Another important point is in the blue box on page 51. The words “...help us to see our God made visible, and so we are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see” point to the wonderful role that Jesus’ Incarnation plays in putting a “human face” on God. And this draws us into the idea of mystery discussed in one of the earlier chapters where we talked about mystery as not something we solve but a faith or belief that we enter into through faith and then live. And our entire modeling of Christ’s life leads us to live that life and thereby we can be said to have new life within us. And that new life changes us so that we have a different perspective on our relationships and how we look at values, our possessions and all of our relationships to others.

Third, I think it is so important to have everyone understand that phrase we all have heard so many times, “to have life in Christ.” The only way his presence among us today as

human beings is possible is if we individually take up the challenge of forming ourselves into the model he gives us and thereby bring his kingdom into our own world. So based on love, we first change our individual selves and then form and transform the community around us. This new way of life, the foundation of which is the law of love, changes both ourselves and our communities as we live that life with others.

I know it may not be an easy task but I think it might be worthwhile to see if others have had the kind of experience that Leah had in that opening story—a literal sense of connectedness to God or to Jesus. I think is always fascinating to listen so some of the evangelical preachers who can tell you to the day and the hour when they experienced “Jesus” or accepted Jesus and were saved. The challenging thing that so many of us cradle Catholics face is making that transition from faith of our parents to an adult faith of our own. Somehow integral to that transition is an encounter and acceptance of the person of Christ. As Bishop Lucas was always quick to point out, we don’t make a commitment to a proposition but to a person. And that person we encounter in Word and Sacrament is Jesus himself, our God.

### **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

This Gospel was read to us on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010. So it may seem familiar in way. Realize that this is Jesus proclaiming and “claiming” has succession to the promise of his Jewish heritage and the prophecy of Isaiah.

### **Luke 4: 14-21**

14

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread<sup>6</sup> throughout the whole region.

15

He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

16

<sup>7</sup> He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom<sup>8</sup> into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read

17

and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

18

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,<sup>9</sup> because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

19

and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

20

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.

21

He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>10</sup>

This scripture is taken from the USCCB web site and the footnotes in the small colored letters can be accessed back to their site. What is also really important is the fundamental theme that this prophecy emphasizes about the message he is bringing about His kingdom. How would you summarize what he is sent to proclaim? This might be a good question to add to the following section.

### **Sharing Questions**

I think both questions have real value and I would encourage you getting an answer from everyone. You might even frame a question around a time frame when we were all much younger—who were our heroes and why were they are heroes. I can remember a very passionate debate on ESPN recently about all the ball players who used steroids and how so many young players “heroes” have suddenly been exposed as “cheaters” as one of the commentators stated. I even recall a sports commentator talking about Tiger Woods fall in public opinion as a fall “from grace...” Do we want to be like Jesus simply because we’re afraid of going to hell or is there something positive, attractive, heroic about his life that draws us to him, something attractive about a group of individuals who also are drawn to him, a fellowship of living together that will in some fashion known only by faith continue beyond our death?

### **Reflection Two: “Lessons on discipleship”**

At this point I would think the group would have an understanding that we all have an invitation to become disciples, that same invitation in a way that Jesus extended to all during his public ministry. So becoming a disciple in his Kingdom, to have “his life” in us, means to “live his life” within each of the communities of which we are a part.

Several ideas bear emphasis. In the second paragraph, there really are two thoughts worth pointing out. One is that Jesus truly experienced our humanity in the list of things the authors mention (frustration, joy, mourning, even death); and also very key “...love is the first lesson of discipleship.” This is especially borne out by the Spotlight Box on p. 53 and CCC 544. In identifying himself with the poor, Jesus set a very high level of model for us to follow. In the Church’s social teaching, we often hear the term “preferential option for the poor.” What that means is that for us to live in and build God’s kingdom we have to be inclusive especially of those marginalized in society. I would challenge you to raise this question. Does being poor always or only have something to do with a monetary measure? I think those who have life in Christ have hope, optimism, direction and poverty can be an absence of hope, a negative outlook on life, and an aimlessness that is never satisfied by material things. Aren’t those who ignore that innate sense of the divine in us, those who have not heard Jesus’ invitation and rejoiced in his promises to us poor in a very profound way?

Another idea that is emphasized well in the middle of page 53 is a reference to the Gospel of John's use of the terminology that the great works and miracles of Jesus are "signs" that he truly was someone extraordinary, that he was the promised Messiah. As one of my old professors used to say very briefly, "what He did tells us Who He is and why we take Him seriously." I also think it is good to point out if no one specifically comments on it that Jesus frequently, in all of the Gospels, is said to go off and find a quiet place to pray. That 's a true model for us since prayer very honestly is the engine that helps drive the continued growth of the kingdom in our hearts and in our relationships. As the citation of Galatians 4:19 and CCC 562 shows the **goal** is for us to conform ourselves to his life and the **result** is that He will be formed in us (i.e. alive in us).

The last paragraph of this section is especially well written and reminds us that the invitation we talked about earlier is timeless and requires a "change of heart" and "conversion" today as it did in Jesus' day. The only thing I would add to that last sentence is the idea that "God's tender love and mercy" is boundless **and** always available to us through his very gift of the sacrament of reconciliation. I would add that since I think it is always good to point out as is done at the beginning of every Mass in the penitential rite that God is always ready to welcome us back, even if we have failed to live up to the ideals of his kingdom.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

All of the questions in this section are worth discussing but I caution you as a group leader to be sensitive to that first question. It may be difficult for individuals to share something as personal as their "loving relationship" so allow time for everyone to think about that first question if they have not done so in advance. It may be easier to admit such things as "my life has more meaning" when I think of it in relationship to Jesus or "I find myself not worrying quite so much about things" when I know and really feel/believe that Jesus does walk with me in whatever I have to face. There are a number of indirect ways I have heard people speak of a loving relationship in terms of its affect on them: I know I'm loved just as I am, I am so grateful for all the good people and things in my life, etc.

In dealing with the second question it may be easier to get at the influence if you probe for examples of ways in daily life that are influenced by my faith and belief in Jesus. I would suspect that given the type of direction the earlier material in this session will draw out, you may find that in some fashion these questions have been touched on already, at least in some concrete ways. The bottom line, however, has to be that if we take seriously the goal of forming ourselves to His life, then something will be different in our behavior, our values and the way to relate in comparison with our relatively materialistic and "It's all about me" culture.

Certainly in concert with the opening story, there may be moments or times in our lives when our relationship to our Lord is heightened by different events or even challenges. And it is always good to perhaps remind ourselves that we are not steady state universes. We do have ups and downs and if someone says quite openly they are not always as consistent as they would like to be, well, just understandable encouragement is helpful as is encouragement to keep finding time for prayer. Just reread that section of the sentence in the last paragraph which reminds us to "be mindful that God's tender love and mercy are boundless."

## **Living the Good News**

Given that we all can use a deeper understanding of what the kingdom means and a deeper appreciation for Jesus as our model, I would really suggest encouraging everyone to consider making a commitment to “read and pray the Scripture each day.” Praying the scriptures is one of the oldest traditions we have as Catholics. Praying the scriptures is also known as [Lectio Divina and here is a good link](#) you can share with folks to help them learn about Lectio.

The other suggestions, or course, also have merit but I sincerely believe that prayer is always the engine that drives so much of the direction we need to go.

## **Lifting our Hearts**

I think the idea of passing a lighted candle is really meaningful and using the prayer on page 55, however, I do think passing the light on to each individual as we might share a special intention also would work. See below:

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 (maybe pass the candle as you do this). Be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; For the Spirit’s presence with us this year to open our hearts to understanding and growth, let us pray to the Lord. Or, for a greater commitment to really live Christ’s life in my circle of family and friends, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer.

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