

# GATHERING...

# 1

## We Respond to God's Love

**“Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.”**

(1 John 4:8)

**+ Leader:** There is a very important truth in our lives that we may not always be aware of: *God loves us*. Let us take time now to remember and reflect on God's love.

**Reader 1:** “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.”

(1 John 4:16)

(silent reflection)

**Reader 2:** “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

(silent reflection)

**Reader 3:** No obstacle “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

(silent reflection)

**Leader:** Thank you, God, for your great love for us. We pray that we may live our lives as a response to your love.

**All:** God,

I want to be present.

I want to be ready.

I want to share what I have—my life, my laughter, my love, my joy.

I want to give to you as I receive from you.

Amen.

(based on a prayer by Sister Thea Bowman)



Visit [www.weliveourfaith.com](http://www.weliveourfaith.com) to find appropriate music and songs.



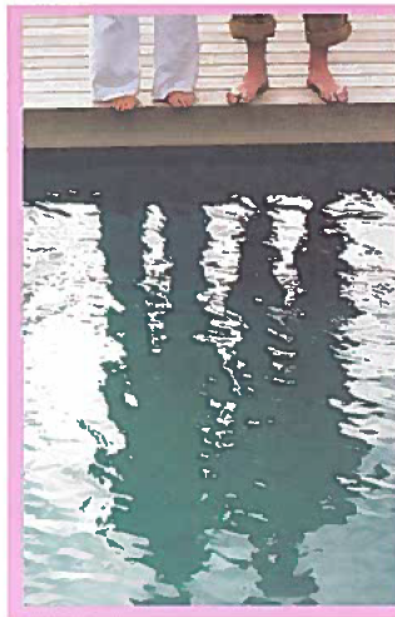
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# BELIEVING...

## We reflect the goodness of God.

We've all heard the advice "Just be yourself." But at times we're so busy trying to fit in, or simply figuring out who we are, that we may not follow this advice. Yet "being ourselves" can have new meaning for us when we realize just how valuable and worthy we are as human beings. In Scripture we read, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). **And because God created us in his image and likeness, we reflect his love and eternal goodness. The value and worth that we share because of this is our human dignity.**



In fact, as human beings who have dignity, we are created to respond to God's goodness and love. It is natural for us to want to return God's love, to do what is pleasing to God, and to help one another. **Through God's gift of free will, the freedom and ability to choose what to do, we can choose to love and praise God and also act kindly and lovingly toward one another.** What a great sign of our dignity this is! We have the freedom and ability to choose to live in God's image.

Yet since we have the ability to choose to live in God's image, we can also choose not to. We can deny our human dignity by turning away from God. The first

A great sign of our dignity is our ability to choose right over wrong. We have this ability because when God created us, he placed his law into our hearts. This law of God within us, known by human reason, is called the natural law. The natural law is understood through our conscience. Our conscience is our ability to know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. It enables us to make right choices. And when we choose to follow God's law and do what is good, we are simply being ourselves, human beings who have dignity.

→ **knowing right from wrong**

human beings used their free will and decided to turn from God. This turning from God was the first sin. And this first sin committed by the first human beings is called original sin. As their descendants we have been born with this original sin. But God the Father fulfilled his promise to send a savior.

### Faith Words

- human dignity
- natural law
- conscience
- free will
- original sin

God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ. Through his suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, Christ offers us freedom from sin and the hope of eternal salvation. Through his example, Jesus Christ showed us that we can truly be ourselves: human beings who reflect the image of God. And God the Holy Spirit inspires us and enables us to truly reflect God.

## An examination of conscience



**An examination of conscience is the practice of thinking about our choices and determining whether we have followed God's law and the teachings and example of Jesus.** Every night before sleeping, take a few moments to ask yourself: Did my choices today show love for God and others? Or did they contribute to the sinfulness and suffering in the world? Thank Jesus for your good choices. Ask Jesus to forgive you for any sinful choices. Plan to ask those you may have hurt for forgiveness, too.

Ask Jesus to help you to follow your conscience and his example each day.

**Activity** Write a slogan to encourage young people to turn to God and value their human dignity.

## God forgives our sins.

Because of original sin, we are subject to ignorance, suffering, and death, and we have a tendency to use our free will to turn from God and from his laws. When we do this, we sin. Sin is any thought, word, deed, or omission against God's law. And just as original sin destroyed the harmony with God that the first humans had, so the sins that we commit, our personal sins, also weaken or destroy God's life in us. But in **the Sacrament of Baptism** God offers us the hope of **eternal life**, a life of happiness with him forever. God frees us from original sin, and our personal sins are forgiven. **God also gives us his grace**, a participation, or a sharing, in God's life and friendship. And as we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, **God's grace "restores what sin had damaged in us"** (1708). Yet we can still sometimes say no to God and to the goodness and life that he offers us.

And sin, when very serious, may completely take away God's grace, his very life in us. This very serious sin that breaks our friendship with God is *mortal sin*. Since mortal sin separates us from God, we have no hope of eternal life with God until we turn back to him—until we repent and ask his forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. Sin is **mortal** only when these **three conditions are present**: (1) **the sin is about a serious matter**; (2) **we commit the sin knowing that it is seriously wrong**; and (3) **we commit the sin completely of our own free will**. A less serious sin that weakens our friendship with God is a *venial sin*. But even though venial sins do not turn us completely away from God, they still hurt us and others. **If we keep repeating venial sins, they can lead us further away from God and the Church**, the community of people who believe in **Jesus Christ**, have been baptized in him, and follow his teachings. And over time, all sins, whether mortal or venial, have destructive effects in our lives if we do not make the effort to turn away from them and from the things that lead us to them.

**But through his mercy, especially in the Sacrament of Penance, God forgives our sins if we are sorry and have a firm desire not to sin again. Through the Sacrament of Penance, the life of grace in us is**



Jesus Christ "saved us and called us to a holy life" (2 Timothy 1:9).

**strengthened when we are absolved of venial sins, or restored when we are absolved of mortal sins.** We are reconciled with the Church and strengthened to live by the Ten Commandments and by Jesus' teaching to love one another as he loved us. And as we respond to the grace of the sacraments, we can come to realize that Jesus Christ "saved us and called us to a holy life" (2 Timothy 1:9).

### Faith Words

eternal life  
grace  
Church

**Activity** Design a prayer card to remind you of God's forgiveness and love. You may want to use one of these Scripture quotations on your card:

"The LORD is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in love."  
(Psalm 145:8)

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord  
will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

"If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and  
just and will forgive our sins." (1 John 1:9)

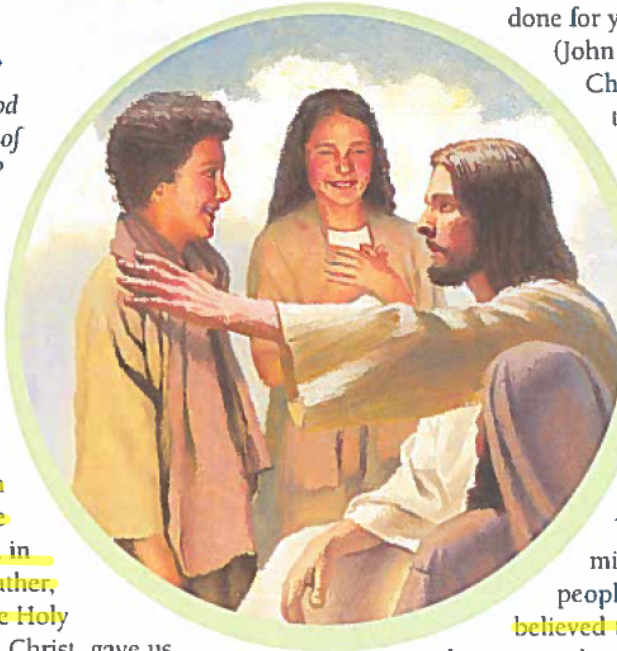
Pray the words on your prayer card before or after receiving the Sacrament of Penance.

## BELIEVING...

### We live holy lives.

*How can we be all that God calls us to be—reflections of his goodness and holiness?*

**Holiness** is a participation in God's goodness and a response to God's love by the way that we live. God alone is holy, but through **grace** he calls us to share in his holiness. **The grace that we receive, the sharing in God's life, unites us to the Blessed Trinity—one God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.** God the Son, Jesus Christ, gave us the perfect example of living in holiness, saying, "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have



done for you, you should also do" (John 13:15). Through Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God fully reveals who he is, shows us how he wants us to live, and offers us forgiveness and salvation. The coming of Jesus Christ is good news for all people and for all time. Jesus' life was lived in total love for God the Father and service to others.

Throughout Jesus' public ministry, his work among the people, **he showed that he truly believed that all human life should be respected and treasured.** He constantly reached out to those who were poor and in need and to those who were weak and defenseless. Truly, Jesus called people to live their lives more fully, relying on God's love and loving others. And Jesus promised eternal life to those who lived as he did and wanted to grow in holiness.

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, guides us to holiness. The Holy Spirit makes the truth clear to us, reminding us of Jesus' teachings, helping us to understand God's word, and helping us to do good and to avoid sin.

As we read in the *Catechism*, "All are called to holiness" (2013). As disciples of Jesus Christ, we work together to respond to this call. **Supporting one another as the Church, with God's grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can live as Jesus lived.**

**Activity** Jesus gave us the perfect example of living in holiness. On a separate sheet of paper, write a dialogue in which you interview Jesus about how he lives in holiness and how you can do the same. What does Jesus say to you?

**Faith Word**  
holiness



### The Blessed Trinity

The truth of the Blessed Trinity sheds light on all of our beliefs and guides us in all areas of our lives. The whole life of the Church revolves around our belief in the Blessed Trinity. The words *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* express the relationship among the three Divine Persons of God and are central to our relationship with God. We are baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (**Rite of Baptism**). And just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, all who are baptized become one with God and one another. **God continues to be with us and is active in our lives as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the grace of all the sacraments that we receive. And in our prayer and liturgy—especially in the Mass—we become one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and our unity with one another is strengthened.**

Listen for references to the Blessed Trinity at Mass this week.

**CATHOLIC IDENTITY**

**We give witness to Jesus.**

Jesus' first disciples gave witness to Jesus by showing that they believed in him. They went everywhere with him. They were his apprentices.

An apprentice is a pupil who learns a specific skill or trade under the guidance of a master teacher. Jesus was the master teacher who

encouraged his disciples to develop their God-given gifts, learn his teachings, and continue his work of sharing God's love. Jesus invited them to trust in God his Father and to obey God's laws.

Jesus showed his followers that through discipleship to him they would share love, freedom, justice, and peace in this life, and would also be choosing eternal life over sin and eternal death. In response, Jesus' disciples worked with him to share God's love and spread God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the power of God's love active in our lives and in our world. We will share in the fullness of God's Kingdom in eternal life.

Having learned from Jesus, the disciples would go on to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world. We are Jesus' disciples. And as members of the Church today, God

**Faith Word**  
Kingdom of God

Learning about and living out our Catholic faith is "an initiation and apprenticeship" (General Directory for Catechesis, 30).

calls each of us to proclaim the good news of Christ by what we say and do. As disciples, we too give witness to Jesus and live our faith as apprentices. Learning about and living out our Catholic faith is "an initiation and apprenticeship" (General Directory for Catechesis, 30). Jesus is our master teacher, encouraging us to develop our God-given gifts, learn his teachings, and continue his mission—sharing the good news and spreading God's Kingdom.

Then we too will be "choosing life" here on earth and, in so doing, choosing eternal life with God forever.

**Activity** Write a "Help Wanted" ad for the position of a disciple of Jesus.

In what ways do you qualify for this position?



## RESPONDING...

### Recognizing Our Faith

Recall the question at the beginning of this chapter: *How can I be true to myself?* Write a fifty-word reflection on the way that living as Jesus' disciple helps you to be true to yourself.

### Living Our Faith

In this chapter we learned that we are all called to holiness. Think of one thing you can do to respond to this call, and then carry it out.

### Sister Thea Bowman



Born in 1937, Thea Bowman was the granddaughter of a slave. Raised by Methodist parents, she attended Catholic school to obtain a better education and then converted to Catholicism. As a teenager she became a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

### Partners in FAITH

Gifted with a beautiful voice, an energetic personality, and wit, Sister Thea shared the message of God's love through a teaching career. She not only had a doctorate in English, but also was the first African-American woman to receive an honorary doctoral degree in theology from Boston College. She began giving presentations combining songs, the Gospels, poetry, prayer, and storytelling. She encouraged people to communicate, to learn about and accept all cultures, and to live with hope, love, and justice.

In 1984 Sister Thea was diagnosed with bone cancer. Seated in a wheelchair, she continued to be true to herself, working against prejudice, suspicion, hatred, and things that drive people apart. She continued to give witness to Jesus until her death in 1990.

How does the life of Sister Thea Bowman motivate you to be true to yourself?

@\* For additional ideas and activities, visit [www.weliveourfaith.com](http://www.weliveourfaith.com).

## Putting Faith to Work

Talk about what you have learned in this chapter:



**We understand** that we have human dignity.



**We appreciate** that a great sign of our dignity is our conscience, through which we can recognize God's law and respond to God's love.



**We respond** to Jesus' call to holiness by imitating his example, accepting God's mercy, and proclaiming the good news.

Decide on ways to live out what you have learned.



## ENCOUNTERING GOD'S WORD



**“As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct.”**

(1 Peter 1:15)

- ➔ **READ** the quotation from Scripture.
- ➔ **REFLECT** on these questions:  
Does the call to be holy in every aspect of your conduct seem challenging? As Jesus' disciples, what help have we been given to meet this challenge?
- ➔ **SHARE** your reflections with a partner.
- ➔ **DECIDE** today on a way that your conduct can better reflect the holiness of Jesus.

Write the letter that best defines each term.

1. C holiness
  2. B conscience
  3. A human dignity
  4. E Kingdom of God
- a. the value and worth that we share because God created us in his image and likeness
  - b. the ability to know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong
  - c. a participation in God's goodness and a response to God's love by the way that we live
  - d. the law of God within us, which is known by human reason = **natural law**
  - e. the power of God's love active in our lives and in our world

Write **True** or **False** next to the following sentences. On a separate sheet of paper, change the false sentences to make them true.

5. False Mortal sin is a very serious sin...  
~~venial~~ sin is a very serious sin that completely breaks our friendship with God.
6. False The law of God within us, which is known by human reason, is called ~~free will~~ the natural law
7. False The first sin committed by the first human beings is called ~~mortal~~ sin....original sin.
8. True The Church is the community of people who believe in Jesus Christ, have been baptized in him, and follow his teachings.

9–10. **ESSAY:** In what ways can you respond to God's love?

We can respond to God's love by following Jesus' example of helping our neighbors in times of need. We are called to use our gifts and talents to serve our classmates, friends, family, etc. especially those who are weak and defenseless (the poor, homeless, etc.). We can grow closer to God by praying to Him, going to Mass, sharing in the sacraments, and reading Holy Scripture. (pp.16-17)