

**Lord,  
Teach Us  
to Pray**



# Lord, Teach Us to Pray

A Guide to the Spiritual Life  
and Christian Discipleship

FR. JEFFREY KIRBY, STL



SAINT BENEDICT+PRESS

Charlotte, North Carolina

Copyright © 2014 by Fr. Jeffrey Kirby

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in articles and critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, printed or electronic, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Scripture quotations are from the Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1965, 1966 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Caroline Kiser

Front cover image: Icon in St. Stephen's Bulgarian church (photo)/  
Godong/ UIG/ The Bridgeman Art Library

Cataloging-in-Publication data on file with the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-1-61890-614-4

Published in the United States by

Saint Benedict Press, LLC

P.O. Box 410487

Charlotte, NC 28241

[www.SaintBenedictPress.com](http://www.SaintBenedictPress.com)

Printed and bound in the United States of America

*To*

The Men of the Drexel House  
Charleston, South Carolina



# Contents

Foreword *by Archbishop J. Peter Sartain* . . . . . ix  
Introduction . . . . . xiii

## PART ONE: “LORD”

### CHAPTER ONE

Baptism and a Personal Decision for Christ. . . . . 3

### CHAPTER TWO

Jesus Christ and Salvation History. . . . . 17

### CHAPTER THREE

My Faith—the Church’s Faith. . . . . 35

## PART TWO: “TEACH US”

### CHAPTER FOUR

First Conversion of the Spiritual Life . . . . . 47

### CHAPTER FIVE

Virtue and Life in the Spirit . . . . . 59

### CHAPTER SIX

Rule of Life . . . . . 73

PART THREE: “TO PRAY”

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Lord among Us . . . . . 99

CHAPTER EIGHT

Living a Life of Prayer . . . . . 111

CHAPTER NINE

A Prayerful Spirit . . . . . 125

Conclusion . . . . . 133

Bibliography . . . . . 137



## Foreword

For the Christian, everything flows from discipleship in the Lord Jesus—which is to say that Jesus *calls* us to be his disciples—which is to say that he desires that we follow him and live his Way—which is to say that everything in a Christian's life is a response to Jesus—which is to say that he sends us the Holy Spirit to make us wise in his Way and keep us faithful to him—which is to say that he wishes to use us as his instruments—which is to say that he desires to have a deep, life-long relationship with us—which is to say that he loves us more than we can possibly imagine—which is to say that his love for us is eternal, and that he desires that we spend eternity with and in him.

Those words are a mouthful, but they summarize the richness of discipleship and the eternal destiny for which God has made every person. Our discipleship and destiny in Christ form the core of our lives as Christians and should be reflected in everything we do. Though that may seem like a tall, even impossible, order, the Lord has left us the Church, through which we will be schooled and formed in all that he desires. Through the Church, the Lord himself, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will guide, teach, forgive, heal, cleanse, and share his joy. He gives us everything we need to attain that to which he calls us. In fact, it is he who accomplishes it in us! What

he asks is that we *follow* him and *cooperate* with his grace.

I have always been intrigued by the passage in Matthew's gospel where Peter quarrels with Jesus about what his mission from the Father will entail. Jesus has revealed to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die and rise from the dead; but this makes no sense to Peter, who wants a different kind of Messiah, a different path to salvation. Taking Jesus aside, he argues,

“God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

But he turned said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!

You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Mt 16:22–23)

Peter's argument against Jesus' cross and resurrection exposes the fact that he is not *following* but wants to create his own path, one that makes sense to him. He would prefer that Jesus follow *his* way, *his* rationale, *his* plan for salvation. Jesus knows that if Peter is trying to convince him of another way, Peter will never follow him. Thus, he says, “Get behind me.” In other words, “Follow me.” In another place, Jesus asks his disciples a haunting question: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?” Every disciple must learn to live a life that is compatible with the Lordship of Jesus.

In *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: A Teaching on the Spiritual Life and Discipleship*, Father Jeffrey Kirby lays out the foundations of discipleship and the steps which lead to faithfulness, prayerfulness, hopefulness, conversion of life, and intimate communion with God. One could not possibly aspire to faithful discipleship without a

commitment to prayer, and Father Kirby teaches us to pray, just as Jesus taught his first disciples to pray.

Faith issues forth in a desire to know God better, and God leads us as trusted friends to a mature life of Christian love. Prayer increases our faith and deepens our friendship with God, who accomplishes all of this within us. After all, it was God who called us in the first place, God whose love is always first, God who created us to rest in him for all eternity. Along the way of discipleship, he helps us know him and ourselves better. He reveals our faults in the healing context of his mercy. He forgives us and teaches us to be merciful ourselves. He feeds us with his Word and with the Body and Blood of his Son. He helps us set aright the priorities of our lives, so that seeking his kingdom first, “all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6:33). He reminds us that as disciples of the One sent by the Father, we are sent by the Son as ambassadors of his unsurpassable truth, instruments of his unfathomable love, reconcilers of the estranged, peacemakers in the midst of conflict, and people of prayer who are grounded in friendship with the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

It is Christ who calls disciples, Christ who forms them, Christ who sends them. And prayer is the way to develop a relationship with him so profound that it strengthens and motivates all we are and do. How could we not communicate daily, honestly, and humbly in prayer with the One who desires with all his heart to teach us to pray and holds us closely as his beloved disciples?

This is a book to inspire, teach, and lead in the Way

who is Jesus. Father Kirby is a wise and clear teacher, and he helps us appreciate the Church's storied tradition of prayer. In doing so, he makes us hunger for more—which is to say, he makes us hunger more for Jesus.

—Archbishop J. Peter Sartain

# Introduction

## **An Amazing Journey**

There is nothing in this life more fulfilling or exciting than to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is nothing bolder in this world than to declare that Jesus Christ is Lord and to live the radical adventure of a Christian believer. This is the singular inspiration of this book.

In writing this book, I have drawn from my own discipleship and priesthood, as well as my vocations ministry. As I have led men and women in their discipleship and spiritual life in order to find God's will in their lives, I have learned and collected lived wisdom and practical applications of what it means to live as a Catholic Christian in our contemporary world. I pray that you find this book helpful as you seek to live the amazing journey of being a friend and disciple of the Lord Jesus.

## **Anxiety and Peace**

It was the celebration of my first Mass as a newly ordained priest, and I was very nervous. I wanted everything to go smoothly and, more importantly, I wanted to make sure that I didn't make any mistakes.

As I looked out in the congregation from the president's chair for the first time, I saw my parents and siblings, nieces and nephews, multiple other family members (some of whom I hadn't seen in years), friends from all the different parts of my life: high school, college, graduate school, and seminary, as well as former co-workers, parishioners from summer assignments, and an array of parishioners from my home parish. It seemed like my whole life was before me. I was joyful but very nervous.

As I concluded the opening Collect and sat down, I was relieved that the first part of the Mass had gone well. I found myself thinking ahead and worrying about the next few parts of the Mass. I allowed a lot of distractions to take over, and I missed a lot of the readings. After we stood for the Alleluia and I gave my first blessing to a deacon to proclaim the Gospel, I was still nervous.

Once I heard the beginning of the Gospel reading, however, I felt a tremendous peace. I had read the Gospel beforehand, but the first verse of the passage powerfully struck me at that moment. It was the beginning of the Eleventh Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, the petition of the apostles to the Lord Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray."

After hearing that petition, a great calm came over me. I stopped worrying and let myself enjoy the Mass. I even laughed internally when I thought, "Well, if I make some mistakes, it'll just give people something to talk about!" In hearing the request of the apostles, I heard the deepest request within my own heart being uttered to the Lord: "Lord, teach me to pray." I was getting caught up in all kinds of minutiae and control, anxiety, and fear.

“Lord, teach us to pray” was the simple, heartfelt request that broke through all those heavy anxieties, and was the core of what I wanted at that first Mass.

I repeated that petition to myself as the Mass moved along, and I asked the Lord’s help to be a better disciple. I prayed:

- Lord, help me to believe and see your presence and providence in my life and in my ministry;
- Lord, teach me to follow you and to seek the virtues that will help me to be like you;
- Lord, give me a prayerful spirit and the gift of a strong spiritual life.

## **Our World Today**

My personal story applies to this book. In a small way it reflects much of what is happening in our world today.

We live in an amazing time, and in a world with tremendous blessings. Although it is a world marked by anxieties and a restless spirit, it is also a world of questions and of exploration for answers and direction. People are looking for answers. Where are they looking? What do people want to know?

People want to know who God is and they want to know about themselves, about life and its mysteries, and about the afterlife and its truths. At times, however, our world is distracted by its own ego, nervousness, fears,

and desire for control. People can lose focus, and indifference or despair can set in. Where can the world turn? Who has the answers?

If humanity turns only to itself or to false prophets, then its inquiry continues with incomplete or wayward guidance, and it leads to journeys without end, to questions without answers, and to a life without meaning.

Jesus, however, enters humanity's state of affairs, and he desires to walk with us. He wants a personal relationship with each one of us, and wishes to be our companion and confidant. The Lord Jesus, who cried human tears, worked with human hands, and loved with a human heart, wants to be with each of us. He co-experiences our sufferings, disappointments, and confusion, as well as our triumphs, joys, and peace. The Lord is with us. He hears our concerns and experiences our trials. He knows each of us better than we know ourselves, and he proposes new and eternal answers to our questions. He announces the Good News and promises an abundant life to those who follow him. The Lord calls each of us out of ourselves and into a deep relationship with him. He waits for a response, for us to accept his invitation to teach us and make us fit for the kingdom of God.

This was the invitation accepted by the apostles. They followed the Lord, lived with him, watched him, ate with him, ministered with him, and sought to find the answers to their questions in his life and teachings. After spending some time with the Lord, the apostles noticed that he secluded himself every evening and spent time in communion and prayer with God the Father. The



apostles also knew that St. John the Baptist had taught his disciples how to pray. Motivated by these examples, the apostles approached the Lord one evening after he returned from his solitude and prayer. They asked him simply, “Lord, teach us to pray.” They wanted to follow him, and so they humbled themselves and asked him to teach them. This encounter between Christ and the apostles and the apostles’ request manifest three very important lessons about the spiritual life:

- The spiritual life is about being in a relationship with God. We address and desire communion with a personal God. It is not simply a random exploration in transcendence or an unguided search into existentialism;
- We cannot give ourselves all that we desire in the spiritual life. We see the depth and richness of the spiritual life, and we must also recognize our interior poverty and helplessness;
- We must be taught. We do not have what we need. We have to accept the humble posture of a person who does not know, and allow God and others to instruct us in the spiritual life.

And so, like the apostles, we have to welcome the Lord into our lives. We have to accept him as our Lord, Teacher, Healer, Friend, Companion, Confidant, our Everything.

We have to become disciples and turn to him, who is the Answer to all our human longings, and ask him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In making this petition, we begin to find in the Lord Jesus all the peace, hope, and joy we seek in our lives.

## **Why This Book?**

In preparing to write this book, and working to collect and present the different portions of the Church’s spiritual tradition, I thought often of my first Mass and of that Gospel verse: “Lord, teach us to pray.” The verse serves as a great outline for presenting the spiritual wisdom of the Church, since in this concise verse there are three distinct parts: “LORD,” “TEACH US,” and “TO PRAY.”

We’ll use these three parts as the three parts of our book. Each part of the book will have three chapters, and will be guided by a question posed by the Lord Jesus in his public ministry. The three parts will present the fundamental aspects of the Church’s spiritual tradition, and the dynamic nature between the three parts. Living a life in Jesus Christ will be demonstrated and explained.

- In Part One, we will address Jesus Christ as “Lord.” We will emphasize the need for a life of faith and discipleship. We will be guided by the Lord’s question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:15), and will explore the identity of Jesus Christ and his summons to each of us. The first part will stress

Baptism and our need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It will address the Eucharist as the heart of our discipleship, and show the Church as a community of faith.

- In Part Two, we will cover our petition to the Lord Jesus to “Teach Us.” We will stress the important aspects of conversion and virtue in the life of a Christian disciple. This part of the book will be guided by the Lord’s question: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Lk 6:46), and will define and explain the purgative way, God’s law, virtue, and the Rule of Life.
- In Part Three, we will develop our request of the Lord to teach us how “To Pray.” We will highlight the universal call to holiness and the different understandings of prayer. We will be guided by the Lord’s question: “What do you want me to do for you?” (Lk 18:41). We will address the utter importance of the Eucharist, and provide practical counsels on how to begin or deepen a time of prayer, how to persevere in prayer, and how to sanctify our daily activities in Jesus Christ.

In our spiritual tradition, there are many volumes on the life of prayer and spirituality. Oftentimes, these books are long, incomplete, and heavy. Some books deal extremely well with prayer, but do not address the life of faith and discipleship that is necessary in order to pray in Christ. Other books do not explain conversion or virtue. They neglect the moral life as an essential part of the spiritual life and the workings of God's grace. A person cannot have a relationship with God or a life of authentic prayer if he is not seeking to be like Christ in his actions and behavior. Other books address the life of prayer or aspects of the spiritual life, but do not fully address the practical, tangible aspects of how to pray or grow in virtue.

In addressing all three of these areas, the book intends to be a resource and a guide to Christian disciples who wish to grow in their relationship with the Lord. It is meant to help the reader as both a workshop and a laboratory, offering practical counsel on how to develop a relationship with God: to be with the Lord and let ourselves be loved by him. This book was written and designed as a blueprint and toolbox for the person who truly "hungers and thirsts for righteousness" (Mt 5:6), and who is willing to labor to receive the Lord's blessing on his efforts (Ps 127:1).

PART ONE

*“But who do you say that I am?”*

Matthew 16:15

**“LORD”**



## CHAPTER ONE

# Baptism and a Personal Decision for Christ

*“Jesus Christ is Lord!”*

Philippians 2:11

### **Starting the Journey**

What a great adventure it is to be a Christian! Throughout the Gospels, we see the apostles and disciples being led and formed by the Lord Jesus in his public ministry. They witnessed his powerful preaching and wondrous signs. We can imagine that the apostles woke up every morning wondering, “What is the Master going to do today?” It was always an adventure, and always led the apostles to follow paths that they would not have taken by themselves. This is the adventure that Jesus offers to us: to join in this life as his friends and disciples.

After following and living with the Lord for some time, Jesus sent out the apostles (the word “apostle” even means “one who is sent”) to go and preach the Good News. They were sent out in pairs, and they taught and worked great signs in the Lord’s name. After their mission, the apostles reassembled with Jesus in Caesarea-Philippi. After

the initial excitement and exchange of stories among the group, the Lord asked a simple question, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” It was an easy question: much like delivering the news, and the apostles responded, “John the Baptist,” “Elijah,” “Jeremiah,” and “One of the prophets.” It is a question that has echoed through the ages, and many other answers have been reported: “Great Teacher,” “Miracle-Worker,” “Inspiring Revolutionary.”

Jesus then asked the apostles a dramatically more provocative question: “Who do you say that I am?” We can imagine that the festive and relaxed mood of the occasion came to an abrupt end, and suddenly the apostles found themselves with a pressing question that calls for an answer.

The Lord’s question given at Caesarea-Philippi is the inspiration and the basis of the first part of our book. In the course of the next three chapters, we will dive into this question and see the answers given by others, and prepare ourselves to give our own answer to the Lord’s persistent question: “Who do you say that I am?”

## **The Human Person**

As we begin to reflect on the question that has been given to us by the Lord, we realize how deeply the question resonates within us. Every human person consists of both a body and soul. Just as our body needs things to survive and grow, such as oxygen, water, food, etc., so our soul needs things as well, such as faith, hope, and love. These spiritual longings point to the truth that every human person has a natural desire for God. The human person



is a spiritual person, and we all interiorly desire the relationship that God offers to us. In our lives and in our culture, we can find several apparent goods to try and fill the *capax Dei*, which is our capacity for God, oftentimes simply called the “God hole” within us. But, try as we might to fill it with other things, this interior desire can only be completely fulfilled by a relationship with God, and by acts of religion that bind us to him.<sup>1</sup>

There is a story about four young Catholic men who were backpacking through Europe after college graduation. The four agreed to attend Sunday Mass and to pray together every evening on their trek. On one occasion, the group was at a hostel in northern Italy and an Englishman at the hostel noticed them praying. Later he asked them, “So, you all are religious?” One of the group members responded, “Yes, just like you.” The gentleman was caught off-guard and protested, “I’m not religious!” To which another group member responded, “Yes, yes you are. You just choose not to exercise your religious nature. I have a muscle here on my arm just like everyone else. You can see the muscle on my arm because I’ve been backpacking and it’s conditioned. Everyone else has this muscle, but perhaps it can’t be seen on them because they haven’t exercised it. In the same way, yes, we’re all religious. We’re just trying to exercise it.” The group explained it well. We are all spiritual and religious persons. Will we exercise this part of our personhood?

In these observations of our human nature, it is

---

1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #27-30.

helpful to be reminded that we were all made by God and for God, and that he never ceases to draw us to himself. The Lord Jesus invites us and welcomes us to be with him. He asks each of us: “Who do you say that I am?”

## **A Response Is Needed**

In our world today, we see an incredible openness to God and to religious sentiment. These noble inquiries are good and need affirmation. They also need direction. Like ancient Athens, there are many religious monuments throughout the Mars Hill of today (cf. Acts 17:16–34). Once again, in the midst of so many monuments and religious opinions, the Good News is proclaimed. As St. Paul did over two thousand years ago, the Church once again raises up the Person of Jesus Christ and offers him as the answer to all of humanity’s needs, hopes, and aspirations. Once again the reality of God becoming a man, suffering, dying, and rising from the dead, and again offering us his friendship, is announced and extended to each of us. In our spinning world, the steadfastness of the Cross and Resurrection are boldly announced, fear flees, and true friendship with God is offered to us.

And so, the Lord Jesus asks us: “Who do you say that I am?” The invitation endures. The question is a tremendously important one, since it lies at the heart of our desire to learn about prayer. The spiritual life is a relationship with God. If we desire a relationship with someone, we have to know who they are. We can only love what we know; therefore we have to come to know who Jesus Christ is in our lives. In addition, our answer to the Lord’s question

determines our level of surrender, trust, docility, and the reception we give to his teachings. The answer we give to the Lord's question will determine whether we accept the Lord's invitation to be in a relationship with him.

Some people answer the Lord's question indirectly or incompletely. They note that they have heard about Jesus, are curious about his miracles, are inspired by his teachings, or revere his historical legacy. Some will answer that Jesus is a great teacher, a miracle-worker, or an inspiring revolutionary. While each of these responses could be good in themselves, each of them is based on actions and functions, and none of them deal with a true relationship marked by a desire to be with the Lord. These responses do not accept the intimacy that the Lord Jesus offers us. Each of these responses, and ones similar to them, are incomplete and limit our compliance to the Lord Jesus and his way of life. People only trust a teacher in the areas of their lives where they feel instruction is needed; people only watch a miracle-worker for entertainment or because they want something; and people only follow a revolutionary because they want a structure or ideology challenged and overthrown. Each of these are limited, and do not establish a deep relationship. Additionally, beyond these answers themselves, we have to acknowledge that this supposed good teacher, miracle worker, and revolutionary claimed, in fact, to be God. The implications of this claim are huge. As C. S. Lewis put it: Jesus is either Lord, a Liar, or a Lunatic.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 3.

- Jesus is Lord as he understood himself and as he truly is;
- Or Jesus is a Liar since he claimed to be God and knew that he was not;
- Or he is a Lunatic since he believed he was God but is not the Lord in reality.

This three-point summary deconstructs many supposed answers that seek the middle ground: “I respect the teachings of Jesus and try to live by them and be a good person,” or, “I accept the contribution that Jesus has made to spiritual wisdom and I find his teachings inspiring along with the teachings of several others.” These types of answers try to absorb Jesus of Nazareth into a broad conglomerate of recognized spiritual teachers, and they avoid Jesus’ direct question: “Who do you say that I am?” Will we avoid generalized answers and understand the singular and utter importance of our answer to this question? Will we understand how much is at stake for us in our answer to this question? How will we answer? Who is Jesus to us?

### **Baptismal Dignity**

In acknowledging the Lord’s question and seeing our natural state as human beings who have a desire for God, it is also extremely important that we remind ourselves of our spiritual state. Principally, we must not diminish or forget the primacy of our Baptism. We must come to

a greater understanding that our relationship with God begins with baptism, the initial sacrament of Christian life and faith.<sup>3</sup>

Oftentimes when Christian believers are asked why Baptism is necessary, they respond that it is necessary so that original sin (and any actual sins) might be removed from the person's soul. This is indeed true, but not complete. Why is sin removed? Why is this important? It is important because as the Lord Jesus removes our sin in Baptism, we enter into a covenant with God. We are incorporated into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. We now participate and are called to re-live the Lord's Paschal Mystery—his passion, death, and resurrection—in our daily lives. God the Father accepts us, is well pleased with us, and makes us members of his own family. We become temples of the Holy Spirit. Sin is removed at Baptism so that these greater, divine actions can occur within us. Baptism is truly our adoption ceremony into the life of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and into the living household of faith. We are blessed with God's presence in our very selves, and are endowed with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.<sup>4</sup>

## **Baptismal Way of Life**

Since we are baptized Christians and live as members of Christ's Body, we are called to re-live the Paschal Mystery.

---

3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213, 1253.

4 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1268-1269, 1279.

As the Lord Jesus died and rose again, we are called to die to ourselves and our sinfulness, and to live in him and seek to follow him in all our ways.<sup>5</sup>

St. Paul juxtaposes two ways of life, and labels them as “life according to the flesh” (with “flesh” meaning our fallen attraction to evil and pleasure, and not necessarily our bodies), and “life according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3–13). In order for us to live in Christ and follow a life in the Spirit, we have to truly die to ourselves and our sinfulness, and seek to live according to the person and teachings of the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup> As St. Paul asked the Christians in ancient Rome, so he asks us:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3–4).

What does this mean?

Imagine if you and some of your closest friends were on a large boat on a nice lake. You were all relaxed enjoying the gentle movement of the boat and a cold drink, when all of a sudden you heard a noise in the water behind you. You can tell from the faces of the people in front of you who can see behind you that something is not right. Something suddenly grabs you from behind and throws you over the boat. Splash! You hit the water

---

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1691, 1694-1697.

6 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #628, 1227-1228.

and are fighting to break free. You sink deeper into the water, and you can see the boat getting farther and farther away from you. You are wrestling to break free. As you are able to look behind you, you're shocked when you realize that it is actually Jesus who is holding you. You scream from within, "Lord, let me go, I'm drowning. I'm dying. Let me go!" Welcome to the waters of Baptism! It is only when we are willing to die to ourselves in Christ that we are able to live in him and be born to newness of life.

Pope Saint John Paul II teaches this very truth in his first encyclical, *Redeemer of Man*:

The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly—and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being—he must with his unrest, uncertainty, and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself.<sup>7</sup>

This way of life is clearly taught and expressed in the Baptismal Promises. In the first three promises we denounce sin, the wayward attraction to sin, and Satan. In the last three promises we acknowledge the array of Christian beliefs, assert our faith in the Holy Trinity and in Jesus Christ, and acknowledge the Church. Seen here,

---

7 John Paul II, *Redeemer of Man*, #10.

the baptismal promises fully summarize the biblical and constant teaching on the baptismal way of life of the Christian believer:

Do you renounce sin, so as to live in the freedom of the children of God?

Do you reject the lure of evil, so that sin may have no mastery over you?

Do you reject Satan, the author and prince of sin?

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?<sup>8</sup>

## **Faith and Baptism**

As we understand our Baptism and review the promises of this first sacrament, we begin to deepen our comprehension of what it means to be a member of the family of God. We perceive anew why it is important to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus, and we start to grasp the context from which the Lord's question—"Who do you say that I

---

8 *Roman Catholic Missal*, Easter Vigil Mass.



am?”—is given and why our answer is so important.

The grace of faith is poured into us at baptism, and yet some initial faith is needed in order to be baptized. Those of us who were baptized as children had our parents attest to their own faith, a type of “proxy faith” for us, and they pledged that they would raise us in the faith. Those who were baptized as adults went through a catechumenate (usually the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA]) and had their initial faith formed so that they could receive Baptism. At Baptism itself, however, a tremendous outpouring of faith was given to each of us. If we’re not careful, this grace can sit in our souls and never fully be used. Sadly, in many Christians, the faith that is called forth from the baptized is never fully accepted, integrated, and lived out.<sup>9</sup> How can we grow into our Baptism? What is faith?

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Two words that stand out in this explanation are “assurance” and “conviction,” and Pope St. John Paul II continues in that spirit in his encyclical, *Splendor of Truth*:

Faith is a decision involving one’s whole existence. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). It entails an act of trusting abandonment to Christ, which enables us to live as he lived (cf. Gal 2:20),

---

<sup>9</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1231, 1247-1255.

in profound love of God and of our brothers and sisters.<sup>10</sup>

How do we live by faith? Following the example and counsel of St. Paul, we have to “rekindle the gift of God” that we have received. We are called to realize what we have been given in Baptism, to seek ways to grow in our faith, to make a personal decision for Jesus Christ and boldly answer the Lord’s question: “Who do you say that I am?”

Pope St. John Paul II teaches us in the encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer*:

From the outset, conversion is expressed in faith which is total and radical, and which neither limits nor hinders God’s gift. At the same time, it gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from “life according to the flesh” to “life according to the Spirit” (cf. Rom 8:3–13). Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple.<sup>11</sup>

## **St. Paul of Tarsus**

As we grow in our understanding of Christian Baptism and the role of formation in making a personal decision for Christ, and as we seek to answer the Lord’s question, it might be helpful for us to look at a great witness from the Sacred Scriptures.

---

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, *Splendor of Truth*, #88.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer*, #46.

In the years after Jesus' death and Resurrection, Saul of Tarsus was a fierce persecutor of the Christian community and a man who was feared by believers: "Saul laid waste to the Church, entered house after house, dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). After persecuting the Church in Jerusalem, Saul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" and asked for letters to go to Damascus and search for any Christians (Acts 9:1-2). On his way to the city, "a light from heaven flashed about him," and a voice said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When Saul asked who it was, the voice responded, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5). After this encounter with the Lord, Saul was blinded and did not eat for three days. God sent Ananias to Saul. Ananias laid hands on him, healed him, and then gave him Baptism. After being baptized, Saul ate again and was made strong (Acts 9:17-19).

After accepting the graces of conversion and being baptized, Saul realized that he needed time with the Lord and formation in the Christian way of life. He went and spent some time in the desert of Arabia (Gal 1:17), and then sought out St. Peter and sat at his feet for instruction for fifteen days (Gal 1:18). One can only imagine the humility of Saul. He was one of the most educated men of his day, a student of the great Rabbi Gamaliel and a Roman citizen, and he sought instruction from a Galilean fisherman. Saul knew he needed formation, and he sought guidance and direction.

Rekindling the gift he received from God at Baptism,

and nurtured by his prayer and instruction, Saul—who decided to be called by his Roman name Paul after his conversion—was able to make his personal decision for Christ. In answer to the Lord’s question, “Who do you say that I am?” St. Paul boldly declared that “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:11). He understood the full depth of that declaration in his life, as he wrote:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.  
(Gal 2:20)

## **An Enduring Invitation**

In seeing the witness of St. Paul, we need to remind ourselves that each of us is invited to encounter Jesus of Nazareth and that each of us is given an invitation to accept him as Lord and Messiah. Jesus chooses us and offers us the powerful opportunity to enter into a loving relationship with him (cf. Jn 15:16). We are offered his friendship, even as he manifests his friendship to us (cf. 1 Jn 3:16, 4:19). The Lord asks us the pressing question: “Who do you say that I am?” The answer to this essential question is the determining factor of where the Lord’s invitation will go in our lives, and whether the door of faith will continue to be opened to us.

Will we accept Jesus as Lord? Will we humble ourselves and accept him as the Lord of our lives, and live as his friends and disciples?