SEARCH185

The Cost of Discipleship

Christian and Catholic, Now What?

There has been a significant increase in last 2 years or so of those interested in learning more about the Catholic faith, but also those entering into communion with the Catholic Church. A significant portion are young men in particular, but also people of all ages.

Why? My thoughts are that there are many that have been disenchanted with the world and they desire objective truth and stability. It seems that many young adults and Millennials are seeking a "solid foundation" and objective truth in a world they perceive as morally relative and chaotic. They are drawn to the Church's ancient traditions, clear moral authority, and the promise of a permanent relationship with God amidst noise of the modern world. They are searching for truth that produces peace in their souls . . . we desire and need truth . . . but what is truth?

Truth is not a concept, it is a person. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." (Jn 14:6)

How do we enter into that "truth," into that "peace that surpasses all understanding?" Saint Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Friendship with God

Friendship with God is a profound relationship of love and communion with the Creator.

> **James 4:4** *Unfaithful creatures! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

When we are "in Christ" we are no longer "of this world," even though we are "in the world."

> **Jn 17:14** *I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

God desires friendship with us as we can see in the OT and NT.

> **Job 29:4** *Oh that I were . . . as I was in my autumn days, when the friendship of God was upon my tent;*

> **Wisdom of Solomon 7:14** *for it [Wisdom] is an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction.*

> **John 15:14-15** *You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends*

> **James 2:23** *and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" and he was called the friend of God.*

- How do we enter into this "friendship" with God? This friendship is made possible through God's grace and is rooted in the covenantal relationship established by God with humanity. A covenant is "an exchange of persons." "You are mine and I am yours."

Entering Into Friendship with The Father Trough Jesus Christ

It is only though the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that we are able to enter into this friendship with God. We are "children of wrath," as St. Paul tells us in

> **Eph 2:3** *Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest.*

> **Romans 5:10** *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

. . . and we must become "children of God." This happens through God's grace alone. Grace is the very life and power of God. We must leave the old "family of Adam and Eve" and enter into the new family of God as "sons and daughters of God" through the ONE Son of God, Jesus. It is through the image of "family" that we will understand our relationship with God.

> **Gal 3:26-28** *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Just like in the OT covenant of ritual of circumcision, we must enter into the Covenant Family of God through a new covenant ritual . . .

> **Col 2:11-12** *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ, buried [died to sin] with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith. (Mk 16:16)*

> **Rom 6:2-4** *How can we who died to sin still live in it? 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.*

> **Gal 6:15** *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

> **Titus 3:5** *he [Jesus] saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.*

- Baptism is the entrance into the Covenant Family of God and unites us with Christ in his death, passion and resurrection and reconciles us to the Father.
- Through this faith in Christ, we develop a personal and intimate relationship where believers are invited to share in the life and love of the Trinity.

So is a life in Christ that simple . . . just believe and be baptized and I'm done? No, not at all.

Remember we said that we are entering into a covenantal family. This is key to understanding what it means to live a Christian life.

This friendship in the family of God is nurtured through prayer, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and living a life of virtue in accordance with God's commandments. It is a journey of growing closer to God, transforming one's heart and mind to align with His will, and ultimately leading to eternal communion with Him in heaven. This is basically the outline of the series . . . transformation, prayer, knowing the Word of God, worshiping God and loving others.

So what next? Now that you have entered into the family of God, you are an "infant in the faith."

> **1 Cor 3:1–2** *But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it.*

> **Heb 5:12-13** *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child.*

Like any other infant, you need to "fed." In the natural world, a baby is given milk and later solid food. But in the spiritual sense, we should leave the "milk," or the basics behind as soon as possible and be fed with the Word of God and with the Body of Christ . . . Let's break it down a little bit . . .

> **Mt 4:4** *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. (Dt 8:3)*

The holy scriptures are God's Word that feeds our minds and hearts with the truths revealed by Jesus Christ and the Apostles through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

St. Jerome, a Catholic priest and theologian in the 4th century said, "Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." If we want to know Christ, we MUST study and know the bible.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states the following:

105 God is the author of Sacred Scripture. “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit . . . they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.” 107 The inspired books teach the truth . . . we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.”

Recall that Jn 1:1 says that Jesus is “the Word.” Is there another way that we can be fed by this “Word” that is Jesus? Yes . . .

John Chapter 6

The bible, the Word of God, tells us that Jesus said he would feed us with a “new manna.” And that this new “manna has come down from heaven” and that when we eat of this manna, we will never die . . . In the OT, we see the Israelites are fed “miracle bread” from heaven.

> **Ex 16:4** *Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day*

> **Jn 6:48-51** *I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*

Jesus also at the Last Supper took bread and said, “Take and eat, for this is my body . . . then the chalice . . . Drink of it all of you for this is the blook of my covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.” (Mt. 26:26-28) These statements are “hard saying. Who can listen to it?” (Jn 6:60) These words have caused many to “leave and no longer walk with him.” (Jn 6:66) When Jesus said . . .

> **Lk 12:51-53** *Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother. . .*

He meant to say that his teachings would be hard from many to accept. If you left the Old Covenant rules and regulations to follow Jesus, there may be those in your own family that will not accept Jesus as the Messiah. You will have to decide whether to maintain family peace and remain a Mosaic Jew or leave the Old Covenant and enter into the new one with Christ.

There is a cost to following the truth . . . following Jesus. This “cost” may not manifest itself in disagreements regarding doctrinal issues, but can also include:

The loss of friends or family. If you change your life and give your heart to Christ and follow his commands, your old buddies may not approve of the “new you.” You may have to remove those negative challenges to your new-found faith.

Dying to Sin. The scriptures are clear that when we enter into the new covenant family of God, we are a “new creation.” We are no longer “slaves to sin.”

> **Rom 6:16-18** *Do you not know that . . . you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

Enduring the Cross of Christ. As a follower of Christ we must continually life a life of sanctification or holiness. The only way to become like Christ, is to endure the trials that will come our way to build holiness. Holiness comes from practicing the virtues that lead to holiness:

Love, forgiveness, kindness, generosity, understanding, compassion, chastity, etc. all require a dying to self. Dying to my desires and passion for the sake of the kingdom of God.

> **Luke 9:23–24** *And he said to all, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.*

In subsequent lessons in this series, we will look at practical ways to move from “milk” to “solid food” in your Christian journey.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the greatest “costs of discipleship” that has permeated the Church throughout her 2000 year history . . . and that is the faith of the martyr. A martyr is one who has been put to death for not denying the faith or simply because they believed in Christ. Our history is replete with martyrs, beginning with the first recorded martyrdom of Stephen in Acts Chapter 7. Eleven of the 12 Apostles were martyred. Every successor of Peter as the Bishop of Rome up until 312 AD with the Edict of Milan was martyred. In modern times,

1. Saint Oscar Romero: Archbishop of San Salvador, he was an outspoken advocate for human rights and social justice. He was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass, due to his vocal opposition to the injustices and violence in El Salvador.
2. Blessed Stanley Rother: An American priest who served as a missionary in Guatemala, he was deeply loved by his parishioners for his dedication and service. He was murdered in 1981 during the Guatemalan Civil War because of his commitment to his people and the Gospel.
3. The Martyrs of Algeria: This group includes Bishop Pierre Claverie and 18 others, who were beatified in 2018. They were killed in the 1990s amid violence and turmoil in Algeria, remaining faithful to their mission despite the risks.

> **Philippians 4:4–7** *4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. 6 ¶ Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 1*

¶ 4:6: Mt 6:25–34. 1 The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), Php 4:4–7.