

## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 1 FAITH IN ACTION

#### DEFINITION

Faith comes from the Latin *fides*, which means to believe, to trust. It is accepting the word of the other trusting that he is honest and that his word is true.

The Holy Bible defines faith for us in the following way “Now faith is assurance of [things] hoped for, a conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11: 1).

And our faith is born from the wonderful encounter with a living and close God, who loves us and transforms us. The encyclical *Lumen Fidei* tells us: “Faith is born from the encounter with the living God, who calls us and reveals his love, a love that precedes us and on which we can rely to be safe and build life. Transformed by this love, we receive new eyes, we experience that in it there is a great promise of fulfillment and our gaze opens to the future” (*Lumen Fidei* #4).



Faith in God is a valuable gift since, as the Word tells us “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11: 6).

Consequently, faith makes the impossible become possible and the invisible become visible. In turn, faith enables us to recognize that it is God who speaks and teaches in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Church. Faith is one of the fundamental pillars of the Church, without which it would not exist.

We can assure you that faith, rather than believing in something we cannot see, is believing in someone who has spoken to us personally and directly. It is accepting the person of Jesus Christ in our life, living his life, following his example. Faith leads us not only to look at Jesus but to look like Jesus.

“For faith, Christ is not only the one in whom we believe, the highest manifestation of God's love, but also the one with whom we unite to believe. Faith not only looks

at Jesus, but also looks from the point of view of Jesus, with his eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing” (Lumen Fidei #18).

And Jesus Christ taught us not to remain in ourselves, but to go out to meet the other, he invites us to live a shared and active faith in those most in need, just as He had it, when He read the scriptures in the synagogue and said: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4: 18-19).

For this reason, faith is necessarily active, because if it lacks works it would be dead, likewise it tells us in the Word “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2: 17).

We cannot make this faith an isolated experience. We must transmit the faith to the world through our witness. A testimony that says that the sacrifice on the cross was worth it but, the most important thing is that through your testimony it can be said that Jesus Christ resurrect indeed.

This is the faith of the believer, of the Vincentian. Our Faith is that Jesus Christ lived with the heart and preached when we extend his kingdom in each of the things we do.

And, that dedication to God and to his work must be joyful, constant, that conveys the desire to live that faith, that they can see in you a happy and transformed person by that personal encounter with that living God who also invites you to meet the other.

Having faith is assuming a lifestyle, a way of being where Jesus Christ risen and incarnate in the neediest.

Father Ignacio Larrañaga, a capuchin Franciscan priest, a simple man, who uses a close and understandable language, highlights the virtues of faith by pointing out that:

“Faith is not feeling but knowing, it is not evidence, but certainty, it is not emotion but conviction. To believe is to surrender, to surrender means to walk tirelessly after the face of the Lord. Believing is always a new departure, getting up every morning and setting out again in search of the face of the Lord. So, pilgrims, walkers, not tourists. A tourist knows where he will sleep today, which museums he will visit tomorrow, which cities he

will visit the next day. A pilgrim does not know anything, where he will sleep today, what he will eat tomorrow, fatigue, uncertainty, insecurity are the characteristics of any pilgrim.

We know that a substance corresponds to the Lord's word and a content to the formulas of faith, but never while we are in this world will we have the sensible evidence of possessing experimentally, vitally the substance that corresponds to the Lord's word. Abraham had lived 75 years in Ur of the Chaldees, he had prestige, properties, in short, a magnificent vital facility, one day the Lord presented to him saying, 'Abraham, leave everything and come with me to a land that I will show you' and at 75 years old Abraham sets out behind God in the direction of an uncertain world, without knowing where it was leading him. In a similar way we sense that someone is coming with us but we do not feel it, we sense it like the blind groping, feeling, but face to face, they can say goodbye, never anyone. We are at night, on the night of faith".

The Vincentian must give testimony of this faith, in the daily fulfillment of his activities, by seeing in the most insignificant of Jesus' brothers, in the poor, the face of the Lord, who offers us the fabulous opportunity to serve him directly by attending to the needs of our neighbor, as Saint Vincent de Paul demands of us. "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith -of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1: 6-7).

Faith must be born and cultivated in the first place in the family, the life of prayer is the task of all: the parents, who are maturing internally; the children, who are gradually entering the world of adults. The child's participation in prayer begins from the womb. How to live faith as a family? Since the mother is capable of transmitting the most tender feelings of piety to her child, it is highly recommended that children become familiar with the life of prayer from a very young age (especially from the third year), at that stage children are especially sensitive to the things of God. They must learn to pray not only with the Sign of the Cross or the prayers already formulated (Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, etc.), but above all with the free and spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving, petition, praise and intercession.

Parents when raising their children should pray for a brief moment before going to school or work, raise spontaneous prayers throughout the day, thank God for the good and simple things that happen (the birth of a brother or cousin, overcoming an illness, passing an exam, getting a job, etc.). A privileged time to pray as a family is when you are at the table together and God is thanked for the food received. Also,

at night before going to bed, is an excellent time to bless the children, ask forgiveness for possible faults, beg God for his help for those most in need and renew good intentions.

## **BIBLE QUOTES**

- Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20: 29).
- "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1: 2).
- "Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter', he said, 'your faith has healed you'. And the woman was healed in that moment" (Matthew 9: 22).
- "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10: 9).

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Encyclical Letter UT UNUM SINT, of the Holy Father John Paul II, on the Ecumenical Endeavor # 9 to 14
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 166 to 184
- Prayer and Life Workshops, Father Ignacio Larrañaga



## PRACTICE

1. What is faith for you?

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2. What means having faith?

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3. How can you attest your faith?

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4. Is faith an individual or group experience? Explain your answer.

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5. How do I assume my responsibility of living and transmitting faith in my family?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 2 JESUS CHRIST, THE CULMINATION OF OUR FAITH

In our church's history we have been summoned many times to delve into different topics. All very important and necessary for faith. But this convocation is undoubtedly of capital importance, since it touches the central theme of our relationship with God, **faith**.

You cannot believe in God without faith, you cannot follow Jesus without faith, you cannot be a member of the church without faith. It seems obvious. But that which is so obvious is not always so in our Christian practice. Celebrating a year of faith, for Christians, is celebrating Jesus Christ, the center and summit of our faith.

Vincentian spirituality is centered on Jesus. The Vincentian is the man or woman who wonders what Jesus would do today in each situation. Therefore, about faith, the question is what did Jesus do? We see that Jesus gives himself unconditionally to God whom he calls his father. His life is in absolute trust and abandonment in the hands of his father. Even in the moments of greatest suffering, Jesus maintained this trust, overcoming any temptation to resign and rely on his own strength.

It means that for us, Jesus is not only a person in whom we believe, he is also a way, a model of how to believe. In this way, Jesus is the "pioneer", the one who goes ahead, the one who leads, the one who teaches the way, he is the way itself.

Consequently, our condition as believers must find a way to follow him as a model and way. Faith then entails an act of deep trust. Abandon yourself into the hands of God, as Jesus has done, even when experiencing loneliness and suffering, as He has done.

In our Vincentian Family's history, there are many who have borne witness to their faith and whom we honor today as saints, blessed, servants and references in our life. Starting from what is fundamental for us, which is Jesus Christ, the principle for our life. Hence, we are invited to live life from God, trying to live like Jesus. Vincent Paul reminds us that "faith is seeing things as God sees them" and "faith allows us to discover Christ in the poor" (Matthew 25: 35-46).

We can access Jesus Christ through faith in him. And consequently, when we seek Jesus, we find ourselves with the poor, because Jesus cannot be understood without that close relationship with them. Jesus has said of himself that he has become the good news of the poor. As Saint Loise reminds us: “the neighbor takes the place of Our Lord, replaces it, by an invention of love that his goodness knows and that has made my heart understand, although I cannot explain it”.

To live that life from God, Jesus Christ teaches us the way of fidelity. Faith implies fidelity for us. Fidelity to God in Jesus Christ and fidelity to Jesus Christ in the poor. As Elisabeth de Robiano (founder of the Servants of the Poor of Gijzegem) tells us: “God will not fail you if you have truly surrendered to Him for eternity”. Commitment to God is not for one time, it is for life (Matthew 28: 29).



This is the most difficult dimension of faith because we are invaded by a mentality of the temporary and the disposable, but true faith is forever. This fidelity demands surrender, renunciation, sacrifice, etc. Be willing to go to the cross like Jesus and have the courage to endure everything for the love of God in the poor, as Jesus Christ did and as the thought of Ignatia North, Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Zagreb, reflects it: “We are at the service of the poor. The poor are children of God we serve, which is highly commendable. If our work tends to gather insults and ingratitude, it is because in this way we can more easily follow the footsteps of our Divine Master”.

Not always being faithful to God brings satisfaction, it also brings "crosses" and that is where not all of us are willing to continue. That is why the path of Faith is a path that requires daily conversion (Luke 9: 23).

We Vincentians, today, have so much to contribute to this world, which has made faith relative. In some places nobody believes in anything or anyone and in others they believe too much, but in things that do not give life, but death. Our creative fidelity can be a living testimony of faith in a world that needs to be strengthened and healed in many ways. We are invited to live a faith capable of transforming the life of the world. As Blessed Frederic Ozanam says: “Our every young faith is capable of meeting the needs of all times, to heal the wounds of all souls”.

Let Jesus Christ truly be our teacher, let him really be the way that leads us to the Father. We may not only believe in him, but also believe in what he says. We may follow in his footsteps that leads us to fidelity, to the God of life, the God who wants life for the poor.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Letter from Father Gregory Gay, Superior of the CM to all Vincentians. June 10, 2013.



## PRACTICE

1. Why is Jesus Christ the culmination of our faith?

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2. What does Jesus represent in your life?

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3. What allow us to discover Jesus Christ in poor people?

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4. Explain the phrase: "*Through faith in Him we may approach Jesus Christ*"

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 3 PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

For the human being to have a change from faith, it must take place from the personal encounter with God.

The Word tells us that Jesus is always knocking on the door of our hearts to be able to enter and share with Him. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3: 20).

Only from that encounter with Christ our life is transformed and our joy is in Him: "Knowing Jesus is the best gift anyone can receive; having found him is the best thing that has happened to us in life, and making it known with our words and deeds is our joy" (# 29 Aparecida Conclusive Document).

There are different ways that will allow us to have that personal encounter with God, that is, to be able to have an intimacy with that God so that he can transform our existence.

A first way is prayer. Personal prayer is that direct dialogue with God, in intimacy to which Jesus invites us "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father, who is unseen. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6: 6).



"Prayer is the elevation of our heart to God, a sweet conversation between the creature and its creator" (Holy Priest of Ars). That conversation is what will allow us to listen to God in our hearts and know what He wants for our life.

As Vincentians, prayer is fundamental, since if we want to be the image of God for our beneficiaries, we must first know that God who reveals himself to us in prayer. On the other hand, we have as a way of meeting, the Lord's word or the Bible, in it we also find the manifestation of God throughout history and we can also know the works of God made man. In the Lord's word we find that living and present voice of God, a voice that gives us strength but that can also question us, and that guides us on the path of truth to get to know God.

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4: 12).

We also have the way to an encounter with God, the sacraments; they are gifts that Jesus has left us through the church to be able to draw closer to him. Through the sacraments, we become children of God, which gives us the grace to be closer to him; and if we are within sin, we can regain intimacy with God after living the sacrament of reconciliation.

These are three means that allow us as Christians and Vincentians to have a real experience of God and thus experience his presence in our lives and in our hearts and have as a result a stronger communion with God and to be able to say like Saint Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2: 20).



## PRACTICE



1. What are the paths that lead us to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ?

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2. From these paths which ones do you practice in your life to find Jesus?

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3. Have you ever had a personal encounter with Christ? How was it?

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4. How church and Vincentian Family help us in the personal encounter with Christ?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 4 THE BIBLE *LECTO* *DIVINA*

Bible is a Greek word that can be translated as library. In other words, it is a set of books, exactly seventy-three, of different length, origin, and content. The Bible is the book that preserves and transmits God's revelation, the message that he wishes to communicate to his people. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

These seventy-three books of Holy Scripture or the Bible are divided into two large groups: Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT). The Old Testament refers to the old covenant, which God made with men, from Abraham and then with his people through Moses on Mount Sinai and with the prophets. The New Testament refers to the new covenant that God made with men through his son Jesus Christ. It tells us about the life, mission of Jesus and his disciples, and the journey of the first Christian communities.



The Old Testament is made up of 46 books that we can divide into four groups:

- **Pentateuch (5):** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
- **Historical (16):** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobias, Judith, Esther, I Maccabees, II Maccabees.
- **Poetics and Wisdoms (7):** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Wisdom, Ecclesiastical.
- **Prophetic:** Major and minor  
**Major Prophets (5):** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Baruch. **Minor Prophets (12):** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The New Testament is made up of 27 books that we can divide into five groups:

- **Gospels:** There are four and they speak of the life, mission, death and resurrection of Jesus. These being: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- **Acts of the Apostles:** It is a book that narrates the experiences of the first christian communities and the expansion of Christianity.
- **Pauline Letters:** There are thirteen, they were written by the Apostle Paul. They are letters for specific christian communities. These being: to the

Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

- **Catholic Letters:** There are eight, and they are so named because they were written to encourage and advise all communities. These being: Letter to the Hebrews, Epistle of James, I of Peter, II of Peter, I of John, II of John, III of John, Judas.
- **Revelation:** It is a book that seeks to strengthen the hope of the people.

We must bear in mind that the Lord's word is not just any book, which has any person as its author, but rather, that it is our sacred book whose author is God himself, who inspired its writers through the Holy Spirit. Every Vincentian should read the Bible daily because it is the best way to know the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Also, it is the way God communicates with us and daily reading is the food for our spiritual life.

If this is the first time you are going to read it, it will be necessary to follow these instructions:

- a) Begin with the Gospel of Saint Luke. In it you will be able to know the most attractive features of Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary.
- b) Continue with the book of the Acts of the Apostles. There you can see the beautiful activity of the nascent church.
- c) Then, we recommend going back to the Gospels. First Mark, then Matthew, and finally John. You can insert the reading of a Letter from the Apostle Paul: for example, to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, etc.

Another way is to have a liturgical calendar and do the readings that correspond to the day.

## **HOW TO START READING AND MEDITATING ON THE BIBLE?**

After you have read the introduction to a book, start reading the text itself. It is better not to rush to read everything at once, just a passage or a paragraph. Read with attention and respect, opening your heart to what God wants to express to us, finally highlighting the texts that have made an impact.

In the first reading of a text, it is advisable to always read the explanatory notes below the biblical text. These explanatory notes and comments will clarify the understanding of the more difficult ones. They are explanations written by specialists and you must try to understand them and, normally, they must be accepted with confidence. Many people, by not carefully reading the explanatory notes, are left

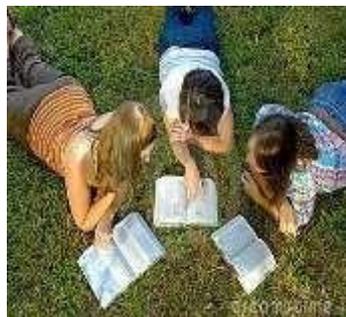
without understanding a text in its own context, without understanding the various styles and doctrines, and then abandon reading out of boredom.

Try to organize your life in a way that **every day we find five to ten minutes for the Bible**. Find a quiet place. Read systematically, not jumping from one part to another, or opening the book at random. Never read the Bible to satisfy curiosity or just to know more, but to find out what God wants to tell us. The Bible is the Lord's word, it is the letter that he sends to his children, in it you will not find science, but wisdom. Do not be afraid to underline and annotate your Bible, because it is not a book to keep, but to be read. Saint Jerome says: "You must not retire to rest at night without having filled your heart with a small part of the Lord's word".

### **LECTIO DIVINA**

*LECTIO DIVINA* means divine reading or prayerful reading, "It is reading the Lord's word in prayer and listening to what God tells us, and then talking with him and living what that word told us", it has five steps: Reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation and action.

Lectio Divina is the believing and prayerful reading of the Lord's word, made from faith in Jesus who says: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14: 26).



#### **Before starting:**

- Find a place where you can have solitude and silence.
- Get into a comfortable posture.
- To calm down internally, put aside your worries.
- Ask God that in this moment of prayer that you are going to live, help you to make the most of it, to listen to him, and to live him intensely.
- Offer this moment of prayer with the Word for your sanctification, for the conversion of sinners, for those who do not yet know him, for missionaries from all over the world.
- Find the text to be read.

#### **1. READING: WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

- Read the text carefully.

- Reconstruct in your mind what the text says. If you do not remember well, read again.
- Identify the characters. Find out why they do and say, what they mention in the text.
- If you do not understand seek help and ask.
- Read notes and references, they will help to understand better.

## 2. MEDITATION: WHAT DOES IT TELL ME?

- Put yourself in the presence of God to listen to what he says today.
- Discover what God means.
- Identify with a character. How is your life like his? See his attitudes and compare it with yours.
- Think about your life, how it resembles the narrated event.
- Consider the context of the environment and the reader. Then be silent and let God speak within you. Try not to draw our conclusions, but to let God speak.

## 3. PRAYER: WHAT DO I TELL GOD?



- Let you talk simple with God, which is born from the text read and meditated. Everything that feels like saying to God.
- Ask him for the necessary virtue to face some life situation on which the text made you reflect.
- Thank him, praise him for what is discovered in him.
- Conversion of life, as the text has inspired us, to do something concrete.
- Putting in his hands a difficult situation that is not within your power to change.
- Pray for those who do not know Christ and for the missionaries around the world.
- Be silent again to listen to what God wants to say to you.

## 4. CONTEMPLATION: BE WITH GOD

- Let your hearts be still, silence the words and simply allow yourself to be with God.
- In silence, feel the peace of being with God, feel that you love him, that you trust him.
- Encounter God affectionately and enjoy the moment.

- Make Saint Paul's words your own: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2: 20).



## **5. ACTION: MY LIFE GOES ON**

- Go back to reality, to your life, to the context and analyze what change or concrete action God asks from you.
- Begin by witnessing.
- Make a concrete commitment, communicate it to God.

## PRACTICE

Let us talk about what we have learn in this Bible Study, using the steps of *Lectio Divina* in Mathew 6: 25-34.

1. What does the text say? Read and make a small summary.

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2. What does the text tell us? Meditate

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3. What do we have to tell God through the text? Pray

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4. What is our commitment for today or for life? Act

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## SECOND KEYSTONE

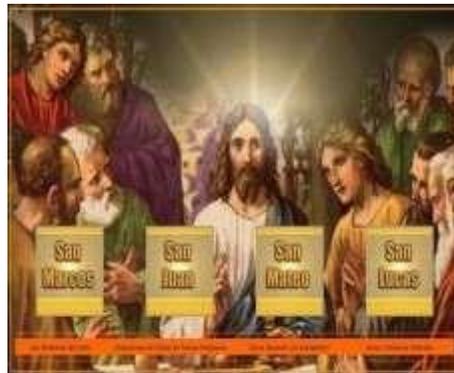
### CHRISTIAN FORMATION

#### TOPIC 5

#### THE GOSPELS

The word “gospel” means good news, because that is what Jesus came to bring us: The good news of the God’s kingdom. We have four gospels canonically recognized by the Catholic Church and apparently written in the following order: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. The first three because of their similarity and the sequence they carry are called synoptic gospels. The fourth is the Gospel of John.

The gospels are the heart of all the scriptures “because they are the main testimony of the life and doctrine of the Word made flesh, our Savior” (# 125 Catechism of the Catholic Church).



The gospels are a set of writings that are not only biographical; they are the experience of the Passover of Jesus Christ, of the first christian communities that express it in the gospels. Therefore, more than talking about the historical Jesus, they are talking about the Paschal experience of the risen one, letting us know that Christianity is not a static doctrine, but rather the dynamic reality of the living Christ.

Each of the evangelists give us a perspective of Christ; four ways to get to the heart of the gospel. We are going to do a short profile of the four gospels in the order in which they were written.

#### **1. GOSPEL OF SAINT MARK**

**The author:** There is no definitive proof as to who the author of this gospel was. The text does not include any indication of its authorship. Christian tradition, however, has attributed the Gospel to Mark, Peter's disciple, a character mentioned in the epistles of Paul of Tarsus (Colossians 4: 10), in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 12: 12-25; 13: 15; 15: 37), where he is presented as Paul's companion and in the first epistle of Peter, who calls him "my son" (1 Peter 5: 13).

**Purpose:** This is aimed at proving that Jesus Christ is the son of God; for this reason, he dedicates himself above all to narrating miracles. The Christ that Mark presents is not a triumphalist Messiah crowned with victory, but a Christ who goes straight to the cross. For this reason, the messianic secret of Mark wants to imply that Christ is not interested in fame or prestige, but in humility and annihilation. They paint Saint Mark as a lion, because he begins by saying that Jesus fasted in the desert and the beasts kept him company.

Its purpose is condensed from the beginning when it says: "Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God". The author presents the deeds of Jesus and in reduced form the sayings and words. It has few parables and only two speeches. The narratives are made up of very short speeches and separate dialogues. This gospel was written in Rome, between the years 65 and 70. It is intended for christian readers converted from paganism and Judaism.

## ***2. GOSPEL OF SAINT MATTHEW***

**The author** Matthew means: "gift of God". His name was also Levi, and he was the son of Alphaeus. His job was that of a tax collector, a position much hated by Jews because those taxes were collected for a foreign nation. The publicans or tax collectors got rich easily. And perhaps Matthew was attracted to the idea of getting rich quickly, but once he met Jesus Christ, he left his ambition for money forever and dedicated himself completely to seeking the salvation of souls and God's Kingdom.

**Purpose:** It is aimed at proving that Jesus Christ is the messiah announced by the prophets and that in him everything announced by them was fulfilled. They paint Matthew as the image of a man, because his Gospel begins by listing the ancestors that Jesus had as a man.

It groups the words of Jesus into five great speeches, no doubt to introduce him as the new Moses. Insists on the need to understand the Lord's word and not just listen to it<sup>1</sup>. In Jesus, your faith makes you see the Lord glorified. From the beginning and then frequently, he proclaims him the son of God and gives a glimpse of his majesty and his authority.

He makes us live in the bosom of a church that celebrates its Lord liturgically: on the disciples of Jesus he places the "transparent role" of Christians who adore the risen one, singing: Lord, save us in the midst of the storm. A church in danger of drowning and with little faith.



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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13: 19-23

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew is structured in three moments, following a historical and theological scheme.

The first part is entitled "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1: 1). This part extends from 1: 1 to 4: 16 and offers what is called the "presentation of the characters". It talks about the emergence of Jesus from Israel, for the whole of humanity, placing it in the light of the Baptist's hope and in the fight against the devil.

The second part starts like this: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (Matthew 4: 17).

The third part starts like this: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16: 21).

### 3. GOSPEL OF SAINT LUKE

**The author:** Saint Luke wrote the third gospel and Acts of whom we can say that their Greek culture has preserved its love of clarity. According to ancient christian tradition, Luke is a doctor and companion of Saint Paul<sup>2</sup>, a native of Antioch. He is not an eyewitness. This is a second or third christian generation. Luke is called the **evangelist of the poor**, because within a confronted and divided society, he has proclaimed the announcement of Jesus as the Good News that sets in motion the project of God's final liberation for the poor. A simple reading of his works leaves the reader impressed by the delicacy of Jesus, with women, with the poor and with sinners. He is also the evangelist of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

**Purpose:** It is the gospel of mercy and it aims to present God's tenderness for all sinners and those in need. It is written in cultured Greek, as Luke is a Christian educated in Hellenistic circles. He tried to respond to the situation in which his christian community lived, threatened by routine and the temptation to cling to the goods of this world. For this reason, it invites conversion, and for this there is nothing better than remembering the words and life of Jesus. Luke is painted as a bull, because his gospel begins with the sacrifices that they made in the temple, where every afternoon a cow was sacrificed.

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<sup>2</sup> Colossians 4: 14

Luke has collected and elaborated the **Marian traditions** of the Church and highlights Mary as:

- **Co-worker of God.** God himself has called her to act in a way that saves the world, and she responds: “let it be done to me according to your word”<sup>3</sup>.
- **The believer.** She is Blessed because she has accepted the Lord’s word, because she “believed”<sup>4</sup>. Mary is important within the church because she has believed in the Lord’s word.
- **Prophecy of the new humanity.** Mary has proclaimed the great saving work of God among men<sup>5</sup>.
- **The first faithful of the Church.** She has traveled all the way of God, following the Lord’s word and the demands of her son Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup>.

Luke wrote for the pagan converts to Christianity. The year of composition of the Luke’s work seems to be between 1980 and 1990, and the most likely place of composition is Rome.

#### **4. GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN**

**The author:** John means "God is merciful". Apostle of Jesus. Son of Zebedee, a fisherman, and Salomé, who frequented the circle of disciples, according to christian tradition. He was, with his brother James, one of the first apostles of Christ. He is credited with the authorship of the fourth gospel, of the three epistles that bear his name and of the book of Revelation. Likewise, it is believed that he was responsible for the evangelization of Asia Minor, for which he received the punishment of the Romans, the gospel refers to a disciple whom Jesus loved, but is not identified with a name. Tradition has completed the name and tells us that it is John, the son of Zebedee

**Purpose:** It is a response to the situation in which his community lives and contains a deep reflection on the mystery of Jesus. Those who meet him and accept him gradually discover the depth of this mystery, through faith. And those who reject it, for lack of faith, end up in the darkness and blindness of their sin. All signs and miracles are aimed at discovering a facet of the unfathomable wealth of Jesus. And the speeches that follow the miracles have a theological character, that is, they reflect on Jesus and his mission. They paint John as an eagle, because the eagle is

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 1: 26-38

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1: 45

<sup>5</sup> Luke 1: 46-55

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1: 13-14

the highest bird, just like the Gospel of Saint John that rose to the secrets of the Divine.

Some characteristics of the Gospel of John are:

- It has been called the spiritual gospel, since it is the testimony of a man and of a community, which has grown with the help of the Holy Spirit towards the whole truth<sup>7</sup>. An essential influence in the community is the presence of the Risen One, experienced in worship. The celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist is a constant in the Gospel.
- The safe chronological reference is the holidays. The other three Gospels mention only the Passover, John refers to various Jewish festivals.
- Symbolic language. When he tells the story of Jesus, he does so with the intention of discovering a deeper meaning.
- Dualism. It consists of the contraposition of opposite terms: life-death, truthlie, light-darkness, spirit-flesh.
- John does not use the noun faith, but the verb “to believe” to show the dynamism of the christian life.

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<sup>7</sup> John 16: 13



## PRACTICE

1. What does the word "Gospel" mean?

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2. Do you consider Gospels as a biography or a norm for life?

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3. How many and which ones are the Gospels?

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4. With which animal do evangelists identify themselves? Why?

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5. Explain one Saint John gospel's characteristics

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 6 ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

#### AUTHOR, PLACE AND DATE OF THE TEXT<sup>8</sup>

The book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts) was written between 80 and 90 A.D., possibly in Rome. Tradition recognizes Luke<sup>9</sup> as the author of the third gospel and Acts. The content of the book begins with the resurrection of Jesus (33 A.D.) and ends with Paul's two-year activity in Rome (58-60 A.D.). In this period, the different models of church were institutionalized<sup>10</sup> Luke seeks with the book of Acts to reconstruct the period that goes from the resurrection of Jesus to the organization of the churches. It is a period normally forgotten in tradition, because in the collective imagination of Christians, the organization and institutionalization of the church appears directly linked to the historical Jesus.

It is possible that in its first composition the Gospel of Luke and Acts formed a single book. The prologue that we have in Luke 1: 1-4 is for the entire Gospel-Acts work. The work begins in the Temple of Jerusalem with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist and ends in Rome in a house with the preaching of God's Kingdom carried out by Paul with all courage and without any hindrance. The whole work is a gospel and has a deep theological coherence and there is historical and theological progress from beginning to end.



#### JESUS MOVEMENT

The book of Acts, as we have already said, reconstructs the Movement of Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Richard, Pablo. *El Movimiento de Jesús después de su Resurrección y antes de la Iglesia. Una interpretación liberadora de los hechos de los Apóstoles*. Riobamba, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Aguirre/Rodríguez: 1994 Synoptic Gospels and Acts of the Apostles for basic introductory questions.

<sup>10</sup> Brown 1986: *Las Iglesias que los apóstoles nos dejaron*. Here we will see only the second part of this great Gospel, which was called from ancient times: "Acts of the Apostles".

after his resurrection and before the institutionalization of the churches. According to Acts, this movement has three fundamental characteristics: it is a movement animated by the Holy Spirit, it is a missionary movement, and it is the basic structure of the small domestic communities. The time after the resurrection of Jesus is the privileged time of the Spirit and this is precisely what Acts rescued. That is why many people call it the "Gospel of the Holy Spirit". In Acts 1: 8 we have summarized these two fundamental characteristics: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth".

The experience of the Spirit and the Mission are historically prior to the church. First, it is the Spirit and the Mission, then comes the institutionalization of the churches. This movement of Jesus after his resurrection also has as a fundamental structure: small domestic communities. The decisive moments of Acts take place in these small communities that meet in houses: the first apostolic community meets in a house and it is in that house that Pentecost is lived.

The ideal community after Pentecost has its center in the houses, where the Communion is celebrated, it is the small community that allows the persecution to be resisted, the service is organized in the houses, the persecution of the Jesus movement is through the houses, the first converted Gentile community is Cornelio's house. There is a community that meets in the Mary's house, John Mark's mother. Paul founded small communities in the houses: in Philippi, in Thessalonica and in Corinth.



In a house the community lives the experience of the Word, the Eucharist and the resurrection. Paul arrives in Jerusalem at the house-community of Nason and the last community of Paul in Rome is in a house.

## **FROM WHERE TO READ THE BOOK OF APOSTOLIC ACTS?**

The book of Acts builds from tradition a methodology, a spirit, a model, to institutionalize the church of its time. We propose to interpret the Acts with this own perspective of Luke, with the intention, spirit, and methodology with which Luke himself wrote Acts, which will be for us the keys to interpreting the book:

1. **From the perspective of the Holy Spirit.** We will interpret the entire book as the “Gospel of the Holy Spirit”, seeking to discover the presence and action of the Spirit in the entire narrative of the book. We will try to rebuild the movement of Jesus after his resurrection, as a movement of the Spirit. The reference to the Holy Spirit is central to our interpretation of the book of Acts. We will rebuild the movement of Jesus, as the movement of the Holy Spirit, for the subsequent construction of the Church.
2. **From the perspective of the mission.** The reference to the mission will be the second fundamental key to our interpretation of the book. The entire book of Acts is a missionary movement, from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth, whose fundamental content is the Lord’s word. The growth of the Jesus movement is identified with the growth of the Word and it is the Lord’s word that has the power to build the church. We will try to rebuild the Jesus Movement as a Missionary Movement.
3. **From the perspective of small domestic communities.** The movement of Jesus, after his resurrection and before the institutionalization of the church, is structured in small domestic communities. The whole book has a dynamic that starts from the temple and reaches the house. The formation of small communities is what allows the Word to be present in cities and in cultures. The small community is the place where the teaching of the apostles (the memory of Jesus) is kept alive and where *koinonia* service (they had everything in common), *diakonia* service (there were no poor among them) and the Eucharist (Acts 2: 42-47). This reconstruction of the Jesus movement, as the construction of domestic communities, will be the third fundamental key to interpreting the book of Acts.
4. **Other keys** to our interpretation of Acts are:
  - The participation of women in the Jesus movement.
  - The dimension of cultures and the inculturation of the gospel.
  - The plurality of ministries, charisms, and functions in the mission.
  - The political dimension: the Jesus movement and the Roman Empire.



## PRACTICE

1. Why is the book called: Acts of the Apostles?

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2. Who is the author of the book and with which Gospel is it related?

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3. What keys should we consider reading Acts?

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4. How can we live this book in our Vincentians branches?

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5. Can a Christian live with the same faith and dedication his Christian faith as the first Christians did, today?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 7 HOLY SPIRIT

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church”.

With this phrase taken from the Credo that we pray so frequently we are affirming that we believe that the Spirit of God, the Defender, or Paraclete that Jesus said he would send, is alive and active in our Church. “The Holy Spirit is none other than the Spirit of God, his intimacy or immediate presence acting in the world. This presence acts in Jesus from his childhood, during his public life and in his new life as risen”.

Let us consider the part from Acts about the twelve Christians of Ephesus: “While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’. So, Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism’, they replied. Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus’. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19: 1-6).



Through Baptism we are given the grace of the new birth in God the Father, through his son in the Holy Spirit. For those who are carriers of the Spirit of God are led to the son; but the son presents them to the Father, and the Father grants them incorruptibility. Therefore, without the Spirit it is not possible to see the son of God, and, without the Son, no one can approach the Father, because the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is achieved by the Holy Spirit.

### THE PARACLETE

The word from the Greek *parakletos*, which literally means "the one who is invoked", is therefore the lawyer, the mediator, the defender, the comforter. Jesus presents the Holy Spirit to us saying: "The Father will give you another Paraclete" (John 14:

16). The defense attorney is one who, by taking the side of those who are guilty due to their sins, defends them from the punishment they deserve, saves them from the danger of losing their life and eternal salvation. This is what Christ has done, and the Holy Spirit is called "another Paraclete" because he continues to carry out the redemption with which Christ has freed us from sin and eternal death.

## **GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural habits, instilled by God in the powers of the soul to easily receive and second the motions of the Holy Spirit himself, in a divine or superhuman way.

Gifts are infused by God. The soul could not acquire the gifts by its own forces since they infinitely transcend all the purely natural order. The gifts are possessed to some degree by all souls in grace.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are:

- **Wisdom:** Taste for the spiritual, ability to judge according to God's measure.
- **Intelligence:** It is a grace of the Holy Spirit to understand the Lord's word and deepen the revealed truths.
- **Advice:** Illuminate the conscience in the choices that daily life imposes on it, suggesting what is lawful, what corresponds, what is best for the soul.
- **Strength:** Supernatural force that sustains moral virtue. To courageously do what God wants from us, and to bear the setbacks of life. To resist the instigations of internal passions and pressures from the environment. Overcome shyness and aggressiveness.
- **Science:** It makes us know the true value of creatures in their relationship with the Creator.
- **Mercy:** Heals our hearts from all kinds of hardness and opens it to tenderness towards God as father, and towards brothers as children of the same father.
- **Fear of God:** a contrite spirit before God, aware of guilt and divine punishment, but within faith in divine mercy. Fear of offending God, humbly acknowledging our weakness. Especially filial fear, which is the love of God, the soul is concerned not to upset God, loved as father, not to offend him in anything, to remain and grow in charity.

When the Holy Spirit bears fruit in the soul, it overcomes the tendencies of the flesh.

And the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit are:

Charity, joy, peace, patience, meekness, goodness, kindness, long-suffering, faith, modesty, temperance and chastity.

In conclusion, the Paraclete Spirit knows how to guide us to live in communion with Jesus Christ, and to assume a life of holiness where the relationship with the merciful father is revealed. We must bend the will so that the Spirit takes control of life and makes us live according to the will of God.



## PRACTICE

1. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

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2. Which gift characterize your branch? How do you used it for the benefit of others?

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3. Which real actions does the Holy Spirit does in your branch?

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4. What fruits of the Holy Spirit do you use to serve the poor in your branch?

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## **SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION**

### **TOPIC 8 THE CHURCH I LOVE**

#### **CHURCH = GOD'S PEOPLE**

The Church is also often called the "edification" of God. The Lord Himself was compared to the stone rejected by the builders, but which was set as the cornerstone.

#### **WE ARE GOING TO BUILD THE CHURCH BRICK BY BRICK**

##### **First Brick: Vocation and mission**

We find in Matthew 4: 18-22 how Jesus calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be fishers of men. The call implies the mission. They did the following: "At once they left their nets and followed him". In the same way we must respond to the Lord's call.

At the end of the training of the disciples and after living with the Risen Jesus, he sends them on the great mission "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28: 19-20).

The task is clear, and we have the support and company of Jesus Christ.

##### **Second Brick: Tradition and Magisterium**

The tradition of the Church is very great, it goes from the beginning of the community to the present day, more than two thousand years. In tradition we have the "deposit of faith" that keeps us in unity.

The Magisterium of the Church gives us lines of action for our pastoral and daily activities. The documents of the magisterium are many, but the most important is the Second Vatican Council (1965), where the Constitution and Organization of the Catholic Church are found. (We will delve into them later).



### **Third Brick: Word and bread**

The celebration of the sacraments is another key element in the construction of the Church.

The renewal of the Covenant of the Lord with men in the Eucharist ignites and draws the faithful into urgent communion with Christ. Therefore, grace flows to us from the Eucharist and that sanctification of men in Christ and that glorification of God are obtained with maximum efficiency, to which the other works of the Church tend as their end.

### **CEMENT: CHARISMA FOR SERVICE**

The Bible speaks to us many times of the charisms that must be placed at the service of the community.

“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12: 11), he distributes among the faithful of any condition special graces, with which he disposes and prepares them to carry out a variety of works and useful offices for the renewal and edification of the Church.

### **SAND: UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

All men are called to be part of God’s people. For this reason, this people, being one and only, must cover the entire world and all times to fulfill the designs of God's will. For this, God sent his son, whom he made universal heir to be our master, king and priest, and giving the Holy Spirit as a gift to the church, who gathers and unites her.

### **WATER: HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit has an important role in the church because he is a cofounder, moves the community and urges it to live the mission with the strength of the charisms and the ministerial and apostolic projection.

The church has two missions:

- The mission of Jesus to make us children of God.
- The mission of the Holy Spirit to lead us from within and lead us to the perfect stature of Christ in order to live in brotherhood in one body.

Jesus, says the Word, reaches the hearts of men and works his creative power through the Holy Spirit’s love.

God inserts us into the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. It gives unity in the diversity of people, unifies the thoughts and way of life.

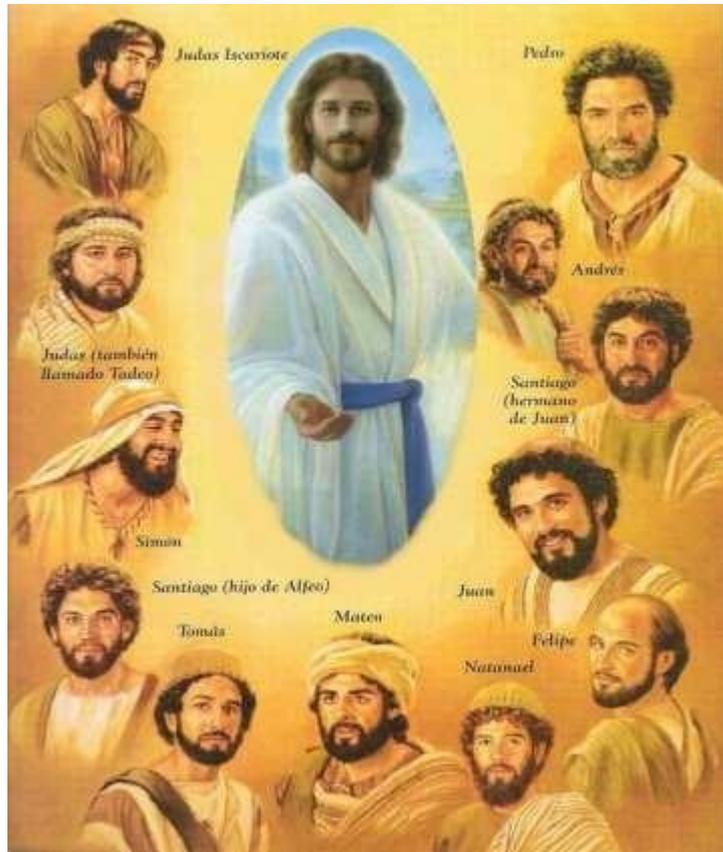
Living in unity and fraternity is how we maintain ourselves in Trinitarian Communion, since the church is the image of the Trinity (Ephesus 4: 4-6) unity manifests itself in love (John 13: 35).

The spirit of Jesus Christ reaches the corners of the earth and the depths of all men so that they feel like brothers, children of the same father and seek universal solidarity. He encourages them to fulfill the mission of evangelizing the universe by bearing witness to their faith.

## **PILLARS: APOSTLES AND THEIR SUCCESSORS: BISHOPS**

### **The Apostles' Institution**

The Lord Jesus, after having prayed to the Father, calling to himself those whom he wanted, chose the twelve to live with him and sent them to preach God's Kingdom. He founded these apostles as a college, that is, as a stable group, and put Peter in front of them.



Christ sent them, first to the children of Israel, then to all nations so that with the power that he gave them, they would make all peoples his disciples, sanctify and govern them and thus expand the church and feed it, serving it, under the direction of the Lord, every day until the consummation of the ages (Matthew 28: 20).

The apostles, then, preaching the Gospel everywhere (Mark 16: 20), which the listeners received through the influence of the Holy Spirit, assembled the universal church that the Lord founded and built on the cornerstone of the building that is Jesus Christ.

## **BISHOPS, APOSTLES' SUCESSORS**

This divine mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles must last until the end of the centuries, since the gospel that they must transmit always is the beginning of life for the church. So, the apostles were careful to establish successors.



Indeed, not only did they have various collaborators in the ministry, but they entrusted their immediate cooperators with the task of finishing and consolidating the work they had begun, entrusting them to tend to the entire flock in the midst of which the Holy Spirit had placed them to pasture the church of God. Thus, the bishops together with the priests and deacons, received all authority to guide the church.

## **BEAMS: CHRISTIAN HOPE**

Among the virtues that leave the deepest mark on the human mind, that most manifestly influence the lives and actions of men, is hope. In fact, the same man, depending on whether he lives under the heights of hope or lives under the weight of despair, appears to us as a giant or as a dwarf.

The truth is that man cannot live without hope. Hope is the call of the creator, the beginning and the end of our life, to which no human creature can escape; it is the voice of the redeemer who ardently desires the salvation of all men, no one can, without losing the peace of soul, refuse to listen to it; it is the deep nostalgia for God.

God prepares for us a new home and a new land where justice dwells, and whose beatitude can satisfy all the longings for peace that arise in the human heart.

Then, after death, the children of God will rise again in Christ, and what was sown under the sign of weakness and corruption, will be clothed with incorruptibility, and we will remain enjoying the glory of God.



## PRACTICE

1. How do you build the church?

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2. What is the church's mission?

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3. What is your charisma (gift) to serve others?

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4. What is your hope?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

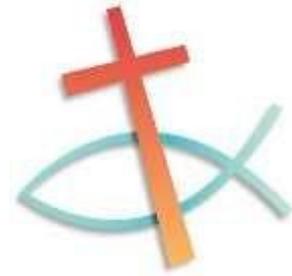
### TOPIC 9 SACRAMENTS: COMUNITARY EXPERIENCE OF FAITH

#### DEFINITION

The sacraments are sensible, visible and effective signs of the invisible grace of God, through which divine life is granted, that is, they offer the believer to be adopted children of God. They were instituted by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the church. The sacraments are administered at different times in the life of the Christian and symbolically encompass it in its entirety, from baptism (which is usually administered to children) to the anointing of the sick (which before Vatican II applied only to those who were in danger of death). Most sacraments can only be administered by a priest. Baptism, on exceptional occasions, can be administered by any lay person, even non-Christians, who intends to do with the sign what the church does. In the sacrament of marriage, the ministers are the same parties.

The sacraments cover the entire life of man in its most significant stages:

- At his birth: Baptism
- In your growth: Confirmation
- In the wounds of sin: Reconciliation
- In his feeding: Eucharist
- In the formation of a home: Marriage
- In consecration to the service of the community:  
Priestly Order
- In sickness: Anointing of the sick



The sacraments are much more than seven rites; they are outstanding moments in the life of the Christian in which he celebrates in a special way the encounter of God in the Church with his brothers. The sacraments are strong moments of Christianity in a personal situation (Christ, Church, Man).

#### JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER'S SACREMENT

Jesus is by essence the original sacrament because all the sacramental realities flow from Him. It is the sacrament of the Father, because Jesus in all his life, always, in all his actions, in his speech is transparency of the Father.

Therefore, sacramentality must be sought in Jesus Christ. "Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?" (John 14: 9). Furthermore, Christ is mediator between men and God, and is the fullness of revelation. In Jesus Christ, the Lord's word is so effective, so dynamic, and so expressive that it becomes a person (John 1: 14).

In conclusion, Jesus is the Father's sacrament because in his incarnation, life, work, death, and resurrection, he is the transparency of God. His behavior makes the divine transparent and has his own identification.

## **THE CHURCH, JESUS CHRIST'S SACREMENT**

The church is a sacrament from Jesus. In it, witness and disciple of Jesus Christ are the seven sacraments. Therefore, the church is a mean of salvation as much as Christ appears visibly through her. The entire sacramental experience is led by the church. The church is divine and human at the same time; divine because the founder is Jesus Christ and human because it is made up of men with all their capacities and limitations. Therefore, **the duty of the church is to be transparency of Christ** in its work with man, in its social commitment according to the historical moment and in its responsibility in coherence with the message it announces, by the signs that it has in an irreplaceable and complementary in the one that believers relate to Christ.



## **MAN'S SACREMENTAL LIFE**

The Christian is essentially being of God in his humanity therefore, he is a testimony of the divine work in his life. The Christian is not alone, but is related to others, having signs of identification in a mutual commitment and complementary in humility with the needy.

The man who discovers himself the sacrament of Christ and of the church, in his essence as a child of God and in his testimony of life in service, proceeds like Jesus, that is, he is a living and active transparency of Jesus.

One is only a sacrament in walking with Christ and the Holy Spirit towards the Father, always looking at his reality of life and acting positively. However, some people live superficially and do not know the sacramental meaning of life, so the sacrament is received, but it does not affect anything, it is only a moment without personal and community repercussions.

Two things are needed to perform these sacraments:

- The form: prayer or words spoken when administering the sacrament.
- The matter: what is used for the sacrament; water, bread, wine, oil, laying on of hands, confession of guilt.

## SIGNS

They are conventional expressions of a certain reality that allow a message to be read universally and without major mistakes. The signs, in liturgy, are visible realities that lead to invisible realities; for example: visible reality water means new birth, chrism means strength. The symbols are conventional, universal, accepted by everyone and always represent the same regardless of the mood of the observer. For example, traffic signs, traffic lights and accident prevention signs in companies or buildings. In the same way, the sacraments are signs:

- **Baptism:** it is the gateway to life in the spirit, the new birth, the sacrament of faith. Through him, we are born into the life of children of God.
- **Confirmation:** it is the power of the Spirit, the fullness of baptismal grace, the seal and mark of christian identity. It is our growth in faith.
- **The Eucharist:** it is the delicacy of eternal life, the food that culminates christian initiation, the source and summit of ecclesial life, the compendium of faith.
- **Reconciliation:** it is the mercy of God, the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Church.
- **Priestly Order:** Priests forever. It is the sacrament by which the "ministers" of the church are constituted, that is, the people entirely consecrated to the Lord who administer the sacraments in the name of Christ, and teach the Lord's word.
- **Marriage:** Union for life. It is a sacrament that sanctifies and perfects the indissoluble union of a man and a woman who, by marrying, have sought to help each other and have children.
- **Anointing of the Sick:** Jesus accompanies us in moments of pain; it can be defined as that sacrament that gives the sick person a special grace of the Holy Spirit, to better cope with their suffering.



They are immanent realities that show or reveal transcendent realities. A rose that a lover gives to his beloved is not love but reveals the love that exists between two people.

The sign is communal, it implies an existential relationship with what it means, it is always new, and its meaning is constantly enriched. In all things created by God there is a communication of God, so the creation in its being has a virtue of



transparency of God (sacramental). Therefore, through creation God speaks to us and is his sign and symbol that leads us to him.

Therefore, the function of signs and symbols is to let or allow to see a deeper reality: God. Under this aspect, the sacraments use signs and symbols to reveal a profound truth.

Keep in mind that man needs to celebrate to live. For this reason, he seeks a way to celebrate life as an event of encounter with Christ and with his brothers.

Let us see what the sign of each sacrament is:

<b>Sacrament</b>	<b>Matter</b>	<b>Sign</b>
Baptism	Water	Newborn
Penitence	Sins	New life
Eucharist	Bread and wine	Spiritual food
Confirmation	Laying on of hands and chrism	Christ witness
Anointing of the sick	Oil	Strength in the adversity
Priestly order	Laying on of hands and chrism	<i>Alter Christus</i> or Minister
Marriage	contracting parties	Communion /Trinity

All the sacraments are joined as links in a chain, and in this sacramental process the whole path of christian love is embedded in its deepest aspect, for this reason a celebration of the sacrament has a dynamic of preparation, of celebratory experience and post-sacramental and complementary celebrations. During the celebration, the symbolic aspect of the sacrament acts mainly through established rites.

The liturgy is the environment that opens to have an existential experience with God, so that it seeks to create spaces for personal, community and transcendent encounter.



## PRACTICE

1. What are the signs of the sacraments?

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2. Why is Jesus Christ the Father's Sacrament?

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3. In your opinion, are the sacraments moments that go away and remained in the past or are they experiences that help you been a better person?

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4. Choose a sacrament. Explain how you live it in community.

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## SECOND KEY STONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 10: RENEWING THE FAITH OF BAPTISM

#### THEOLOGY OF BAPTISM

Baptism means the new life of the newborn in Christ. Through water the person is born in Christ and by virtue of the Holy Spirit, being a salvific event.

In Baptism one dies to sin and is resurrected with Christ to new life. Therefore, the baptized live and commemorate the paschal mystery of Jesus in his life.

Being baptized in the Spirit is the beginning of a transformation, the new creation begins in Jesus Christ. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6: 11 tells us: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”. Therefore, the baptized is in Christ and in the Spirit, discovering the divine nature’s participation of the sons of God.

The baptized is incorporated into the church for its edification, because Baptism involves the entire community; The church begins to form with Baptism, and with it, love is built and strengthened, through the Holy Spirit and with Jesus.

With Baptism begins the forgiveness of all sin, because the old man is left, and the new man begins in Jesus Christ. Baptism is death to sin and fight against sin, it is justification and task. But Baptism is lived in an experience of public and liturgical faith, because not only is it receives, but lives with faith in everyday life.



Baptism is a bath of purification, journey, health, transit to another kingdom; it is death and resurrection with Christ, communication of the Spirit, new creation, rebirth. It is incorporation into the body of Christ. It makes the Christian a member and citizen of the people of God, and, as the beginning of the christian life, he is entered into the covenant with God. It is the concession of inheritance and life, an act of divine justice, by which justification and adoption come to us; it is sanctification and illumination, it clothes us with the new garment, that is, with Christ. In short, it is lordship of Christ, updated eschatology, anticipated gift of fullness. There are two important elements in Baptism for children: the first is the Baptism of the child itself, and the second is the commitment of parents and godparents to help their children live out the baptismal promises.

Of course, the baptized person is not a perfect Christian, but simply a person who begins the path to holiness, this is a challenge and a commitment. Magically, one is not a Christian, it is achieved by being each day like Christ.

An adequate preparation of the parents and godparents of the children who are going to be baptized is advisable, to remove the legal concept of Baptism, give a real sense of the Sacrament and live the celebration.



The Baptism of children is a legitimate and necessary beginning of the initiation, provided that the necessary conditions are met, therefore, its value, position and importance must be rescued.

## **BAPTISM'S SIMBOLIC AND CELEBRATING ELEMENTS**

### **Baptism's Celebration**

The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism is divided into four parts:

**The rites of reception:** they express the mutual acceptance and reception of children, as well as the intention of the parents and of the church itself when taking and welcoming them. After the godparents or parents ask for baptism, the celebrant says: "When you ask for baptism for your children, do you commit to continue educating them in the faith, so that they can lead a life according to the gospel, following the example of Christ?; are you aware of this obligation that they contract now?" Faced with the positive response, the celebrant (president) continues the reception of the community and the ritual recommends the sign of the cross to the one to be baptized.

**Liturgy of the Word:** The Word gives meaning to baptism, a fact that invites us to respond to God's call. The liturgy of the Word consists of the corresponding readings, the homily, the prayer of the faithful. Lord's word of the celebration is a committed beginning to be sown in the hearts of the baptized throughout the process of christian initiation.

**Liturgy or celebration of the Sacrament:** It consists of three parts:

- A close preparation that consists of the blessing of the water of baptism, renunciation of sin, adherence to Jesus Christ, and profession of faith.
- The rite of ablution (pouring out) or sprinkling with water, invoking the Holy Trinity.
- Complementary rites, these are: Chrismation, white garment, lighted candle receiving the light of Christ.

The community while it baptizes, is baptized and renews its own Baptism.

**Farewell rites:** monition of the celebrant, Sunday prayer or Lord's prayer, blessing to the assistants, prayer, or song to the Virgin Mary.

## **BAPTISM SYMBOLS**

Baptism has some symbols with a special meaning, presented below:

- The name: it is the first sign of the baptized, it reflects belonging and possession.
- The cross: the cross is traced on the baptized, placing his life under this sign that symbolizes victory and salvation. It indicates consecration and commitment, belonging, profession of faith and salvation and task for the future. Christ by his blood on the cross gave us salvation.
- Baptismal water: It symbolizes purification and death, resurrection and life, womb and birth to new life, the beginning and goal of baptismal life.
- Baptismal anointing and chrism: there are two anointings. One is prebaptismal which is followed by a deliverance prayer to remove the power of evil and be possessed by Christ. The second is post-baptismal; it is the chrism, which means the royal priesthood of the baptized and union with the community.
- The light: Christ is the true light that illuminates every man, He is the light of the world, therefore Christians must be children of the light and light of the world. The light of Christ illuminates loneliness, cold, darkness, error, slavery and makes us see in a new way. It symbolizes the life, the resurrection, the Easter illumination in which all the baptized participate.
- The white garment: symbolizes the new life received from Jesus Christ that takes away sin and gives new life Jesus eliminates the old man, removes the heart of stone and the new man emerges with a heart of flesh (Ephesians 4: 24; Galatians 3: 27).
- The whole community is a sign of the presence of Christ, it makes it transparent. That is why it is recommended that parents, godparents, and those accompanying them carry out a renewal of baptismal promises, the same ones that can help to further purify the community and bring it closer to Jesus Christ (John 3: 5).

Let us understand that Baptism, in its first facet is more than a rite, it is a ceremony. It is the experience that we live as believers, making us see that the Christian and the experience of the Spirit are two realities linked to each other.

The second facet of this Sacrament is Baptism as an experience of death. Let us read what it says in Romans 6: 3-4 "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life".

Jesus, at the moment of being baptized, acquired full awareness of the mission entrusted to him by the Father and we know that such a mission was not, but unconditional dedication to save and liberate men, without conditions of any kind, but if necessary until the death as it actually happened.



By being baptized with water, believers express our bond with Jesus in his death, “but not to remain in the destruction that death brings with it, but to pass in that way to a completely new life”.

The third facet of the Sacrament is Baptism as an experience of freedom; but freedom or liberation from what? From sin, which according to the Apostle Paul himself in Romans 6: 14 “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace”.

The experience of Baptism is the most radical that Jesus grants us in grace through his Holy Spirit. This is only because of the gratuity of God that we are saved, and not because of our own merits, or because of the compliance with the laws, norms, and rites that they impose on us (Titus 3: 5).

The Baptism experience must lead us to the following: to a total change in our lives that leads us to walk in a new way. To seek from freedom, the breakdown of all barriers and divisions that separate us, because where there are divisions and differences, there are limitations to freedom.

To conclude this theme of Baptism, we once again emphasize that this sacrament is more than a rite, it is the experience of the Spirit that is "installed" in us; the experience of death in Jesus, to later be able to rise with him and in him, and the experience of freedom that separates us from sin, making us new men.



## PRACTICE

1. What are the symbols of baptism?

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2. What have represented in your life the sacrament of baptism?

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3. How have you assumed your baptism's compromise?

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4. What are the effects of baptism?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 11 RENEWING THE FAITH OF EUCHARIST

The catechism of the Catholic Church has a very clear definition of what this sacrament is: "The Holy Eucharist culminates christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and more deeply configured to Christ, by Confirmation, participate through the Eucharist with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice" (CIC 1322).



When talking about culminating, it is understood that a whole process has been carried out, the first stage has been completed. In other words, initiation is what leads us to understand that the Eucharist, more than an honor, is the result of our baptismal commitment.

They tell us that by Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ, then as soldiers we must ensure our commitment to faithfully fulfill all our duties. We have heard that a relative or acquaintance in the army is going to "swear the flag", that they commit to the Homeland. Likewise, with Confirmation we acquire the commitment to continue faithful to Jesus, and to participate through the Eucharist with the entire community, in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus.

For Christians, the Eucharist is synonymous with communion and, as its name indicates, it is common-union when God the Father through Christ comes out of himself, he lives in us and produces fruits of love, solidarity and mercy. In this way, we want to share with others, as does our highest God. And the more we experience the emptying of God in us, the more we must empty ourselves to make a true surrender with our brothers.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist or Mass "the fundamental truth of our Catholic faith continues and will continue to stand. It is the memorial or memory that updates for the faithful, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, whose presence in this mystery is real".



The Council of Trent, convened by Pope Innocent III in the 16th century, makes us understand the reality of the presence of Jesus and the change of the substances of bread and wine, into the body and blood of Christ. "Realism that is not to be understood on the visible and material plane, but on the invisible, as an object of faith and that is why, from this Council on, a growing cult of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the host began to be rendered, that gives rise to the tabernacles, the cult of the consecrated host, the veneration and adoration of the tabernacle and silence in our temples, the *Corpus Christi* festivities, the forty hours;

sacramental signs of the Eucharist that 'we must understand and believe' and what they tell us: Here is really present in this assembly and in these forms of bread and wine, the risen Jesus, his spirit who gives us life".

We have to understand that "Jesus is really present in the Eucharistic forms, on the stone altar, in the assembly, through the words and the canon or Eucharistic prayer and through the real signs of bread and wine".

It indicates a real presence of Jesus: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take and eat; **this is my body**". Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26: 26-28).

That is why to receive communion is to solemnly reaffirm a commitment of solidarity with those who need it.

## **EUCHARIST'S SIMBOLIC AND CRELEBRATING ELEMENTS**

The Eucharist has a scheme for the development of the celebration where it shows its dynamics and its symbols:

**Initial rites:** "the purpose of the introductory rites is to make the assembled faithful form a community and be ready to hear the Lord's word as appropriate and to celebrate the Eucharist with dignity" (Roman Missal 24). The initial rites are the greeting (kiss at the altar, sign of the cross and greeting the believers); the penitential act (confession); *Kirie* (Lord have mercy); the Glory and the collect.

**Liturgy of the Word:** In the Eucharist, the Lord's word is proclaimed and announced, explained, and applied, prayer and song, dialogue and response, event and celebration are made. The meaning of the biblical readings is that the Word is transforming with a saving, creative, active, illuminating force of the present and the bible. Lord's word becomes an effective sign, and the sign becomes an eloquent word.

The texts used announce and realize the mystery of redemption and salvation. The first reading is commonly from the Old Testament, which announces Salvation to us. The second reading is from the New Testament and tells us the continuation of salvation in the ecclesial community, then the gospel of Jesus Christ, which presents salvation today.

After proclaiming the gospel, comes the homily that aims to update the Lord's word, explain the central content, apply the teaching to the community, announce the good news, form the assembly catechistically, present the prophetic and salvific character of that of the Word, to seek to live evangelically, coherently with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Eucharistic Liturgy:** it is divided into three parts: preparation and presentation of the gifts; eucharistic prayer and communion rites.

- **Preparation and presentation of the gifts:** bread, wine and water are brought to the altar, thanks to God for all the work of salvation. Christ spoke to us before, now he will turn the wine and the bread into his body and blood. Gifts for sacrifice are prepared. The gifts that the Lord has given us and that we have made our own, we return them as sacrificial gifts. There is no better offering for God than the gift accepted by man, this is the value of the preparation of the gifts.



- **Eucharistic prayer:** it is the heart and the culminating point of the Eucharist, where it reaches its fullness and maximum expression, thanksgiving and praise that the community directs to the Father in the name of Christ and through the Holy Spirit. The entire prayer from beginning to end is a blessing to God, a praise, a thanksgiving.
- **Rites of Communion:** they present the elements to guide communion, these are:
  - ✦ Lord's prayer: expresses the two most important reasons for which the Christians pray.
  - ✦ The rite of peace: it is a gesture of charity and unity among the brothers; communion and peace among the participants.
  - ✦ The breaking of bread expresses the unity of all in one body, that of Christ, participating in one Bread.
  - ✦ Communion: it is the full participation of the sacrifice. When communion is a true human and christian act, it becomes the most privileged and visible expression of the community. Eucharistic communion expresses and realizes communion in love, therefore, if I do not love, I do not create community and if I am not capable of giving myself like Jesus.
- **Farewell rites:** after communion there is a space of silence for each person to adore Christ within, since he has become his tabernacle and has committed to living in community, it is a silent praise, an action of thank Christ for allowing us to celebrate life.

The presbyter or priest performs a prayer after communion in which he thanks the Father for the spiritual food received and forming one with his son, he asks to participate in the life that the bread that came down from heaven gives .

The priest ends up delivering the blessing, just as the celebration began, then he invites us to live the Eucharist, which is not only received, but is lived in daily life, giving testimony and preaching Jesus Christ. The shipment is to live what is celebrated.



## PRACTICE

1. What does the eucharist represent for you?

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2. What compromises do you acquire with the eucharist?

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3. What does the Council of Trent make us comprehend?

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4. What are the symbolic and celebrating elements of the eucharist?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRITIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 12: MARY, LORD'S DISCIPLE

Starting from Luke 1: 26-56 we are going to analyze some of the characteristics of Mary, our Mother, who is the "perfect disciple" because she embodies the Word of God in her heart and in her womb.

#### Announcement of the birth of Jesus



In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus."



He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

#### Mary visits Elizabeth

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.



His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

## MARY CHARACTERISTICS A DISIPLE

- **Happiness.** In the V.28 receives the greeting of the angel Gabriel: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Joy is the fruit of realizing the gifts that God gives, and Mary is happy because she is "full of grace" and the Lord is with her. Maria's happiness at the beginning of her mission is so great that she overflows to infect her cousin Elizabeth when she visits her.
- **Knows how to ask and knows how to keep quiet.** Between the v.34-37 there is a dialogue between Mary and the angel Gabriel, where she asks naively (which is different from ignorance): "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a

virgin? Asking is a sign of intelligence and the desire to know a little more, but in the face of the response of the angel who reveals such a wonderful mystery, it is better to remain silent. Mary teaches us to ask when it is opportune and to be silent when the divine mystery overflows us, to speak when it is necessary and to silently contemplate the works that God performs in our lives.

- **She serves the Lord.** In the V.38 we see that Mary introduces herself pointing out "I am the Lord's servant" Servants have three characteristics that can be applied very well to our Mother Mary's choice of life:
  - a) she has no life of her own because the life of a servant belongs to the master.
  - b) she cannot decide for herself, because in everything she must do the will of the master.
  - c) she is not even entitled to claim her rights, because the master decides what is best for his servant. Mary assumes her discipleship from the service to the Lord, so that the divine will be done in everything.
- **She obeys the Word of God.** In the V. 38 Mary says: "May your word to me be fulfilled" to indicate the total availability to what God wants to do with her. Mary understands that the life of the disciple of the Lord consists in staying attached and obedient to the Word of God, because there it is her happiness, her freedom and, therefore, her personal fulfillment. To be obedient, Mary first became a servant. This is where we find the key for her to be recognized as the "perfect disciple" of Jesus Christ.
- **She runs to serve her family.** In Lk 1:39 we are told that Mary "hurried" in search of her cousin Elizabeth and old Zechariah, who lived in "town in the hill country of Judea", very far from Nazareth. The angel Gabriel told her that her relative was already six months pregnant and since Elizabeth was already older, her husband was also old, Mary is going to serve her cousin, help those who need it, collaborate in the activities that are necessary so that the marriage of Elizabeth and Zechariah is adequately prepared for the birth of their only son. Maria is willing to serve even if she must travel far and serve to improve the quality of life of her relatives.
- She spreads joy and the Holy Spirit. In v.40 and 41 we see that Mary "she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.", with the Jewish greeting of Shalom, immediately Elizabeth is filled with the joy that Mary brings and the Holy Spirit that leads her to her cousin. Mary is the disciple who shares the Good News with such joy and disposition that those who are close to her are infected with the divine Spirit who leads her to serve. Mary carries Jesus in her womb and is ready to serve promptly, with joy and with the power of the Holy Spirit, causing those who receive her to become infected with a new experience.
- **Knows how to receive praise and blessings.** It is important to know how to give, but also to know how to receive, because whoever gives does so with love, with gratitude and with the desire to recognize the generosity of the other person, that increases fraternity, makes the other person feel good and helps them grow. Mary receives the praise and blessing that Elizabeth gives her when she says:



"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" (Luke 1:45). During the home visit that María makes to Zechariah and Elizabeth's house, she knows how to give generously and how to receive with humility to create an environment of trust and brotherhood, of growth and solidarity.

- **Knows how to pray.** Between the v.46 and 55 we see the prayer of Mary known as the Magnificat. This prayer has three stanzas, as it is a song that teaches us to pray with very interesting elements:
  - a) First stanza: Mary praises God because she is aware of the blessings received (v.v. 46-50). To praise it is necessary to realize the blessings that God gives and therefore turns to Him to recognize his greatness, his power, and his holiness.
  - b) Second stanza: Mary prays from the reality of the people and from God's choices (v.v. 51-53) for the poor, the humble and the hungry. God seeks those most in need to help them.
  - c) Third stanza: Mary remembers the fidelity of the God of history (v.v. 54-55). God is faithful to his promises and always keeps them. God is always merciful and reminds his friends to fulfill his promises as he does to Abraham and his descendants.
- **Stays to serve until the end.** In the V. 56 we are told that " Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home ", that is, she stayed to serve until the birth of the child and helped in everything necessary to create a familiar and pleasant environment to receive the new member of the family. Faced with the difficulties that could arise, given the inconveniences of Elizabeth's pregnancy and childbirth, Maria did not abandon the mission, but remained constant until it was finished. Maria teaches us to serve in the best way and until the end, until she leads the person to their integral development.

## CONCLUSIONS

We see the discipleship of Mary in an active way, where the willingness to receive and incarnate the Word of God comes together, the readiness to develop her mission of sharing the Good News with words and with actions of service, while she has her support in the prayer of praise to hold on to the greatness and power of God.

We are invited to develop in ourselves the characteristics of Mary as a perfect disciple, where what we hear becomes action and the virtues are put at the service of those most in need.

We must remember that it is necessary to pray with Mary, pray like Mary and pray to Mary, to embody the characteristics of the true disciple and missionary of Jesus Christ.



## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 13 SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

#### INTRODUCTION

The Social Doctrine of the Church (also, Christian Social Doctrine) is a set of norms and principles referring to the social, political and economic reality of humanity, based on the gospel and the magisterium of the Catholic Church. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church and the Catholic Catechism define it as a renewed doctrinal body, which is articulated as the church, in the fullness of the Word revealed by Jesus Christ, and through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, reads events as they unfold in the course of history.

The Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, written by Pope John Paul II, tells us: “Learning the Social Doctrine of the Church is learning, more than an ideology, to live the faith. The Social Doctrine of the Church starts from seeing and is oriented by acting. It is not only seeing what exists, how society is set up, but also discerning that what we see is not the work of a fatal destiny, but the product of the hands and hearts of men; that we can think and create situations of hope. The Social Doctrine of the Church helps us identify situations, discover in them the signs of justice and injustice, and create possible solutions and compromises”.

The Social Doctrine of the Church viewed as a social commitment of Christians, as faith made alive, which “focuses especially on men and women since they are engaged in a complex network within modern societies. The human sciences and philosophy are useful for interpreting the central place of the person within society and for providing a better understanding of what it means to be a social being. However, the identity of a person is completely revealed through faith, and it is precisely from faith that the Social Doctrine of the Church begins. Although it makes use of all the contributions made by science and philosophy, the Social Doctrine of the Church is aimed at helping humanity on the path of salvation” (*Centesimus Annus*. 53-54).



#### PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The inalienable principles of the church's teachings are:

- **The life, dignity and rights of men:** The measure of each policy is in how it protects human life, promotes dignity and respects human rights. This principle is the foundation of the church's teaching on war, peace, and social life.
- **The preferential option for the poor:** In Catholic Social Doctrine the poor and vulnerable have the first place in our consciences and policies. Although the language is new, it is a language that comes from Latin America and has been embraced by the entire church as the contemporary expression of Matthew 25: 40 "I assure you that everything you did for one of these most humble brothers of mine, for me they did it themselves".
- **Solidarity:** This is a special principle for building a new world. It is a moral expression of independence, a reminder that we are one family regardless of our differences in race, nationality, or economic status. People from distant lands are not enemies or intruders, they are brothers and sisters endowed with life and dignity whom we are called to protect.

## THE VINCENTIANS AND THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH (SDC)

We Vincentians, who must first be convinced Catholics, must participate in the illumination and transformation of these crude social realities, in the healing of this morally ill society, knowing first-hand what is socially damaged, not by "the will of God", but because of the amorality and stubbornness of men. Many Catholics, including Vincentians, lack sufficient training to meet the needs of the new times, being that we must be the first to "make our proposal for dialogue and charity clear, from the invitation, never from the imposition, seeking to help build a more just and equitable society".



Currently, we are going to delve into some elements of the Social Doctrine of the Church. In the first place we are going to point out the characteristics of the SDC and secondly the ecclesial documents that speak of it.

### CHARACTERISTICS

We present some of the characteristics of ecclesial thought on social questions:

- **The SDC is an integral and constitutive element of the christian conception of life.** It is not a simple appreciation or recommendation given by the church in temporary situations. It carries within itself part of the evangelical message and leads to its application in the realities of today's world. It is not related to evangelization as something different and neighboring but is an integral part of it. Whoever transmits the SDC is

evangelizing. Who wants to evangelize considering all the implications of his mission must teach the SDC.

- **The SDC is not the formulation of one more opinion, easily confused and comparable with other positions.** It has an original element that makes it radically different from an ideology or a philosophical conception: it is inspired by the gospel. Its vision of man is not only born of reason, but also and to a great extent, of faith.

That is why the SDC not only defends man for his human dignity (as any atheist can do) but also defends him for his dignity of image and likeness of God, called to be the Son of God and in which the face of God is recognized (Matthew 25).

- **The SDC** does not constitute a simple repetition of principles but **it is in permanent and dynamic growth** thanks to the fact that it is also formed in the dialogue with the social sciences and with the voices and studies carried out from other points. It is therefore not absolutely original but is formed,



- complemented and developed in the historical relationship with the various cultures and times in which its pilgrimage takes place.
- **The SDC is specifically ethical in nature.** Its richness is not in the acceptance of certain theoretical principles born from analysis and intellectual effort, but rather it is a radical demand for a change in behavior. It carries within itself the strong request for a conversion towards a more human and more christian lifestyle. Its main value lies in being practice oriented.
- When we refer to the SDC, we do not refer to something that belongs to it as a private property, but rather is part of the service that due to its **salvific mission corresponds to render humanity.** For this reason, it implies the participation of the human community both in its deepening and in its implementation. This does not mean either that any ideology or political party can identify with it or pretend to be the owner of it.
- Despite referring to social or earthly issues, the **SDC has an eminently religious character in the sense of being oriented towards the integral salvation of the human being.** That is why it is not satisfied with proposing the solution of material problems but requires the creation of situations that allow man to open himself to transcendence.
- **The SDC**, despite living in permanent dynamism, is not subject to the changes of time like a weathervane but rather has permanent values: the **dignity of man**, justice, peace, love, etc. At the same time develops and molds according to the specific requirements and characteristics of each era and each culture.
- **The SDC does not attempt, nor can it attempt, to provide technical solutions** that acquire the sense of closed molds to which societies would have to accommodate. Rather, it has the characteristic of being a critical

conscience of the different types of social organization to which it recognizes its virtues and points out its limitations.

- **The SDC is not a theory** in search of a subject to apply it, such as ideologies, but rather the way in which Christians should live in society. It is more of an experience that should be followed by a personal and community encounter with Christ in a social program. That is why it is a dynamic, a permanent interpellation, a constant incentive for action and commitment, and a verification test of all our actions.

## SDC'S DOCUMENTS

Since the end of the 19th century, the Popes have formulated a Social Doctrine that has enriched the tradition of the church. While articulated in different ways and applied to various problems, the heart of the teachings of the Popes has been the defense of humans, created in the image and likeness of God.

Documents and general topics	Pontiff
<i>Rerum novarum</i> = Of the new things (1891), on the problems of the capital and the work and on the rights and responsibilities so much of the government, as of the employers and workers.	Leo XIII
<i>Cuadragésimo anno</i> = At forty years (1931), on the reconstruction of the social order and its improvement in accordance with the law evangelizing.	Pius XI
<i>Divini Redemptoris</i> = <i>Divino Redentor</i> (1937), about atheist communism and its influence in the world.	Pius XI
<i>Mater et magistra</i> = Mother and Teacher (1961), on Christianity and social progress. He deplores the widening of the gap between rich and poor and presents the church as mother and teacher, hence its Latin name.	John XXIII
<i>Pacem in terris</i> = Peace on Earth (1963), about peace among all peoples founded on truth, justice, love and freedom.	John XXIII
<i>Populorum progressio</i> = The Progress of People (1967), affirms the rights of poor nations to full human development.	Paul VI
<i>Concilio Vaticano II</i> (1965). The dogmatic constitutions <i>Lumen Gentium</i> on the Church; <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> on the church in the world.	John XXIII Paul VI
<i>Octogesima adveniens</i> = Eightieth Anniversary (1971), on promoting the development of poor countries and international social justice.	Paul VI

<i>Laborem exercens</i> = Labor work (1981), about human labor on the 90th anniversary of Rerum Novarum. It helps to understand what has happened and continues to happen in history, in what way men can transform themselves with their work to become more than men. Talk about the dignity of human work.	John Paul II
<i>Sollicitudo rei sociales</i> = Preoccupation of the Social Issue (1987), in this document, the Pontiff assures that “the process of development (of the peoples) is concretized in the exercise of solidarity, that is of love and service to others, particularly to the poorest”.	John Paul II
<i>Centesimus annus</i> = Hundredth year (1991), on various questions of social doctrine on the 100 years of the Rerum Novarum. This encyclical letter testifies to the Pope's interest in social issues.	John Paul II
<i>Deus Caritas Est</i> = <i>Dios es amor</i> (2006), about the love of God that is projected onto human beings to restore their dignity as children.	Benedict XVI
<i>Caritas in Veritate</i> = Charity in truth (2009), which recalls that charity is “the main route of the Social Doctrine of the Church, warning that charity Christianity without truth can easily be confused with a reserve of good feelings, beneficial for social coexistence but marginal”.	Benedict XVI
<i>Laudato Si</i> = Praised Be My Lord (2017), invitation to care for our common home.	Francis

Finally, it is good that we consider some documents of the Latin American Church, issued by the Latin American Episcopal Council (LAEC):

- First General Meeting of the Latin American Episcopate in Brazil: Rio De Janeiro, 1955.
- Second General Meeting of the Latin American Episcopate in Colombia: Medellin, 1968.
- Third General Meeting of the Latin American Episcopate in Mexico: Puebla, 1979.
- Fourth General Meeting of the Latin American Episcopate in the Dominican Republic: Santo Domingo, 1992.
- Fifth General Meeting of the Latin American Episcopate in Brazil: Aparecida, 2007.

From what has been reflected in this module, it is concluded that the Catholic Church has not been alien to the feelings of the different communities, on the contrary it has tried to make its contribution, adapting to the peculiar characteristics of each region, always looking for the appropriate solutions, which in its content always have human promotion, growth in faith and evangelization.

## APARECIDA DOCUMENT

The text has three main parts that follow the method of pastoral theological reflection "see, judge and act". This is how reality is viewed with eyes illuminated by faith and a heart full of love, joyfully proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to illuminate the goal and path of human life, and seeking through a community discernment open to the breath of the Holy Spirit, common lines of a truly missionary action that puts all God's people in a permanent state of mission. This tripartite scheme is woven by a common thread around life, especially life in Christ, and is traversed transversely by the words of Jesus, the Good Shepherd: "I came that they may have life and may have *it* abundantly" (John 10: 10).



*Aparecida* shows us different themes, it is considered, briefly, the subject who looks at reality and who blesses God for all gifts received, especially by the grace of faith that makes him a follower of Jesus; and for the joy of participating in the ecclesial mission.

In some detail, the great changes that are taking place in our continent and in the world, and that call for evangelization, various complex and ongoing historical processes are analyzed at the sociocultural, economic, sociopolitical, ethnic, and ecological levels, and are discerned great challenges such as globalization, structural injustice, the crisis in the transmission of faith, and others.

This document presents many realities that affect the daily life of our people. In this context, consider the difficult situation of our church in this challenging hour, taking stock of positive and negative signs.

*Aparecida* shows us the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ as the source of life for the men and women who are united to him and who walk the path of missionary discipleship. Here, taking as an axis the life that Christ has brought us.

In a decisive nucleus of the document, the mission of missionary disciples at the service of full life is presented, considering the new life that Christ communicates to us in discipleship and calls us to communicate in mission, because discipleship and mission are like the two sides of the same medal. The document also tells us about God's Kingdom and the promotion of human dignity where the preferential option for the poor and excluded is confirmed, starting from the fact that in Christ, God made himself poor to enrich us with his poverty, they are

recognized new faces of the poor (for example: the unemployed, migrants, abandoned, sick, etc.) and justice and international solidarity are promoted.

Both the Social Doctrine of the Church and the Aparecida Document invite us to be missionary disciples in the places where we are; and they propose to all Catholics and Vincentians to be in a state of mission.

The mission is to go out in search of Jesus in the neediest, examining our environment, the causes of poverty and proposing solutions, seeking the promotion of the person and the person's dignity.

For Vincentians, this call cannot be indifferent, because it is the reason for our charism, the personal encounter with Jesus and the mission of serving him for the poor.



## PRACTICE

1. Write the letter of column "B" that corresponds to the translation of the encyclical inside the parenthesis of column "A"

«A»

- ( ) MATER ET MAGISTRA
- ( ) LABOREM EXERCENS
- ( ) LA RERUM NOVARUM
- ( ) REDEMPTOR HÓMINIS
- ( ) SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS
- ( ) CARITAS IN VERITATE
- ( ) GAUDIUM ET SPES
- ( ) DEUS CARITAS EST
- ( ) POPULORUM PROGRESSIO
- ( ) PACEM IN TERRIS
- ( ) LAUDATO SI

«B»

- A. Social Concern
- B. Progress of people
- C. God is Love
- D. Chrithy in the truth
- E. Mother and teacher
- F. Joy and Hope
- G. New things
- H. Peace in Earth
- I. Redeemer of the man
- J. Laboral work
- K. Care of the common house

2. What is the relation between the SDC with our Vincentian charism?

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3. What is the method that the Aparecida document propose to work?

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4. In your branch, do people live the spirit of these documents? Why? How?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 14 CHURCH MAGISTERIUM

#### WHAT IS THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH?

The Magisterium of the Church (from the Latin *Magister* = Teach) is the expression with which the Catholic Church refers to the role and authority to teach that the Pope and the Bishops, who are in communion with God, have.



The catechism of the Catholic Church says: "The office of authentically interpreting the Lord's word, oral or written, has been entrusted only to the living magisterium of the church, which exercises it in the name of Jesus Christ" (DV 10), that is the bishops in communion, the successors of Peter, the bishop of Rome<sup>11</sup>.

"The magisterium is not above the Lord's word, but at its service, to teach only what is transmitted, since by divine mandate and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it listens devoutly, jealously guards it, faithfully explains it. This single deposit of faith brings out all that it proposes as revealed by God to be believed".

Within the Ecclesiastical Magisterium, the Solemn Magisterium (or extraordinary) and the Ordinary Magisterium are distinguished.

The Solemn or Extraordinary Magisterium according to Catholic doctrine is infallible (it cannot contain error) and includes the ex-cathedra teachings of the Popes and the councils (summoned and presided over by him) and the so-called Ordinary and Universal Magisterium, both of which deal only on matters of faith and morals. What is contained in the Sacred Magisterium is irrevocable, it cannot be contradicted even by the Pope or the councils, being fixed forever. The Canon Code says: everything that is contained in the Lord's word written or transmitted by tradition must be believed with divine and Catholic faith, the only

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<sup>11</sup> Catholic Church Catesism, 85-86 *De los fieles bajo la guía del Sagrado Magisterio; por tanto, todos están obligados a evitar cualquier doctrina contraria.* (Canon 750, libro III).

deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and that also it is proposed as revealed by God, either by the Solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its Ordinary and Universal Magisterium, which is manifested in the common adherence.

The Ordinary Magisterium consists of the non-infallible teachings of the Popes and the Councils, those of the Bishops and the Episcopal Conferences (in communion with the Pope), and the faithful Catholic must believe and proclaim it.



The Magisterium of the Church fully exercises the authority it has from Christ when it defines dogmas and doctrine, when it proposes, in a solemn way that obliges Christians to an irrevocable adherence of faith.

## **DUTIES OF THE CHURCH'S MAGISTERIUM**

It has several duties:

- Adequately interpret sacred scripture, so that its message is updated.
- Interpret and update the tradition of the church, because what has elapsed in his life through the centuries should guide the life of the church in the 21st century.
- Dictate doctrinal guidelines so that issues of faith are understood and assimilated by the people of God.
- Guide the moral conduct of the baptized so that they assume their commitments in a testimonial way, contributing to the transformation of the world.
- Maintain hope in Jesus Christ who is present in the sacraments and who prompts us to hope for life after this life.

## **BISHOPS MAGISTERIUM**

Bishops can exercise their magisterium either solemnly in the Ecumenical Council or in an ordinary way in the Diocese itself. By Ecumenical Council is understood the meeting of the pastors of the Church, legitimately summoned, for deliberate problems related to the Universal Church.

## **CHURCH'S MAGISTERIUM AND THE VINCENTIANS**

We Vincentians have our sources of spirituality in the life and work of Saint

Vincent Paul, Luisa de Marillac and all the saints of the Vincentian Family, but we follow the ecclesial directives with obedience from the Pope, the Councils, and the Episcopal Conferences. Our belonging to the church leads us to obey the guidance of the Bishops.

Each Branch of the Vincentian family, in its Constitutions, Norms and Statutes has established this filial respect and obedience to the Ecclesiastical Magisterium.

In addition, this invites us to a double commitment:

- Work and serve as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Making these four ecclesial notes a reality in our service.
- Work and serve as a Vincentian Family, and not in isolation or separate from others; let us remember the principle: “add, multiply; subtract, divide”.

In this way, our Vincentian journey is carried out within the Church and under its orientations that confirm the faith and guide the commitment to transform the world, in addition to the eradication of poverty.



## PRACTICE

1. Define with your own words. What is the church magisterium?

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2. What is the difference between the extraordinary and the ordinary magisterium?

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3. For you as a Vincentian, what is the importance of the magisterium?

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## SECOND KEYSTONE CHRISTIAN FORMATION

### TOPIC 15 CHRISTIAN HOPE

We must distinguish between hopes, in the plural, and hope, in singular. Hopes are circumstantial and express the human tendency to achieve a desired situation, but which could not be realized and turn into disappointment. These hopes, even if they were realized, would not totally fulfill the wishes of man, who would go back to planning new projects and aspiring to new things. On the other hand, absolute hope indicates the tendency

to achieve the total good, the full realization of one's own being. It is to this hope

that Saint Paul refers when he writes: "And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5: 5).

This hope does not disappoint because it is not based on human weakness, nor on the uncertainty of events, but is guaranteed by the action of God. That is why it cannot fail. It fully fulfills the longings of the human heart and is as sure as God himself.

#### **Abraham, model of hope.**

The model of hope is Abraham, who "believed, hoping against all hope" (Romans 4: 18). The expression "hope against all hope" is contradictory since one cannot wait sensibly when there are insufficient reasons to do so. Abraham manages to wait because he believes. The relationship between believing and waiting is very close. It is not about two separate attitudes, but one, of a faith that hopes and a hope that believes. Faith is lived as hope, hope is unlimited trust.

Saint Paul describes Abraham's faith in these words: "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead -since he was about a hundred years old- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Romans 4: 19-21).



Abraham's faith has been stronger than death because he believed in God, as the one "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not" (Romans 4: 17). Abraham exceeds the horizon of hopes that are based on human forces, to which death inexorably imposes an insurmountable limit. He believed and hoped in God and in his promises: "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God" (Romans 4: 20).

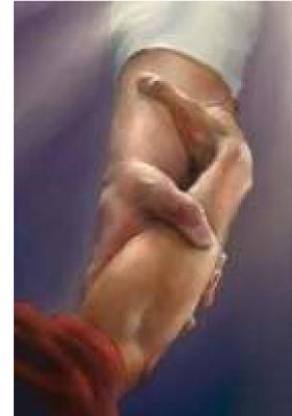
The faith and hope of Christians are like the one of Abraham, for we place our faith and hope in the faithfulness and life-giving power of God. Abraham believed in God "the God who gives life to the dead" (Romans 4: 17); Christians "to whom God will credit righteousness- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4: 24). The God who kept his promises to Abraham is the God who has raised Jesus from the dead. Abraham waited for a land and a seed. Those of us who believe in Christ hope to be transformed into the image of the Risen Lord, we hope for a new heaven and a new earth.

### **The dynamism of hope**

Those who believe in Christ live "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5: 1) and have received the grace of salvation. However, they can always be victims of evil and pain and become engulfed in the negativity and contradictions of human history. The grace that believers have received through the death and resurrection of Christ does not nullify their historical condition, nor does it tear them away from the harsh reality of life where the forces of evil dangerously threaten them too. The extraordinary thing is that, even during the most difficult and dark situations, Christians remain firm, as they put all their trust in God, knowing that evil and negative never have the last word. They put all their security and trust in God. This is what Saint Paul means when he affirms that Christians "And we boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5: 2).

The Christian feels proud of the hope that springs from his faith in Christ and experiences evil, not as a fatal obstacle that destroys him and makes him unhappy, but as an opportunity to live more intensely the love and strength of God. What could be a source of failure and death is experienced as an occasion for human growth and faith: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character and hope" (Romans 5: 3-4). The difficulties of life make the believer mature they do not bring him down they give him the opportunity to persevere with fidelity. The fruit of hope is not gathered when the predicament has already been overcome, but when we manage to discover God where everything seems to deny his presence.

Christian hope is not passive waiting for the future, nor conformist resignation, nor is it reduced to naive optimism. Our hope springs from the trust we place in God who has loved us, with which we face reality serenely, without letting the weight of difficulties overwhelm us and trying to change what can be changed. Our hope is sustained by the certainty that "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31), and that "neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8: 39).



### **Foundation of hope**

Christian hope is not based on one's abilities or willpower, nor does it depend on a human decision. Its foundation is the experience of God's love, communicated personally and internally to the believer. Whoever finds himself loved by God every day is prepared to wait on Him. God's love is like an inner principle that energizes all of existence. It is something real, which is made present in the intimacy of the believer through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, christian hope is not an illusion, nor is it identified with easy optimism.

Christian hope is a "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5: 5). It does not disappoint because, although we live with tension towards a future that is yet to come, it makes us live the fullness in advance, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit that we have received. In the hardest moments of life, we can live as children of God, led by the Spirit (Romans 5: 14). But above all we can pray, which is an exceptional way of practicing hope, allowing the Spirit to pray in us and for us to the Father, as Jesus did (Romans 8: 15).

For Saint Paul, the root of hope is always the initiative of God's loving action. That is why he says of himself: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Corinthians 15: 10). That is why he teaches that it is God who gives birth in us the hope of one day reproducing the image of his son (Romans 8: 29). And this "good work" -as Paul calls it- is also God himself who will carry it out (Philippians 1: 6), since "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5: 18). Our hope is born and lives as a gift of Christ and communion with Him, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4: 25).

### **The realization of hope**

The world, as it exists in the present, does not respond to God's project. The new world that began with the resurrection of Christ, a new world, liberated and glorious, is yet to come in full. Saint Paul describes the entire creation living in the hope of being freed from corruption, "groaning, travailing" (Romans 8: 22). The sufferings of the present world are like the groans that already herald the birth of that totally free and renewed world. The groans of creation are joined by our own groans longing for liberation: "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (Romans 8: 23-24).

Believers, who have received the Holy Spirit, have received the first fruits, we already possess the anticipation and the guarantee of the full realization of salvation. We await the glorious transformation of the world and of our existence, but from now on we already participate in that condition of final liberation: "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (Romans 8: 24).

Christian salvation is not totally identified with what we can now see, but with what, even believing, we still do not see. Christian hope is opposed both to a vague expectation, void of content, and to the visible and complete possession of the gift of God.

To live with hope is to have trust in God and to persevere faithfully in faith. Waiting is having the capacity to see, even when our eyes do not see.

It is to recover our ability to dream of a better world for all, it is to question the inhuman structures and ideologies that make people unhappy and to actively collaborate so that a new and liberated world is born. Waiting is discovering and welcoming every day the life force of the Risen Christ, who makes this world new with the power of his Holy Spirit.





## PRACTICE

1. What is hope?

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2. What are your hopes?

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3. Explain the phrase: "The man needs God, otherwise, he remains without hope"

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4. What does it mean to live with hope?

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