

Forming Catholic Disciples

Session 4:
A Community of Servants
and Missionaries

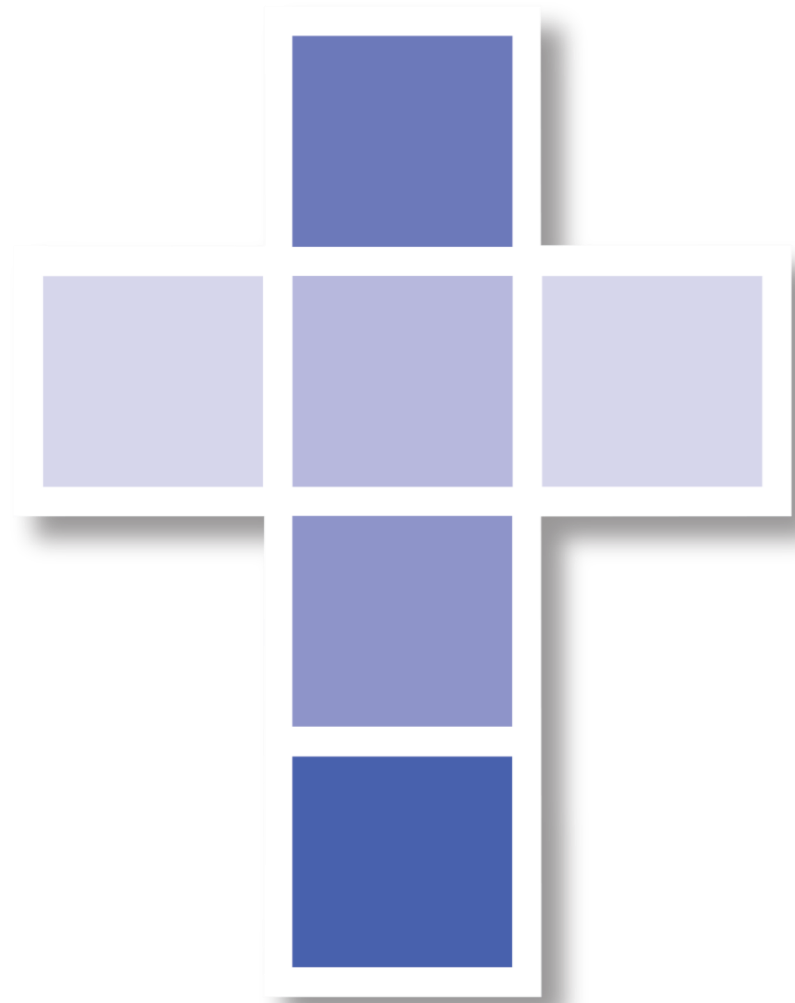


Opening Prayer

O Holy Spirit of God, take me as your disciple. Guide me, illuminate me, sanctify me. Bind my hands that they may do no evil. Cover my eyes that they may see it no more. Sanctify my heart, that evil may not dwell within me. Be my guard. Be my guide.

Wherever you lead me I will go. Whatever you forbid me, I will renounce. Whatever you command me, in your strength I will do. Lead me, then, to the fullness of your truth. Amen.

(Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, 1809-1892)



Unit 10: Community



Community in the New Testament

- ▶ We have heard the phrase, “See how these Christians love one another,” but the New Testament details many conflicts in the earliest followers of Jesus.
- ▶ For example, the Corinthians were divided into factions, and people dismissed each other as not wise enough, or not spiritual enough.
- ▶ The First Letter of John shows a community that realizes that a part of its members have left as a group.
- ▶ The Galatians were giving up Paul’s message and resorting to Jewish ways even though they weren’t Jewish.
- ▶ People were saying they contributed everything but they held things back.



Community

So, the interactions we see among the earliest Christians give plenty of evidence of just how complicated church life can be. Yet the truth is this: all of us need community. Discipleship cannot grow apart from community. In community, we find ourselves accepted and supported. In community, we also find out if we are truly committed by our faithfulness to others. Through community we receive the vision of hope that we need to persevere as disciples. Indeed, we are not alone in our journey in God's life.

(p. 69)

What has the community of the Church brought to your life?



“Heresies” of Popular American Religion

“I don’t need church.”

This is the illusion that somehow I can come to a relationship with Jesus, and sustain that relationship, without the support of others. In fact, all faith comes, one way or another, through community.

“I go to Church because it blesses me.”

This is called “the prosperity gospel” in which preachers claim that going to Church will improve our lives materially, because God will bestow blessings upon us—finances, relationships, house and car, etc. This totally ignores the poverty of Jesus who call us to be poor and serve the poor.



Consolidation, Merging, and Closing Parishes

- ▶ What experiences have you had of parishes being merged, consolidated, or closed? What were the feelings of people and where did these feelings come from?
- ▶ In what ways do you think the parishes can be clannish? Even today when we do not organize parishes very often around ethnicity?
- ▶ In what ways do we see our parish open to new people? How do we invite, engage, and welcome new people into our parish? How can we do this better today?



Who Is My Neighbor?

- ▶ P. 71 reminds us of the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- ▶ The Samaritan was the one despised by broader society, yet the Samaritan stops to help.
- ▶ The teachings of Jesus have blossomed into the “social teaching of the Church” which took on new power in the 1800s under the influence of the Labor movement.
- ▶ These teachings include: the inherent dignity of everyone, the preferential option for the poor, striving for peace, service and compassion, global connectedness with all (solidarity), and working for justice in the world.



Covenant Expressed in Baptism

We who are baptized, then, form a special community rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus. When Jesus bestows his Spirit upon the baptized, he gives us the ability to continue his ministry of serving God by bringing about the Kingdom. The community of the baptized, the Church, becomes the nucleus of this Kingdom—a center of grace so powerful that it extends beyond the visible borders of the Church, in mysterious ways, into all human experience.

(p. 72)

In what way is the Church “the sacrament” of the Kingdom, showing the world a vision of how we can live?



Covenant Expressed in Marriage

- ▶ Marriage forms family, the nucleus of community.
- ▶ Family life forms the essential ways of acting and feeling that shape the personalities of people.
- ▶ Marriage leads people to love each other with the faithfulness of Jesus, thereby modeling his love as a way of life.
- ▶ Marriage is a special example of unconditional, selfless love, as a major factor which can shape the world.
- ▶ Marriage underscores the place of family in the lives of everyone.



Covenant and Mission

Catholics can model the way humankind can be one by the way we bring about unity in the multicultural reality of our church experience. We can credibly be involved in ecumenical and interfaith experiences because our Catholic life so often invites us to be open to “the other,” the strangers who constantly find a home in our midst. We can model what acceptance looks like, as well as the richness that comes from reaching out to those who, at first glance, appear strange, because of the stronger community that results.

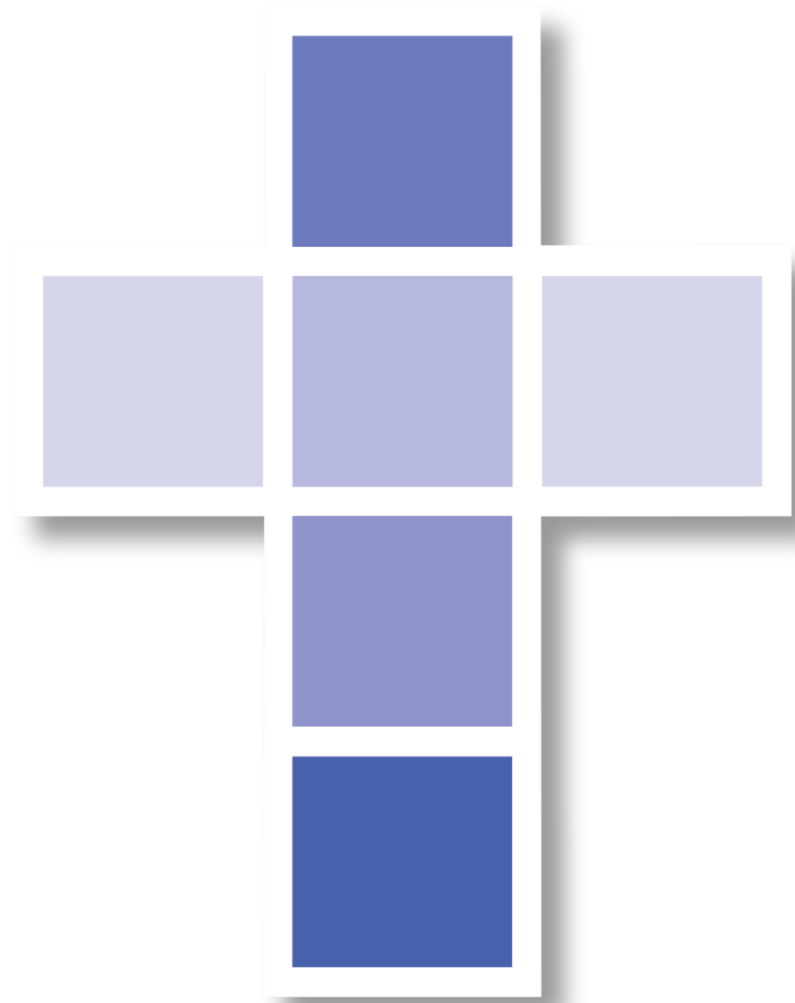
(p. 75)



Poll

In terms of community and unity, where would I rank my parish (pre-Covid)?

- Very strong community and welcoming
- People are friendly but don't always welcome
- People are friendly but hang in their own groups
- People are not welcoming
- Parishioners are distant and cold



Unit 11:

Service



Service

- ▶ All of discipleship is to dispose us to service.
- ▶ Jesus showed the Kingdom of God by serving others.
- ▶ His service was directed at those who were stuck, in impossible situations, and outcasts, whether socially or morally.
- ▶ His deeds of service are viewed as the fulfillment of the vision of Isaiah—bringing Good News, making the blind see, helping the lame to walk, proclaiming a time of mercy from God, and preaching the Good News to the poor. (See Luke 4:16-20)
- ▶ He washes the disciples' feet before his death.



Showing God

We can interpret the life of Jesus precisely in terms of the service he wills to give others to demonstrate the love of his Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

(p. 79)

- How often do we think of God as a servant?
- How does the Holy Spirit show itself in service?
- How do our deeds of service reveal God?



Service through Hope

- ▶ Think of a great accomplishment in your life... For example, completing college, or opening a business, or producing some work of art.
- ▶ None of those could have happened without an **image** in our heads, an image for which could strive.
- ▶ That image, hazy or incomplete as it might have been, drove our motives and actions toward some goal.
- ▶ This is what the virtue of **hope** does when we look to serve the world.



Hope

Disciples who have encountered Jesus Christ have an irreplaceable vision to bring to the world. To encounter Jesus means participating in his death and resurrection, the process whereby we come to total trust in God because we have placed our lives in God's hands. Through our baptisms into Christ's death, all of us believers already are living on the other side of death. As a result, disciples see with a vision beyond that of most people. Instead of worrying from day to day, or year to year, disciples have a vision of the Kingdom for which Jesus lived: the slow transformation of time and space under the sway of God's love, which nothing can stop, not even death.

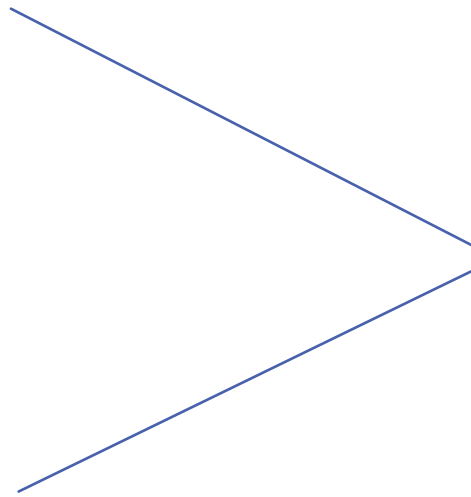
This image of the Kingdom, the realm of love and life that God is bringing about, constitutes the central vision of believers.

(p. 80)



Kingdom of God

- ▶ Healing for the broken.
- ▶ Freedom for prisoners.
- ▶ Acceptance for outcasts.
- ▶ Forgiveness for the sorrowful.
- ▶ Justice for the oppressed.
- ▶ Embrace of all people because God loves them.
- ▶ Life given even to the dead.
- ▶ Eternal life promised to all.



This is what Jesus lived for, why he was murdered, and why he rose.

To accomplish this Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, making us a Church that can bring hope to the world around us.



**When will our parishes look like an
embodiment of the Kingdom of God?**



Mercy

- ▶ Hope is not possible without mercy.
- ▶ Everyone gets stuck in life; getting stuck is to live without hope.
- ▶ Mercy is the act of love and forgiveness that helps people get unstuck in their lives.
- ▶ Mercy is God's gift to us, his prior love and healing, offered to us even before we are hurt, broken, or sinful.
- ▶ Reconciliation is the act by which we accept God's mercy in our lives and participate more fully in the Kingdom.



Love

Catholic disciples know a distinct kind of love, shown by Jesus, through which people, freed from their fears and insecurities, come to give themselves to others. We do this not because we primarily have something to gain (though we always gain in love), but because we have gone beyond ourselves, through compassion, into the lives of others. The only thing Jesus hoped to gain was the attainment of the Kingdom for humankind. We moderns have made Jesus into a superstar, or a sentimental movie idol, or even a religious fanatic. Ultimately, however, he was, as the Jesuits say, “a man for others.”



Christ: The Norm of Life

Disciples know that Christ is the one measure for life. We, one day, will stand even more clearly before the Lord than we do now; the Lord will look into our eyes, saying, “Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, that you did for me”.

(Matthew 25:41, adapted)

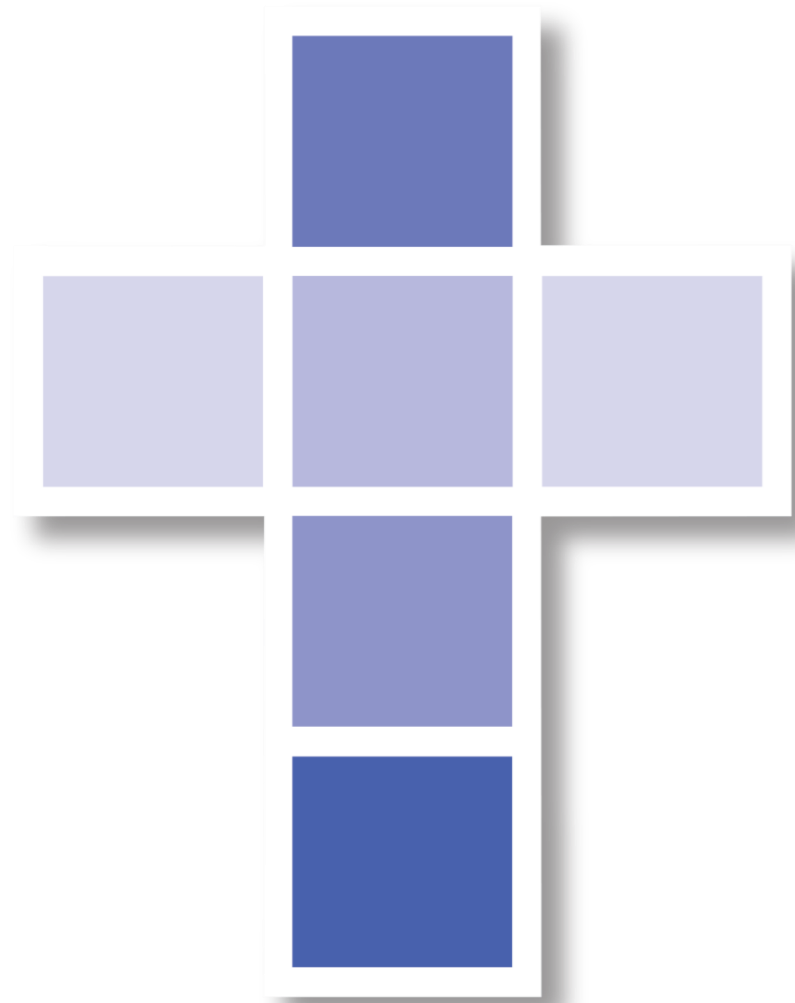
Christ’s smiling gaze will be reflected on the faces of all who have undertaken his path of love. His gaze will be humbling judgment for all who missed the point that life basically is about giving ourselves to others.

(p. 81)



Faith

- ▶ Faith is a gift that comes from God, the transformation of our vision from knowing the God of Jesus.
- ▶ But faith is not a gift to be kept... Rather it must be shared.
- ▶ To share faith is to offer people the most precious resource they can have—a vision of God active in their lives through Jesus and the Spirit.
- ▶ To share faith is to invite people to consciously embrace the Kingdom of God, to live for that Kingdom, and to extend that Kingdom.
- ▶ Sharing faith is not nagging people, making them feel small, or attacking them. It is offering them a gift.



Unit 12: Missionaries



Images of Missionaries

Let's take a few moments to explore the images of missionaries that we have.

- People who go foreign countries
- People who care for the homeless and poor
- Special preachers of renewal and movements
- People involved in the RCIA and evangelization teams
- People on the parish staff
- Parents who raise children in the faith



Pope Francis

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”.

(The Joy of the Gospel, #120)



Missionaries to Ourselves

- ▶ We cannot evangelize unless we continue to be evangelized ourselves. Our evangelization is never complete.
- ▶ We are evangelized by living the life of discipleship as fully as we can.
- ▶ Evangelization deepens through our ongoing contact with the Word of God.
- ▶ Evangelization has power to the extent that we pray, and celebrate the Mass, to attain unity with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ We deepen our roots in community and serve people more willingly.
- ▶ We have spiritual guides and communities along the way.



Family

- ▶ Living our vows is to live a life of ongoing commitment and conversion.
- ▶ Loving our children for their sake teaches us selflessness.
- ▶ Passing on the faith to our children is essential for the growth of the Kingdom of God.
- ▶ Today's assumptions about life have made it harder to pass faith on to children.
- ▶ Prayer, community, and service have to be part of a family's ordinary experiences.



Neighbors— *Joy of the Gospel, #128*

1. Begin with the other person, getting him or her to express care and concern.
2. Show interest in the other person, being willing to listen and share.
3. After there is some common basis, one can speak about one's own experience. Pope Francis then says, "Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God's word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship."
4. Then speak what the Spirit gives you to speak, humbly and simply. In all of this, the object is not to win arguments, or prove people wrong, or show off our holiness or knowledge. Rather, it's to express the love of God.
5. If appropriate, one might then offer to pray with a person.



Missionaries in Parish Communities

- ▶ Think about the various “audiences” that parishes might be called to reach:
 - ▶ Their own membership, active and inactive
 - ▶ People who have moved to the margins in terms of their Catholic lives.
 - ▶ People searching for faith and meaning today.
- ▶ How can we help our parish reach out to these various audiences?
- ▶ What committees or organizations does the parish have that can strengthen this kind of outreach?
- ▶ Can our parishes each have evangelization teams to reach out?



Where would my parish begin?

Which might be the most promising area to foster evangelization and discipleship in my parish? (Pick two)

- Special preaching series
- Faith-sharing groups
- Outreach to inactive Catholics
- Spread news about our parish to neighborhood
- Invite people without a church to the RCIA
- Bible sharing and study throughout the parish
- Renewing a strong sense of community in the parish



Scripture – Spiritual Exercise

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:16-20)

**Imagine hearing Jesus say this to me?
Who is Jesus sending me to reach?**



Dedication

Lord God, Father of infinite love and grace, your Son, Jesus, consecrated himself to the truth (John 17:17-19) of your self-giving life, revealed through his actions of mercy, healing, and peace. He gave himself through his death to the salvation of humankind.

You raised him up in order to bestow the Spirit of grace and life upon us (John 20:22). Lord, in this same Spirit, I consecrate myself to be a follower of Jesus.

I pray that I will continue to die and rise with him, through the power of his Spirit: to die to my selfishness and sinfulness, to rise as a disciple, experiencing his power in my life as I overcome sin, grow in prayer, and serve others in his name.

I consecrate myself as Jesus did; I consecrate myself in the image of his Mother, Mary, who heard your Word so deeply that it became flesh within her, who accompanied your Son in the joys and sorrows of his life, right up to being with him in your death and receiving his risen Spirit.

Father, consecrate me with the holiness and dedication of Jesus Christ.

Renew in me my baptism and my promises to reject sin and follow Jesus.

Fill me with the Spirit who bestows Jesus' Easter gifts upon us, as I hear his Word, experience ongoing conversion, celebrate in worship, pray for myself and the world, support fellow believers as they support me, and give my life in service as a disciple, showing your selfless love in my life, and being on mission to serve and further your Kingdom.

May your divine compassion, your generous forgiveness, and your unending love show itself in all my actions.

I pray this in the Spirit of Jesus whom you bestow upon me, and all who seek to follow you in Christ Jesus.

Amen.



Catholic Discipleship Prayer

Lord, God, through our baptisms you have made us disciples, followers of Jesus who attend to his Word, pray and worship in his Spirit, experience love in his community of the Church, and are sent to serve by helping others as he did. Lead us, Father, more fully into your Kingdom, which Jesus came to begin and fulfill. Help us, through his Spirit, to adhere to him and bring his Good News to all we encounter. We pray this in his name. Amen.

Our Father...



Discussion

If you would like a more conversational approach to this material, we will be having a discussion session next Tuesday at 7pm

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81043023508>

(The link will also be emailed along with the recording of this session.
If you have not been receiving the recording emails, please email Emily at esmith@pemdc.org.)



Contact

Frank DeSiano, CSP

President, Paulist Evangelization Ministries

- ▶ **Email:** ministry@pemdc.org
- ▶ **Online:**
 - ▶ www.pemdc.org
 - ▶ www.fpdesiano.com
- ▶ **Mailing Address:**
 - ▶ PO Box 29121
 - ▶ Washington, DC 20017



**PAULIST
EVANGELIZATION
MINISTRIES**