

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA
Fourth Sunday of Lent • Year C • March 30, 2025

*Almighty Father,
because we were dead
in our sins,
you sent your Son
to redeem us.
In Christ
we are called back to you.
In Christ
we are restored
to your family,
sons and daughters
saved by your love.
Amen.*



Sunday Word

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12
Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

God Provides

Manna from Heaven feeds the children of Israel as they journey to the Promised Land. Once they arrive, the manna ceases. God, however, continues to guide his people and provide for their needs. The manner of provision changes, just as the journey itself changes. Having arrived, they must now subdue and settle the land, making it their own.

The Old Gives Way to the New

The old order has passed away. All things are renewed in Jesus. We who were estranged from God by sin are recreated in the Lord Jesus. We who have received the gift of reconciliation thus become its ambassadors. God acts through us to bring others to Christ.

The Prodigious Love of the Father

The son realizes his dire predicament. He rehearses his speech asking for forgiveness and then returns home. Before he can speak, the father runs to greet him, embracing his wayward child. Arms of mercy enfold the foolish son. The father acts with love to restore his son to his place within the family.

Church Teaching: Conversion

Lifelong Project

As the faithful prepare for Lent, they are marked with the sign of Redemption. The cross is traced upon their foreheads with ashes as they are reminded, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel." Even though the baptized are freed from the power of sin through the suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, everyone who has been initiated into his Body, the Church, still experiences the weakness of the human condition and concupiscence.

Recognizing that they fall prey to their human limits, the baptized strive for a "turning away." All those persons and things that lead them from God or seek to drag them down into sin can be overcome only with God's grace. The lifelong struggle to turn

away from sin and to keep oriented toward goodness and godliness is described as *conversion*.

The Call to Continual Conversion

Jesus begins his public ministry with the call to repent and believe in the Good News (see Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15). Jesus preaches conversion. The imperative to change one's life in accord with the life of God is not simply meant for those who are hearing the Gospel for the first time in preparation for Baptism. Conversion is an ongoing reality—a dimension of the universal call to holiness.

Even the disciples, the closest associates of Jesus, had to be reminded of the discipline entailed in following him. When Jesus explains that he must go to Jerusalem, be rejected by the elders and chief priests, and suffer death, Peter seeks to dissuade him. Jesus' response is to "put him in his place," so to speak. He tells Peter to "get behind me" (see Mark 8:33). The place of the disciple is thus to get in line, to follow the Lord wherever he leads. This entails a continual lifelong conversion, a sometimes daily reorienting of oneself to the Lord.

This calling to continual conversion is not just an individual task but one for communities and groups to pursue, since sinfulness and the tendency toward sin can be embedded within the social practices and structures of those communities and groups. Hence the Lenten season is celebrated and observed by individuals and by the Church as a whole community.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

The inner conversion called for by Jesus, and for which all constantly strive, is expressed continually in outward signs and gestures. We change our behavior, we shift our place, we "get behind" the Lord. The radical reorienting of one's life is manifest in good works. In Christ, God comes forth to meet us with love and reconciliation, placing within us a spirit of loving reverence for him and of willing service to our neighbor.

Key Terms

CONCUISCENCE

Appetites and desires that remain disordered due to the consequences of Original Sin, marking the human condition in spite of Baptism. These appetites and desires produce within us an inclination to sin (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1264).

CONVERSION

Radical reorientation of one's whole life away from sin and evil and toward God. Change of heart, or conversion, is a key theme of the preaching of Jesus, of the Church's entire ministry, and of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1428).

DISCIPLES

Those who accept Jesus' message and who follow him. In his public ministry, Jesus associated his disciples with him in his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom of God to them, and gave them a share in his mission, his joy, and his sufferings. The Church is established by Christ to call all men and women to become the Lord's disciples (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 767).

Voices of Faith

He began to want and to suffer starvation, because nothing is enough for prodigal enjoyment. He who does not know how to be filled with eternal nourishment always suffers starvation.

—Saint Ambrose

The parable of the prodigal son is above all the story of the inexpressible love of a Father—God—who offers . . . the gift of reconciliation. . . . The Church takes up the appeal that the parable contains and grasps her mission of working, in imitation of the Lord, for the conversion of hearts and for the reconciliation of people with God and with one another.

—Pope Saint John Paul II

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 978 (battle against concupiscence), 2514 (types of concupiscence), 1427 (Jesus' call to conversion), 1431 (the interior resolution to change one's life)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 18 (Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation), especially the section entitled "Conversion, Confession, Forgiveness," pages 236–237

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

107 (all called to conversion), 165 (Church members ever in need of conversion), 77 (human nature wounded by Original Sin, beset by concupiscence)