

To be holy: To be fully human

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To Be Holy: To Be Fully Human

A Thesis Submitted in Total Fulfilment

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by

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Introduction

The call to be holy is from God who is holy (Lev 11:45). God wants Moses to tell the Israelite people: “Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). In the New Testament Peter repeats this call in his First Epistle (1 Pet 1:16). Moral theologians have written on this, and Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* recently emphasizes the call to holiness in the present world. This thesis examines the fullness of that call through the writings of contemporary moral theologians and Pope Francis. I will show how we respond to the call by being related to God, self, others and nature.

Why do I develop these four relationships so that through them one may become holy? Here are some reasons and backgrounds. From the beginning, Adam and other creatures created by God live in harmony with God, other (e.g., Eve), self, and nature, having a good relationship with one another. But in the symbolic narrative of the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve chose to disobey God by eating the fruit in the middle of the garden, these relationships are broken. They blamed each other. Adam blamed God and the woman blamed the snake (Gen 3:12-13). Besides, there is a conflict within each and every human being, as Saint Paul admits that he does not understand what he does because he does not do what he likes, but he does what he hates (Rom 7:15). This seems to suggest that where unity does not exist, there is no holiness. In other words, where unity is, there holiness is. Moreover, for Earnest Larsen we are called to holiness which is “to abundant life” and “a quality of relationship.”¹

After the Fall, God wants to heal brokenness. To redeem humans’ original blessed state and relationship, God makes covenants with human beings, particularly with Adam (Gen 3:16-19), Noah (Gen 9), Abraham (Gen 12), Moses (Exo 19:3-8), and David (2 Sam 7:12-13).

¹ Earnest Larsen, *Holiness*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 7.

Moreover, through the sacrifice and death of Jesus in Jerusalem, God first and foremost makes the new and everlasting covenant with the Israelites (Mt 26:28).

When disobeying God, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God (Gen 3:4), refusing to be humans with limitations. God is their Creator, and they are creatures who need to love each other and take care of all other creatures. In much the same way today, if we do not accept who we really are as human beings in relationship with God, self, others, and nature, we cannot become holy.

In this thesis I explore and present the call to be holy from God by building on our relationship with God, self, others and nature. In doing so, we are fully human and thus holy.

1. Significance of the Study

In this thesis I reflect on the meanings of the call to be holy in Scripture and by moral theologians. To be holy means to be fully human. The present study may benefit all those who are interested in becoming holy in life. It may help us deepen our faith in Jesus, who is the Holy One of God. The study focuses on becoming holy in the fourfold relationships with God, self, others and nature.

2. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The present study has some limitations. It cannot cover all aspects concerning how to become holy in human life, but only how holiness is pursued and encountered in each of the fourfold relationships. Each aspect of these four relationships cannot be explored in its different dimensions. Being human, I am certainly not able to grasp fully the call of God as to why humans need to be holy and how we can get there.

3. Research Questions

The primary objective of this study is to investigate our relationships with God, self, others and nature. More specifically, the study is designed to answer the following questions:

- Why does one need to be holy?
- Why does one have to be fully human?
- How can one be holy?

4. Definition of Terms

Holiness refers to certain particular associations with God.² It means that without God we humans cannot receive the gift of holiness.

In the Old Testament the basic meaning of the word *holy* is “separation from the profane.”³ If holiness only means “separation from the profane,” it is still lacking. Holiness lacks separation *for*: we are created to do good as God does. For example, turning from evil is not enough; we need to turn toward and believe in God. John the Baptist preached, “Turn away from your sins” (Mt 3:2), while Jesus added another element that is very crucial for those who want to be holy: “Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News” (Mk 1:14).

Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler clearly define human holiness as follows:

In Catholic doctrine an effect of man’s justification by sanctifying grace; especially a participation in the holiness of God, since it is a strictly supernatural grace, that is a self-communication to man of God who is holy by nature. Whatever is said of “grace” necessarily applies to human holiness: it is supernatural, gratuitous, essentially personal and dialogic, both Christological and eschatological, at once a gift and a task. Since this justification is inextricably bound up with the capacity given one by the supernatural virtues of faith, hope and love, human holiness is an absolute surrender to the God of eternal life as he is in himself.⁴

² See John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), 365-366.

³ John C. Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 46.

⁴ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985), 212.

This definition shows that human beings can be holy through God's grace and being with God, that God is holy because of whom God is while human holiness is not by nature because our holiness depends on God and God's grace. That sanctifying grace is given to us freely and then we have to make use of it.

Donna Orsuto writes, "Holiness as God's big and complex building project is meant to lead us into a practical and simple participation of Christ's way of being and acting in our everyday lives. It involves you and me, the people we meet on the street, as well as the huge celestial choirs we see on Christmas cards."⁵ We are called to become humans like Christ in being and acting. This holiness concerns Christ, self, others, angels and even implicitly animals.

Anthony Hoekema describes human beings as creatures and persons. To be a creature means totally depending on God. After falling into sin, we need God's grace to be redeemed and saved. Hence, to be a person means depending on God. Besides, we humans have freedom and are able to make decisions, to set goals, and to pursue those purposes. We cannot be saved as robots would be, but as responsible persons in the process of salvation.⁶

5. Review of Literature

In the biblical text, the idea of holiness derives from God and God's calling the Israelites to be holy (Lev 11:45). For John Haughey, holiness is a call, not a concept given within a story because God's holiness is unlimited and bottomless, and thus it is communicated to Israel in part through a story. The story first informs and then forms the Israelites.⁷

For the Israelites, God is considered the Creator of all creatures, and all God creates is good (Gen 1:31). God created man and woman and blessed them (Gen 1:28). According to John

⁵ Donna Orsuto, *Holiness*, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 9.

⁶ See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 5-7.

⁷ See Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire*, 35-39.

Haughey, many centuries later this blessing is described by theologians as “an original justice whereby humans were created in a condition of being in right relationship with God. They were commissioned to ‘cultivate and care for’ the Garden of Eden where God strolled (Gen 2:15; 3:8).”⁸

In the seventh day of the story of creation God blessed it and made it holy (Gen 2: 3). This appears clearly in Exodus: God worked six days and rested on the seventh, the Sabbath, then inviting all creatures to do the same (Ex 20:8-11). As Haughey writes, “By entering into rest with God on the day made holy, human beings would have a weekly experience of the origin and order of things and thereby live in a greater communion with the Holy One.”⁹

Moreover, to make the Israelites a holy nation, God tells them through Moses to keep God’s covenant (Ex 19:3-6). With the second Commandment, God calls Israel to have no other gods (Ex 20:3). By worshiping other gods, they commit sin and will be unable to become holy. God requires them to be faithful.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the invitation to be holy is deepened by love. The Israelites are called to be faithful to God and keep God’s commandments: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5), and then they will become holy (Deut 6:25). This call does not stop there, but extends to others: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). Jesus answers a teacher of the law who asks what he must do to inherit eternal life by sharing the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). We are called to go out and bandage others’ wounds out of love.

From the time of the prophet Ezekiel to other prophets, the Israelites did not worship God (Ez 20:13), but rejected God’s commands, broke divine laws, profaned the Sabbath, and

⁸ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 37.

⁹ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 38.

worshiped the idols of their fathers (Ez 20:24). Thus, the notion of holiness refers to “separation from the profane.”¹⁰ The Israelites are separated from the profane so they bear a new identity, become God’s children, and thus belong to God. Saint Paul teaches the Romans: “Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect” (Rom 12:2). This point is clearly described in his other Epistle to the Galatians: the life I live now means it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20). Moreover, when belonging to God, we have to do God’s work. We follow God’s commandments. We must act differently from worldly humans who neither know God nor belong to him.

Based on the Book of Isaiah, especially 5:7, John Haughey concludes that justice is the crucial point to understand holiness.¹¹ If the Israelites wanted to be in relationship with God, there must be justice among themselves and with others, particularly the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner.

Other virtues need to be discussed. In place of common classical cardinal virtues such as justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude, James Keenan proposed four cardinal virtues: justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence. Of those, self-care really plays an important role in pursuing holiness. He concluded that “we each have a unique responsibility to care for ourselves, affectively, mentally, physically, and spiritually.”¹²

Based on Jesus’ teachings and life, Richard Gula comments on how to live our human life:

¹⁰ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 46.

¹¹ See Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 12-15.

¹² James Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” in *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), 723-728.

In fact, Jesus shows that it is okay to be human. He showed how life can be lived in a world as it is, not in a world of how we would like it to be. He lived a fully human life by being completely alert to the mystery of life all around him, the mystery that was himself, and the mystery that was his Father speaking through all that surrounded him. Jesus showed that we can come to know who God is and what God requires of us by looking hard and deep into our own lives, into the lives of others, and into the land.¹³

In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis following his predecessors Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens*, and Pope John XXIII in *Pacem In Terris* appeals to all humankind to take care of nature, our common home since Earth has been harmed by our misuse and abuse of the goods created by God and given to us.¹⁴ Pope Francis uses Saint Francis of Assisi as a good example of excellent care of nature, saying that Saint Francis reveals “just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”¹⁵

Gustave Thils suggests two dimensions of holiness: “The God-life and the temporal vocation,” which means that human beings are born in this world and become Christians belonging to another world. The former is considered human and temporal, while the latter is divine and transcendent. We have two lives and are required to live them to the fullness at the same time. A Christian person cannot be holy if the two are not lived fully.¹⁶

In his human life, Jesus’ holiness is really human. John Haughey makes two points to prove that Jesus’ holiness is really human: Jesus is “a man of faith” and “he learned the way we do, with a consciousness that is the same as ours.”¹⁷ Haughey proves these points with the following illustrations. According to Hebrew 12:2, Jesus is “the pioneer and perfecter of our

¹³ Richard M. Gula, *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 85.

¹⁴ Francis, Encyclical letter on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato Si'*, (24 May 2015) §2, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 9.

¹⁵ *Laudato Si'* §10.

¹⁶ See Gustave Thirls, *Christian Holiness*, (Beldium: Lannoo Publishers, 1961), 3-4.

¹⁷ Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire*, 65.

faith.”¹⁸ The objects of Jesus’ faith are “Israel’s election by God; Israel’s call to holiness; the divine authority of the law; the coming Messiah; the final reign of God.”¹⁹ When speaking of God’s kingdom, Jesus uses parables to talk about it, but says he does not know the time of its last arrival. Besides, Jesus develops his knowledge of God by learning from others: his parents, relatives, and those who worship God in the synagogue. He learns and teaches what he learns. This is Christology from below. This is the best way to understand holiness since Jesus became one of us.²⁰

Jesus is really human, and we are also called to be fully human. This means that we need to become Christlike. “Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many believers” (Rom 8:29). This passage clearly reveals the intention of God for humankind to become like the Son, Jesus Christ. Additionally, we are created in God’s image and likeness, and thus we are called to be like God in goodness, especially as Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God really wants us to be like Christ as Saint Paul writes, “All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Because we are made in God’s image, we are called to be like Christ not only in this age, but also in the world to come. Saint John obviously pictured it, “My dear friends, we are now God’s children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is” (1 Jn 3:2).

One way we can become Christlike, as Jesus commands his disciples to be, is to follow him (Jn 21:19, 22). Following Jesus Christ as a person of faith, learning and teaching God’s

¹⁸ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 67.

¹⁹ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 68.

²⁰ See Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 68, 75-76.

words to humankind as mentioned earlier is not enough. Those who want to follow Jesus need to be like him in all things such as his obedience, faithfulness, humility, wisdom, mercy and love. For Martin Parsons, “Holiness is likeness to Christ, not only in his victory over temptation to sin, but also in his positive life of perfect love, the epitome of all other virtues.”²¹

How can we become like Christ when following him? Metz clearly suggests that we can become human beings by imitating Jesus Christ who is fully human. The most convincing example we can take is Jesus’ overcoming three temptations by the devil (Lk 3:1-13). By saying no to Satan, Jesus counts himself as fully human. Although Jesus is God, he does not count on it, but empties himself (Phil 2:6). In these three temptations, Satan wants to make Jesus powerful, trying to persuade Jesus as Eve was tempted: “You will be like God” (Gen 3:5). However, Jesus refuses to grasp his divinity by saying no to Satan three times. This shows Jesus truly and utterly emptying himself. Through self-renunciation, Jesus immerses himself in our limitations, except sin, and lives his humanity until the end.

For Francis Kline, four ways of holiness for humankind are conversion, suffering, desire and unity. Conversion is a long process of the reconstruction of human beings toward God. When our false identity is disposed, we may know our own stiffness and roughness of heart. Human beings are called to overcome struggles toward holiness. Longing to be with God is the driving force that helps people to seek holiness. Holiness unites the Church and the world to be one as God created them to be.²²

In summary, what is presented above shows that holiness is referring to building a good relationship between God and humans, and among ourselves. These relationships also reflect those within us and with nature. Larsen defines that love, as well as hate, is a word that shows a

²¹ Martin Parsons, *The Call to Holiness*, (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1974), 39.

²² See Francis Kline, *Four Ways of Holiness for Universal Church*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2007), xiii-xiv.

relationship quality. It is unable to stand alone, but exists between one and another. However, words like brother, sister, and friend are profoundly relational. The word *Christian* indicates a relationship, but does not point to the quality of that relationship. However, holiness may show that quality.²³ Without the quality of a relationship, holiness and love are not possible.

Being born on earth, we can grow until the last breath of our lives. The human life is considered a journey and needs to reach its ending. It is the same with the holiness that humans are called to pursue. Norbert Robichaud suggests that holiness needs its road map because the life of Christians is often assumed to be a journey. The road map of Christian holiness is to faithfully and continually observe God's commandments. This map has to be consulted and lived.²⁴

Lastly, "To be human is to be related to the self, to others, to the world, and to God. The relation which is most basic, which stands at the center of our lives is the one which overflows and affects all the others; the relation to God should be that center. If this is so, we are on the road to life, peace, and justice."²⁵ God is absolutely the center of these relations. We love God first, and then loving self, others and nature depends on God's love. If we live these four relationships appropriately, we are not only on the road to life, peace, and justice, but to holiness.

²³ See Larsen, *Holiness*, 8.

²⁴ See Norbert Robichaud, *Holiness for All*, (Westminster, MD: The Newman Bookshop, 1945), 43.

²⁵ Michael D. Guinan, *To Be Human before God*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 61.

Chapter I: To Relate to God

From the beginning, human beings are created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27), and thus endowed with inescapable dignity. This dignity bears God's goodness. We can be like God, but we cannot be God since we are limited humans. God is our Creator and Father, and we are God's creatures and children, brothers and sisters. We are called by our Creator to be blessed creatures with dignity.

In this chapter we will discuss the following topics that help us understand our relationship with God: the human participation of divine life, theological virtues, obedience, faithfulness, and prayer.

1. Participating in divine life

Humans are created in God's image (Gen 1:27), thus dignity is bestowed upon us. The symbolic story in Genesis (1-4) shows that because of God's love, this absolute dignity shapes us before any individual accomplishment or social quality. Human dignity first and foremost derives from our relationship with God. We are sacred since our dignity is God's gift.

James Keenan notices how, in the pontificate of John Paul II, the definition of sanctity of life goes from that which can never be violated because it belongs to the divine to that which can never be violated because it contains within itself the divine spirit. The former meaning shows that sanctity is a limit, what we cannot violate. For instance, no human being is allowed to violate the law of the Lord: "No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together" (Mk 10:9). In addition, this term also means that human life is sacred. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that we human beings are not the authors of our lives, but it is God who is the author.²⁶ Hence, sanctity needs to be sustained, which indicates our stewardship.²⁷

²⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2258.

Dignity is the fundamental principle of all morality; however, in many places around the world human dignity is not respected.²⁸ For Mark O’Keefe, morality asks, “What should we do because of who we are?”²⁹ What we do and say depends upon who we are. In God’s image we are created; we should do as God does.

Human beings created in God’s image are “God’s own image on earth” and similar to the Creator, who is free. Freedom is not something we own for ourselves, but for others. It is a relationship between persons. We are free only when we relate to the other.³⁰ We are God’s representatives and like God in certain aspects.³¹ When we are God’s representatives on earth, but not God, we participate in divine wisdom, spirit, and freedom, and are then free to relate to God, ourselves, others and nature.

The participation of our identity in God’s image indicates that we have potential to become like God. We are able to do good. If our existence has nothing related to the divine, we have no chance to become like God. From the first moment of conception, every embryo has the potential to gradually grow and become human. If not, it cannot be human. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every

²⁷ See James Keenan, “The Concept of Sanctity of Life and Its Use in Contemporary Bioethical Discussion,” in *Sanctity of Life and Human Dignity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz, (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 3-11.

²⁸ See Gula, *The Good Life*, 12-15.

²⁹ Mark O’Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 35.

³⁰ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007), 62-63.

³¹ See Larsen, *Holiness*, 13.

innocent being to life.”³² Another example is that when studying licentiate of moral theology, I have the potential to receive a licentiate degree, although I have not yet reached that stage.

In the Old Testament, wisdom and spirit characterize the relation of creatures with God. The orderliness of the created world reveals God’s wisdom. The world is created in order, not in chaos (Is 45:18); and God provides for living beings (Ps 147:8-9). The Creator also created “the moral order that is nearly lawlike in its workings.”³³ By participating in God’s wisdom we are able to know how to act wisely, as God does. Without God’s spirit no creature can live; God’s spirit is the source of life. By returning the breath of life to God, living beings die. In addition, in the New Testament we intimately participate in God through Jesus Christ. We belong to the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches (Jn 15:1-8).

However, the participation of the universe in the triune God is not complete. The way creatures exist is different from how God is. They exist with limitations, which is distant from God. If creatures participated in God completely, they would overcome their limitations and be divine.³⁴ To overcome our human limitations, we try our best with the support of God’s grace, since without God we can neither become holy nor enjoy our salvation. For John, without God we can do nothing (Jn 15:5).

Symbolically, when creating Adam, God formed him from the dust of the ground. God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils, and Adam became a living being (Gen 7:2). This shows that human beings consist of dust and spirit. We humans have God’s spirit within us. Living by God’s spirit, we no longer live for our lives but God lives in us (Gal 2:20).

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, creating man with God’s own hands reveals two complementary things:

³² CCC, 2270.

³³ Samuel M. Powell, *Participating in God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 42-43.

³⁴ See Powell, *Participating in God*, 56.

On the one hand, it expresses the physical nearness of the Creator to the creature—expresses that it is really the Creator who makes me, the human being, with the Creator’s own hands; it expresses the trouble the Creator takes, the Creator’s thinking about me, the Creator’s intention with me and nearness to me. On the other hand, it expresses also the omnipotence, the utter supremacy, with which the Creator fashions and creates me and in terms of which I am the Creator’s creature; it expresses the fatherliness with which the Creator creates me and in the context of which I worship the Creator. That is the true God to whom the whole Bible bears witness.³⁵

This quote indicates that through God’s omnipotence we are formed and that we are not only near to God the Creator, but also God’s creatures.

God worked six days and rested on the seventh, the Sabbath (Exo 20:11). We are called to enter God’s rest so that we may have communion with God. “By entering into rest with God on the day made holy, human beings would have a weekly experience of the origin and order of things and thereby live in a greater communion with the Holy One.”³⁶ To rest also means that our spiritual health is recovered.³⁷ God is holy (Lev 11:45), and being in God’s presence is holiness. If we want to be holy, we need to be with God. We cannot be holy out of God’s presence. The more we are God’s presence, the holier we are.

The Sabbath in the Old Testament is the day God completed creation, but the Sabbath, or Sunday, in the New Testament is the celebration of Christ’s resurrection from the dead and inaugurates the new creation by Christ.³⁸ The Sabbath is made for human beings (Mk 2:27). Hence, God’s rest, as well as Jesus’ resurrection, is made for human beings. God’s grace is always available. We are called to come and dwell in God’s rest so we can find our fulfilment in God. Human desires cannot be fully satisfied by human things. After experiencing different

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 76.

³⁶ Haughey, *Housing Heaven’s Fire*, 38.

³⁷ See Guinan, *To Be Human before God*, 84.

³⁸ See CCC, 2190.

activities, Saint Augustine did not find peace anywhere on Earth except in God, saying “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”³⁹

2. Theological virtues

The theological virtues—faith, hope and charity—are necessary to successfully relate not only with God, but also self, others and nature. By the virtue of faith we believe in God and all God’s teachings, and in what the Church teaches us.⁴⁰ Without faith we cannot believe in God and what God teaches, since many of God’s words are hard to accept. For example, when Jesus says that his flesh is real food and his blood real drink, and that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will have eternal life (Jn 6:54-55), many of Jesus’ followers are unable to grasp those teachings, saying that, “This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?” (Jn 6:60). It is hard for those followers, as well as for us today, to understand that. We may neither comprehend figurative and spiritual meanings nor fathom exactly what Jesus really means. We cannot know everything Jesus teaches since, “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours” (Is 55:9). Although faith goes beyond reason, we also need reason to confirm our faith.

What we believe needs to be put in practice, otherwise faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26). We should act according to our beliefs. For instance, if we believe that God always does good, respects human life, forgives us our sins, and loves each and every person, we are also called to do the same. Jesus frankly tells us, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven (Mt 7:21). To be holy, we need to do our heavenly Father’s will.

³⁹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans., John K Ryan, (Garden City, NY: Division of Doubleday & Company, 1960), 43.

⁴⁰ See CCC, 1814.

As the *Catechism* writes, “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.”⁴¹ Professing faith, witnessing it, and spreading it can be done by our daily words and deeds. Each person has different ways to manifest their faith. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council declares that, “Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.”⁴² Pope Francis also calls all people to be holy by “living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.”⁴³

When we see, by faith, the image of God in ourselves, others and nature, we may live our lives justly in the sight of God as well as others. This could be why Pope John Paul II declared that faith is surrendering to God and transforming one’s life.⁴⁴ With the virtues of hope and love, faith fully unites believers to Christ and makes them become living members of his body.⁴⁵ Through the virtue of faith, we totally trust in God and follow God’s word so that our lives can be transformed into God’s own image.

By the virtue of hope we desire God’s kingdom and eternal life as our happiness.⁴⁶ We are called to hope in God’s kingdom and eternal life, although we may hope for different things in life such as having good health, long life, wealth, and happiness. What we hope for will shape our life. Jesus assures us that where our treasure is, there our heart will be (Mt 6:21).

⁴¹ CCC, 1816.

⁴² Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) §11, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

⁴³ *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §14.

⁴⁴ See John Paul II, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1979), 4.

⁴⁵ See CCC, 1815.

⁴⁶ See CCC, 1817.

Our trust is placed in Christ's promises and the help of the Holy Spirit, but not on our own strength.⁴⁷ Our help comes from God, who makes heavens and earth (Ps 124:8); it is not from our own strength. This could be the reason why Nietzsche calls hope the "virtue of the weak."⁴⁸ We surrender ourselves to God's care since nothing is impossible for God (Lk 1:37, Mt 19:26). Hope helps us go beyond our human limitations to reach what we long for.

The Israelites hoped that God will restore Israel (Jer 30-31), and we hope for a new heaven and new earth where righteousness resides (2 Pet 3:13). We hope the order of the universe will be reestablished as God created it from the beginning: to live in harmony with God, self, others and nature. To get there we have to do God's will (Mt 7:21).

Knowing that Jesus was resurrected, we believe that there is life after death, otherwise our Christian life is meaningless. Saint John assures that those who believe in the name of God's Son have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13). Saint Paul reminds the Corinthians not to lose heart since our external self is wasting away and our internal nature is being renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that with the virtue of charity we love God above all things and our neighbors as well as ourselves out of God's love.⁴⁹ These are the two most important commandments of God in the Old Testament: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deut 6:5), and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). The rule to "love your neighbor as yourself" is imperfect since moral standard is based on human beings who are finite and imperfect. If I do not drink coffee, I thus neither buy coffee nor let other members of my family have it, for instance. I set my living styles for me and others who need to follow what I think and live. This is very subjective. Similarly, the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras thinks, "Of all things the

⁴⁷ See CCC, 1817.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, 12.

⁴⁹ See CCC, 1822.

measure is man.”⁵⁰ This saying is wrong because no human being can be the measure for all things. Human law can be changed, but divine law cannot.

However, Jesus corrects the second important Old Testament law of “love your neighbor as yourselves” as follows: “Love one another, just as I love you” (Jn 15:12). When we love others, we need to love them how Jesus loved them: He loved us by dying for us. There is no greater love than this: a person lays down one’s life for one’s friend (Jn 15:13). The moral standard of loving others is perfect because it is based on Jesus the Lord who is infinite and perfect. This is the objective law. Whether I like to drink coffee or not, I need to buy it for others so they might be able to drink it.

To love others includes those whom we love and those who do not like us. To love the former is easy, but the latter is difficult, especially our enemies. We are called to love enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44).

God created us in God’s image; we are from God. Saint John teaches that God is love and that those who love have been born of God and then must love one another (1 Jn 4:7-8). What Saint John confirms of God’s love and of our love for one another is very similar to what Gérard Gilleman affirms: Love is the act of our being and unity. Because love is a crucial substance of our being, we love. In our flawless being, the exercise of our love will lead to unity, which consists of God and other people.⁵¹ Because charity is the principle of our action, sanctifying grace is given us to make our beings deepened and complete: Being capable of being divinized.⁵² We can become like God when we love God, self, others and nature.

⁵⁰ Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 118.

⁵¹ See Gérard Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, trans. William F. Ryan and André Vachon, (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1959), 131-132.

⁵² See Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity*, 155.

The theological virtues adjust the faculties of humans for participation in the divine nature and directly relate to God. With these virtues, Christians live in a relationship with the Trinitarian God. Our origin, motive and object are the One and Triune God.⁵³

3. Obedience

Obedience is one of the most important virtues in Christian life. We depend on God and therefore must obey God's will. Obedience is also important in the Old and New Testaments, especially in the life of Jesus, who totally obeyed his Father's will. To totally rely upon God's word requires faith and obedience, along with its cost, but it brings great benefits. To obey Jesus' word, Dietrich Bonhoeffer considers that "the command of Jesus is definite enough, but I have to remember that he never expects us to take his commands legalistically. What he really wants me to have is faith... The call of Jesus made short work of all these barriers and created obedience, and all that it required was single-minded obedience."⁵⁴

From the beginning of humankind, God calls Adam to obey the divine command to be steward in the garden, saying "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2: 16-17). Later on, the story tells us that Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command by choosing to eat the fruit in the middle of the garden (Gen 3:6). They could not trust God. They thought that God wanted to limit their freedom, and they decided to eat the fruit so that they may know everything and be like God. However, after eating the fruit, they do not know everything nor are they like God. The only thing they know is that they are naked (Gen 3:7). How sad and bitter is such knowledge!

⁵³ See CCC, 1812.

⁵⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The cost of discipleship*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 79.

God chose Israel among the Gentiles as elected and chosen people. God also chose some special people such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, and others to be part of the history of human salvation. The relationship between God and God's people is sealed by covenants. Each party of the covenant needs to keep one's responsibilities. The story of the Maccabean family is a great example of submitting themselves to God totally. They entrust their human lives and bodies in God and finally accept death by disobeying the command of the king by not eating pork (2 Mac 7:1-14).

When observing God's commands, the Israelites were blessed: "Keep God's laws and you will live longer; if you ignore them, you will die" (Prov 19:16). Lastly, Isaiah prophesied the need to obey the Messiah when he will come, saying, "The Lord has given me understanding, and I have not rebelled [disobeyed] or turned away from him. I bared my back to those who beat me. I did not stop them when they insulted me, when they pulled out the hairs of my beard and spit in my face" (Is 50:5-6).

Although many stories about obedience are impressively narrated in the New Testament, some are chosen to be presented here. First is the story of Mother Mary and Saint Joseph. Mary accepts the invitation of Gabriel to be the mother of God (Lk 1:26-38). Also, Joseph accepts Mary to be his wife after having planned to divorce her secretly (Mt 1:18-25). Both Mary and Joseph say yes to God, although they do not fully understand the angel's words.

Although the magi are not Jews, their faith is so strong that they follow God's warning in a dream and fulfill it when they are awake. Peter, who is a fisherman, did not catch fish for the whole night, but then he obeyed Jesus, who is a carpenter but not a fisherman, to lower the net (Lk 5:4-5). It is not easy for an expert to obey an amateur. When seeing Matthew sitting in his office, Jesus calls to him to follow him (Mt 9:9), and Matthew got up and followed Jesus without

asking any questions, at least in the Gospel's account. It seems that Matthew followed Jesus with faith and without any conditions.

Obedience, in particular, is narrated in the life of Jesus, who totally obeys his Father's will. Jesus does everything that his Father commands (Jn 14:31). When facing tribulations and death, Jesus wanted to escape them; however, he did his Father's will rather than his own (Mt 26:39). The Letter to the Hebrews states that Jesus came to do his Father's will, which is more important than any sacrifice and offering (Heb 10:5-7). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote that "Jesus was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross" (Phil 2:8-9).

To obey or to hear God's word in the Bible is important in every age, from the beginning of creation until now. How can people of today believe and act in their lives today? Paul advises living a life that is guided by the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:6) and grasping Christ's mind (1Cor 2:16). To imitate Jesus, who always does his Father's will, is a perfect way of pursuing the virtue of obedience.

For Bonhoeffer, "At all events poverty or riches, marriage or celibacy, a profession or the lack of it, have in the last resort nothing to do with it—everything depends on faith alone."⁵⁵ If so, faith plays the most important role in obedience. The biblical stories reviewed above show the importance of faith in obeying God's command.

Bonhoeffer explains that obeying Jesus' call is never within our own power. For instance, suppose we give away all our belongings. That might not be the act of obedience Jesus wants; it may even be opposite to obeying Jesus because we choose how we live for ourselves or some other ideal. When we give what we have, we might be faithful to ourselves or to other ideals, but not to Jesus' command. In doing so, we are not liberated from our own selves, but more enslaved

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 82.

to them. The significant point is that it is not what we offer to Jesus but always his valuable gift to us. This shows us the importance of doing Jesus' work. The Catholic Church officially teaches that, "By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls human response to God, the author of revelation, 'the obedience of faith.'"⁵⁶ In the same vein, Luke Johnson highlights the significance of one's faith in other people: Faith gives the viewpoints of others to relativize its own viewpoints, as it gives another's project to relativize its own project.⁵⁷

Moreover, no one does God's word without having faith in God. Faith makes the impossible possible. What humans cannot do, faith can solve. When Jesus says, "it will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," his disciples ask him "who, then, can be saved?" (Mt 19:23-25). It is surprising that they do not ask "which rich man?" Therefore, every person, including the disciples, is considered rich. However, Jesus replies, "This is impossible for human beings, but for God everything is possible" (Mt 19:26). Bonhoeffer concludes, "Salvation through following Jesus is not something we men can achieve for ourselves—but with God all things are possible."⁵⁸

Bonhoeffer supposes that Jesus never expects us to obey his commands legalistically, but rather with faith. Bonhoeffer's faith does not necessarily rely on riches or poverty, or any other thing like that. One needs to cultivate "a spirit of inward detachment, so that my heart is not in my possessions."⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer repeatedly emphasizes the inward detachment and that we need to be free from all anxiety.

⁵⁶ CCC, 143.

⁵⁷ See Luke T. Johnson, *Faith's Freedom*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 77.

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 84.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 80.

According to Bonhoeffer, when Jesus says, “Sell your goods,” he does not mean that we need to sell everything we have, but that we live as if we did not have them. Do not let material things bother us, nor does our heart be on it. The matter here is ‘single-minded obedience,’ the obedience in faith. In the same way, if Jesus told a person, “give up everything and follow me, leave your family and your father’s home,” he knew that only one answer was expected: “the answer of single-minded obedience.”⁶⁰

How can we overcome legalism? Bonhoeffer explains that obeying Jesus when he calls us to follow him is the only way to overcome legalism, since the fulfilment of the law as well as its cancelation is perfected in Jesus.⁶¹ Human beings are obedient to God without limitations, but to human authority with limitations. Paul advised the Romans that the root of obeying human beings is from obedience to God (Rm 12:17). Paul Duffner also explains that the ultimate source of all authority stems from God and that in his plan authority is exercised mostly through God’s chosen people.⁶² Charles Mangan gives several examples of obedience in action: Jesus obeys God; the Blessed Mary and Saint Joseph, the Angel of the Lord; all baptized Christians, the word of God; children, their parents; priests their bishops or superiors; religious the evangelical councils; spiritual directees, their spiritual directors; Catholics, God and the Church; and citizens, rightful authority.⁶³ Moreover, listening to God’s word and interpreting it correctly requires the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of wisdom. Bonhoeffer takes the example of Peter, who walks on the water to go towards Jesus and risks his life, saying “Only one thing was

⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 80.

⁶¹ See Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 83.

⁶² See Paul A. Duffner, “Obedience in the Divine Plan,” in *The Rosary Light & Life* 52, no. 5 (Sept-Oct, 1999), <http://www.rosary-center.org/1152n5.htm>

⁶³ See Charles M. Mangan, *The Virtue of Obedience: Our duty, our Crown*, at Catholic Online, accessed October 2, 2018. <http://www.catholic.org/featured/headline.php?ID=5245>

required in each case—to rely on Christ’s word, and cling to it as offering greater security than all the securities in the world.”⁶⁴

Obedience to God means to let go what is disordered in own will and to discern what could be God’s will. Frank and Hall consider that when we really let God’s will be done, then miracles will happen.⁶⁵

When obeying Jesus, we become his disciples. Bonhoeffer discusses the call of Jesus to the rich man to sell all he has and give it to the poor and then follow him; he finally concludes that “it is only to this obedience that the promise of fellowship with Jesus is given.”⁶⁶

Bonhoeffer confirms that to respond to his call, Jesus knows that “it is only through actual obedience that a man can become liberated to believe.”⁶⁷ This shows that we have freedom when obeying God. Therefore, being God’s children and obeying God’s teachings do not make us losing our freedom, but helping us become fully human.

4. Faithfulness

The history of salvation shows that God is always faithful no matter what happens, but that many of God’s chosen people are not always faithful. God made an everlasting covenant with the Israelites (Jer 32:40): God will be their God, and they will be God’s people (Jer 30:22).

In the *Dictionary of Theology*, “the faithfulness of God is expressed in Hebrew by the term *emet* (literally, ‘truth’), in a fundamental concept of Scripture. It is generally accompanied by *hesed*, ‘mercy’ or ‘loving kindness’, emphasizing in this way the fact that divine grace, although sovereignly free, is completely steadfast.”⁶⁸ In the New Testament, Jesus is considered the faithful Servant, “the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his

⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *The cost of discipleship*, 79.

⁶⁵ See Linnie Frank and Andria Hall, *This far by Faith*, (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 19.

⁶⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 80.

⁶⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 83.

⁶⁸ Louis Bouyer, *Dictionary of Theology*, trans., Charles Underhill Quinn, (New York: Desclee, 1965), 159.

life to redeem many people” (Mk 10:45) and, as a faithful and merciful high priest “he had to become like his people in every way, in order to be their faithful and merciful High Priest in his service to God, so that the people's sins would be forgiven” (Heb 2:17). The commentary of the Navarre Bible also shows that, “Jesus is the Truth because by coming to this world he shows that God is faithful to his promises, and because he teaches the truth about who God is and tells us that true worship must be in ‘spirit and truth’ (Jn 4:23).”⁶⁹ Jesus clearly reveals God’s faithfulness since Jesus is “the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13) and “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8).

In the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, faithfulness is the heart of the covenant. “Remember that the Lord your God is the only God and that he is faithful. He will keep his covenant and show his constant love to a thousand generations of those who love him and obey his commands” (Deut 7:9). The prophet Hosea reminds the Israelites that what God requires is faithfulness, not sacrifice (Hos 6:6). God is always faithful to the covenant although Israel is not faithful (Hos 11). For Richard Gula, faithfulness is required if covenantal partners want to grow together. When they do not trust each other, the relationship of love is destroyed. Moreover, “Faithfulness that puts down roots is to belong. If we don’t know how to be faithful, we don’t know how to belong in a way that enables each to live together in a way that enables everyone to flourish.”⁷⁰

God is always faithful to the covenantal promises. For example, God made a covenant with: Noah, and saved his descendants (Gen 6:18; 9:9-15); Abraham, and blessed his offspring (Gen 12:1-3); Moses, and asked the Israelites to keep God’s commandments (Exo 19:5); and David, and established his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:12-17). God loves the Israelites not only

⁶⁹ *The Navarre Bible, the Gospel of Saint John*, (Navarre: Four Courts Press, 1981), 181.

⁷⁰ Gula, *The Good Life*, 70.

through others, but also through the Son, Jesus Christ, who made the new and everlasting covenant with the Israelites (Lk 22:19-20). Through these covenants, God never ceases to be with God's people. Jesus promised that he will surely be with humankind until the end of the time (Mt 28:20).

In the book of Genesis we read that Adam was unfaithful to his vocation, trying to be like God by eating the fruit in the middle of the garden (Gen 3:4-7). Therefore, Adam was thrown out of the garden, and died. Very soon afterward, God promised to save humankind from death. Here are some examples. God told the snake that "I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring's heel" (Gen 3:15). This statement indicates that God wants to save humankind right after human beings broke God's words. The offspring in the quote could refer Jesus, who is the Son of God and of the woman Mary. The devil always tries to tempt Jesus and believers, but Jesus overcomes Satan and death.

In the case of Israel, God saw that the Israelites were suffering and thus set them free from captivity; they joyfully celebrated Passover and then received the commandments given by God through Moses. However, very soon after being set free, they created their own god and refused God as their Liberator, and again were enslaved. This shows that they quickly and easily abandoned their promises, thus breaking their relationships with God; however, God never abandoned them and sent His only Son to redeem humankind. Also, according to the Books of Joshua and Judges, three things repeatedly happened in the life of the Israelites: winning successes when they carried out God's teachings; following their own wills after religious leaders died; and having other religious leaders sent by God. Similarly, they conquered land and

then were driven out; they were sick and then cured, but very soon they were unfaithful to God again.

However, many figures in the Bible do not give up their faith and trust in God. They are very faithful to the Lord. Job and Abraham are considered faithful people in God's sight when they faced many tribulations. In the time of the Maccabean family, the Jewish nation was ruled by the wicked ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, who took all things from the temple of God and issued a decree: All people in his empire must abandon their own customs and offer sacrifices to pagan idols (1Mac 1:41-43). However, Maccabean family members were still faithful to God's words, disobeying the decree of Antiochus and defending God's temple from being profaned. In doing so, they became martyrs for their faith. In the same way, Jesus was faithful to God, professing his real identity as a king and his purpose in the world being "to speak about the truth" (Jn 18:37) no matter what would happen to him. Followers of Jesus surely face difficulties and persecutions in every time and age. Today, many people are not confronting persecution from being forced to denounce their faith, but they face other different kinds of persecution: individualism, materialism, consumerism, losing sense of sin, and other cultures of death. If we are not aware of these cultures, we will become self-centered and thus gradually distant from God, who is the Truth.

Gomer, Hosea's wife, was unfaithful to him, but Hosea still loved her and took her home (Hos 1-2). In the same way, God's love for Israel did not change when the Israelites turned away from God and worshiped other idols (Hos 3:1). The faithfulness of Hosea reflected that of God. God's faithfulness endures forever. We are called to be faithful like God as well as to our own vocation, especially those who live in marriage and family life.

Suffering is part of being human. However, being human, we also tend to avoid tribulations, suffering and death. We seek to relax and enjoy life without effort. Before confronting suffering and death, Jesus, being human, did not want to take the cross, praying “Father, if you will, take this cup of suffering away from me. Not my will, however, but your will be done” (Lk 22:42). But at last, Jesus utterly obeyed the will of God: he accepted suffering and death for our sake. Jesus completed his mission on earth (Jn 19:28). Paul finished his race and kept his faith (2 Tim 4:7). We cannot say that taking the cross to follow Jesus is for some years only; rather we must follow Jesus all the days of our lives. We are called to obey God’s commandments and take our daily cross and follow Jesus Christ. The paradox is that when we seek to save our own life, we will lose it and vice versa (Jn 12:24-25).

For the virtue of faithfulness, we need to do good over and over. God is always faithful to God’s promises. We have no reason to doubt God’s faithfulness. Since faithfulness is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, obeying God’s words and following Jesus’ steps are signs that we are living according to the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Faithfulness calls us to be faithful to who we are. We live under God’s grace and protection. God, our Creator and Protector, never abandons us, but rather sustains us with divine love and grace. God protects us as a hen protects her chicks under her wings (Mt 23:37). However, if we are unfaithful to our vocation as human beings, we will lose ourselves and never become like God. We rely on God’s power, as Paul is proud of his weakness: when he is weak, then he is strong (2 Cor 12:9-10).

The faithful are those who believe in God and are faithful to God. Be faithful to God no matter what happens in life. God is always present in our ups and downs to support us. When confronting temptations and tribulations in life, we have to follow Saint Paul’s advice: “be

patient in your troubles, and pray at all times” (Rm 12:12). This is the topic discussed in the following section.

5. Prayer

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that “Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.”⁷¹ To build the relationship between God and humans, prayer cannot be excluded since it is a bridge that connects the two realities. The more we build this relationship, the more we get close to God. We remain in a close relationship with God as well as others through prayer. Pope Francis says that by contemplating the face of Jesus, who died and resurrected, our humanity is restored; even when the tribulations of this life or sins have broken it.⁷² To contemplate Jesus in his death and resurrection means to look for and ask God’s mercy.

Prayer is spending time with God so that we may know God and always learn from God. In silence, we are able to discern the ways of holiness in which God wants us to live.⁷³ Additionally, when spending time to be with God in words or silence, we can become holy through God’s holiness that overshadows us. As the *Catechism* writes, “God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.”⁷⁴

One of the signs of holiness in the present world is the prayer that Pope Francis presents in *Gaudete et Exsultate*. He reminds us to remember that holiness involves a habit that one opens

⁷¹ CCC, 2564.

⁷² Francis, *Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, (10 November 2015), at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html

⁷³ *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §150.

⁷⁴ CCC, 2591.

to the transcendent through prayer and adoration. Without prayer we cannot become holy.⁷⁵ We open ourselves to God through prayer and let God work in us. If we allow God to work in us, God takes control and leads our lives.

Why does prayer take an important role in developing the relationship between us and God? It is important because we can be with God through it and become who we are. Metz confirms that the precipitous depths of our poverty are revealed only through prayer. We are so poor that even our own poverty does not belong to it, but to God's mystery. When praying, we know the bottom of our poverty and confess the abundance and magnificence of God. We do not confess ourselves, but God. In our impoverished spirit of worship, when coming before God's freedom and going into God's impenetrable mystery, we know the depths of our own existence and value. "Then we really become fully human."⁷⁶

Our personal relationship with God is developed through personal as well as communal prayer. When our individual relationship with God is good, our relationship with one another and nature might also be in harmony. The good relationship we build with God will bring other human relationships in harmony and vice versa.

Reading all four Gospels, we see that Jesus is the person of prayer. He is fully divine and human, but always prays. Here are some examples of Jesus' prayer. Before beginning his public life, Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, entered into the desert and was tempted by the devil for forty days and nights (Lk 4:1-13). Luke does not explicitly mention that Jesus prayed while staying in the wilderness, but other passages in the Gospels show that Jesus always prays before important events happen. He prayed all night before choosing the twelve disciples (Lk 6:12-16). Jesus gave thanks to God before multiplying bread and fish (Mt 15:36), raising Lazarus (Jn 11:41-42),

⁷⁵ See *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §147.

⁷⁶ Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998), 51-52.

teaching the Lord's Prayer to his disciples (Lk 11:1-4), and before Peter confessed that Jesus is the Messiah (Lk 9:18-20). Before entering his passion, Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:36-56). Jesus prayed while teaching the Israelites (Mt 11:22-26), healing a deaf and mute person (Mk 7:31-35), celebrating the Last Supper (Mt 26:26-27), and dying on the cross "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" (Mt 27:46).

After being baptized, Jesus prayed; and the heavens were opened (Lk 3:21). Jesus withdrew to desolate places and prayed to God after healing a leper (Lk 5:16) and feeding people (Mt 14:23). After his disciples returned from ministry with success, Jesus prayed and gave thanks to God (Lk 10:17-22). And after being nailed on the cross, Jesus prayed to God and asked forgiveness for those who persecuted him (Lk 23:34).

Getting up early in the morning, Jesus went to a desolate place and prayed there before going throughout Galilee (Mk 1:35-36). Jesus prayed alone to the Father (Mt 14:23; Lk 9:18). Together with his disciples, Jesus prayed for himself, his disciples and believers (Jn 17:1-26). Jesus prays with others, and he is present when two or three gather in his name (Mt 18:20).

Prayer is also the central activity in the primitive Church. The twelve apostles dedicate their full time to prayer and preaching (Acts 6:4). Together with Mary Mother of Jesus, other women and Jesus' brothers, the apostles frequently prayed in group (Acts 1:14). Followers of Jesus took time to learn from the apostles, to join fellowship, and to pray together (Acts 2:42).

Of course, there is not only a fixed prayer that we can use, but several kinds of prayer are used in the Scriptures. For example, we praise God in faith (Jam 5:13-15) and give thanks to God (Ps 95:1-3). We pray for our needs (Phil 4:6) and God's will (Mt 26:39). The most effective, powerful and only prayer that Jesus explicitly taught is the Our Father (Mt 6:5-15). We can also

pray and praise God through the liturgical prayers that the Church offers: Eucharistic celebration, Rosary, Liturgy of the Hour, way of the cross, and other prayers.

O’Keefe reminds us, “People of prayer approach God from different perspectives and with different attitudes as their situations, moods, and needs change....”⁷⁷ However, the best way could be a prayer in Spirit. We pray according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:14-15) because we humans do not know how to pray appropriately. Saint Paul advised:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (Rm 8:26-27).

We are called to pray unceasingly (1 Thes 5:16). Why do we need to pray constantly? We need to because, as Jesus advised Peter as well as us, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26: 41). Pray and be alert since we do not know the time and hour that the Son of Man comes (Mk 13:32-37). Through prayer we are able to drive out evil spirits and to win battles. A person with an evil spirit is brought to Jesus’ disciples, but they cannot drive it out. Then Jesus assures his disciples that only prayer they can drive out an evil spirit (Mk 9:29).

God always gives good things to us when we ask God. Jesus teaches us that, “Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you” (Lk 11: 5-13). The parable of a persistent widow and the judge (Lk 18:1-8) shows that God always keeps doing good to people. However, when praying to God, we need to pray with humility. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who prayed in the temple (Lk 18:9-14) proves this: The tax collector considers himself a sinner but humbles himself before God. He goes home, and his sin is forgiven; however, the Pharisee is not. God fights the proud, but gives grace to the

⁷⁷ O’Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy*, 115.

humble (Jam 4:6). The Magnificat of Mary clearly shows that God scatters the proud and lifts up the lowly (Lk 1:51-52).

In the Old Testament, the more Moses prayed, the more the Israelites won the battle: As long as Moses held up his arms, the Israelites won, but when he put his arms down, the Amalekites started winning. When Moses' arms grew tired, Aaron and Hur brought a stone for him to sit on, while they stood beside him and held up his arms, holding them steady until the sun went down. In this way Joshua totally defeated the Amalekites" (Ex 17:11-13).

Through prayer, the power we have does not derive from us, but from God.

How can we pray continually? Because Jesus is the person of prayer, we imitate his ways of praying. He prays before, during and after his ministries. He prays in every activity. Through prayer, Jesus always gets in touch with God the Father. Accordingly, prayer is important for us to become fully human and thus holy.

Chapter II: To Relate to Self

Although being created in God's image and thus bestowed with an absolute dignity, we humans need to try our best to know God and ourselves so that we may enjoy the gift of salvation with others. Thomas Merton says, "For me, to be a saint means to be myself."⁷⁸ Thomas Ryan describes the self as "child of God, creature, sinner."⁷⁹ When these three aspects of the self are taken together and balanced, we are "one with God, but not God."⁸⁰ To be ourselves, we have to know who we are. However, we never understand ourselves fully because of our concupiscence.⁸¹ It is our human weakness that makes us difficult to do what we want. We are able to know ourselves fully only by being with God our Creator.

Moreover, to know ourselves is easier than to discipline ourselves or to be a saint. Saint Paul states that we need to discipline our body; to avoid that after preaching to others, we are not disqualified (1 Cor 9:27). Besides, Jesus says that a blind man cannot lead another blind one; if he does, both will stumble (Lk 6:39-41). Confucius also teaches that one first needs to be good, then one is able to lead one's family and then one's country, thus resulting in peace in the world.

In this chapter we will treat the following topics which lead us to a developed understanding of the care for one self: Being dependent before God; Discernment; Conversion; Discipleship; and, Purity of heart. The last topic, purity of heart, is where the person, as a disciple, fully lives the life of virtue.

1. Being Dependent before God

From the beginning, God created a human being from the dust of the ground and divine spirit (Gen 2:7). Being human before God, we are not only clay but also spirit. Both form us to

⁷⁸ Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, (Norwalk, CT: New Directions, 1949), 26.

⁷⁹ Thomas Ryan, *Four Steps to Spiritual Freedom*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 22.

⁸⁰ Ryan, *Four Steps to Spiritual Freedom*, 22.

⁸¹ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 45.

be human. Being God's creatures means dependence on God, limitedness, and mortality. In other words, our human life and other creatures' are dependent on God; all creatures limited in ability, space, and time and, therefore, mortal.

For Anthony Hoekema, we, God's creatures, totally depend upon God.⁸² Without God we can do nothing. For example, a statue cannot move by itself; it is moved by something or someone. We, God's human beings, relatively depend on God because we are given freedom so we are able to determine what we should do. God totally respects our freedom when it is given to us. The famous saying of Saint Augustine convincingly proves that God freely gives us freedom and really respects it. Augustine writes, "So while he [God] made you without you, he justified you without you. So he made you without your knowing it, he justifies you with your willing consent to it."⁸³ When creating us, God did not need our consent, but God completely respects our freedom when redeeming us.

We human beings and other creatures depend upon God in many ways. Our human life depends upon God, who is the Creator and Sustainer of our life. The following verses of Psalm 104 clearly express God's sustaining of creatures:

All of them depend on you
to give them food when they need it.
You give it to them, and they eat it;
you provide food, and they are satisfied.
When you turn away, they are afraid;
when you take away your breath, they die
and go back to the dust from which they came.
But when you give them breath, they are created;
you give new life to the earth. (Ps 104:27-30)

⁸² Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 5.

⁸³ St. Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, trans., Edmund Hill. ed., John E. Rotelle, (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 231.

These verses indicate every creature's total dependence on God for its life. No creature can live by itself. God gives us food, drink, sunshine and oxygen to live. Without God's sustaining, all creatures will die.

Additionally, it is written in the Scripture that "Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks" (Mt 4:4). We also depend upon God for our salvation because we cannot save ourselves. Saint Paul reminds the Ephesians that we are saved by God's grace through faith. It is God's gift that saves us, not our own efforts; otherwise, no person can boast about it (Eph 2:8-9). Without God we cannot be saved. It is Jesus Christ who is our way because Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).

The only way we can live and bear fruit in our human life is to remain in God as the branches of the vine attach to the vine and live. Jesus endorses, "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me" (Jn 15:5). This reveals the intimate relationship between branches and the vine. Without attaching to the vine, branches are nothing. The outcome of our life, the branches, comes from the vine, not from us.

Similarly, our holiness also relies on God for only God is holy, and no human being is. God is not only holy, but "holy, holy, holy" (Is 6:3, Rev 4:8). Nowhere in the entire Bible tells of God who is mercy, mercy, mercy or love, love, love, but rather holy, holy, holy. It means that God is the most supreme holy. When we accept our humanity which relies on God, we may find our real selves.

Our knowledge also depends on God, who gives us the capacity to do. The strength given by Jesus Christ helps us to face all conditions (Phil 4:13). Saint James also advises that those who lack wisdom should pray to God, who will give it to us (Jas 1:5). Moses considers himself

as nobody (Ex 3:11), and a poor and slow speaker (Ex 4:10) to deal with Pharaoh when God sends him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. God assures Moses that God will speak through him and Moses “will be like God” and tell his brother Aaron what to say (Ex 4:15-16). The ability to speak, as well as the power to perform miracles, does not derive from human beings, but from God. Saint Paul acknowledges that when he is weak, it is then that he is strong. God’s power is perfected in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9-10).

The greatest in the kingdom of God are not those who have high status in life, high degrees of education, or are billionaires. Children are the greatest citizens in God’s kingdom (Mt 18:1-5). They depend totally on their parents. If a little boy stands on a second floor and his parents tell him to jump, he will likely jump without any hesitation or fear. He believes that his parents will catch him and not let him be hurt. His protection is from his parents as our protection comes from God. “My help is from God, who makes heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2). “A human being with grace is a human being who has been emptied, who stands impoverished before God.... Without it there can be no Christianity and no imitation of Christ.”⁸⁴

The dependence of our life, wisdom, help, and salvation on God, which is an opportunity for us to grow in God’s grace, love and holiness, does not mean that we do nothing and let God do everything. When adults are hungry, they have to feed themselves. No one takes food and feeds them as when they were babies. Although God bestowed us with freedom when creating us, we need to cooperate with God’s grace so that we may have what God has given us. We are responsible for what God has given us: grace, fraternity, nature, our body, spirit, soul, and the like.

According to the biblical narrative, after creating human beings, God put them in the Garden of Eden, saying that “You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that

⁸⁴ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 21.

gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day” (Gen 2:16-17). This demonstrates that human beings have freedom with an exception. In other words, freedom is limited. We are not allowed to do whatever we want. If we venture beyond this limitation, we will die. Accepting this limitation, however, will help us live in a good relationship with God, our Creator.

For Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, human beings are formed in “openness.” It means that human beings must find the various historical potentials of their selves through work. With this effort, we discover our nature. If we reject this freedom, we reject this component of human nature and thus ultimately our whole self. The positive freedom is the freedom to do something (free for something), and the negative freedom is the freedom to refrain from doing something (free from something).⁸⁵ Accordingly, freedom is an important characteristic that God bestows upon us. We should use it to do good and avoid evil.

With freedom, we can do and reject many things. On one hand, we can help the poor and the disabled, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, forgive those who trespass against us, pray for those who persecute us, bring joy to the sorrowful, and love those who hate us. On the other hand, we normally neither pass the red traffic light nor drive at 150 miles per hour in any freeway in the United States. Neither intruding on others’ properties nor saying bad words to them is permitted. Eating or drinking so much that our health is affected is not accepted although we can eat what we like. There are many other things we wish to do for God, self, other and nature, but we cannot do them since we are limited human beings. The Church’s teaching about human limitations is as follows:

Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions he is constantly forced

⁸⁵ See Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology*, 181.

to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society.⁸⁶

We are bestowed spirit, soul and body. Because of God's love, we build our moral and spiritual life. We are called to do as God does. A life that shows the divine love within us by putting the total self to care for what God cares for is a holy life.⁸⁷

Because human beings are limited in many ways, we like other creatures never live on earth forever because we are mortal. Through our mortality, we may become our true selves in God. When the grain of wheat dies, it will bear fruit; otherwise it remains only a seed (Jn 12:24). To live or not to live or to be holy or not holy requires considerable discernment so we are able to do the right things when living a human life.

2. Discernment

There are many choices that people have to make. Some are easy, but some are not. It is easy to choose to go to Mass or stay at home, but to choose which life I should live as single, married, or consecrated takes much time to pray and consider. If I choose to live a married life, whom should I marry? To love others and forgive their sins against us or to take vengeance to those who harm us could bother many people. In spiritual life, we have to be careful because “many false prophets have gone out everywhere” (1 Jn 4:1).

Charles Pope explains the word ‘discern,’ which comes from the Latin:

dis- “off, or away” + *cernere* – “to distinguish, separate, sift, set apart, divide, or distinguish. Thus, to discern is to distinguish or sort out what is of God, and

⁸⁶ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, (December 7, 1965) §10, at The Holy See.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

⁸⁷ Richard M. Gula, *The Call to Holiness: Embracing a Fully Christian Life*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 105-106.

what is of the flesh, the world or even the devil. As such, discernment, in its root meaning is something that ought to precede decision and aid it.⁸⁸

In terms of discernment, those who seek to recognize a certain idea or a thought coming from good or evil spirits need to be prudent in their decision-making since it seems it is difficult to make a good, significant and right decision in terms of important human matters; however, a moral one is tougher. If people really to seek to do things according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will find some consolation in the mind and be willing to carry out those things in reality.

Discernment leads us to find God in our daily activities. Mark O’Keefe considers that discernment is “the discovery of God’s will in concrete situations.”⁸⁹ How can we know what belongs to God and what does not? It is not about our own ability to be able to discern the difference, but it is through discernment, which is a gift given by the Holy Spirit through prayer, meditation, reading and good counsel. These discerned practices will help us to receive this spiritual gift.⁹⁰

In addition to what is mentioned above, some methods of discernment need to be explored so that we may know how to apply discernment in life. Based on the Ignatian method, Jim Manney suggests 11 steps to make a spiritual decision.

The first step is to pinpoint the issue to be resolved or the decision to be made. The issue or decision should be practical (doing or not doing something), real (should or should not do something), belong to one’s right, and have the necessary information to be decided intelligently. Here is procedure to help those who have difficulty identifying the issue:

⁸⁸ Charles Pope, *Six principles of discernment*, at Archdiocese of Washington (June 6, 2012).
<http://blog.adw.org/2012/06/six-principles-of-discernment/>

⁸⁹ O’Keefe, *Becoming Good*, 115.

⁹⁰ *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §166.

1. List the various issues you might be deciding about in the next few weeks or months, or in the next year's time,
2. List the actions you might take about these issues,
3. Make a list of pros and cons for each issue or possible action,
4. Rank the issues and possible actions in the order of preference as you currently experience them, and
5. Use the issue or possible action ranked first as the focus of your discernment.⁹¹

The second step is to formulate the issue in a proposal. It should be stated as a positive, concrete choice, making it as specific as possible. The issue is considered in the way that God makes the first step to be drawing a discerner. For example, "I will study harder so that I can get a full scholarship in the next school year, or I will stay in this company with my present work or will I work another job offered by another company?"

The third step is praying for openness to God's will and for liberty from prejudice and addictions, which helps people have inner freedom and balance of life. This means that people ask God in order to be free from obstacles and influenced only by one value: "which alternative will give most glory to God and be expressive of my own deepest self, my authentic self?"

The fourth step is to gather all essential information related to the decision by using question words such as who, what, where, when, how much, etc. This step requires consulting with people who are sensitive to Christian values and discussing its details on values, possibilities, strengths and weaknesses.

The fifth step is to repeat the third step: praying for openness to the will of God. All data are gathered and need to be shared with God so they may be purified from prejudice and obstacles.

⁹¹ Jim Manney, *11 Steps for Making a Decision Following the Ignatian Method*, at Ignatian Spirituality, accessed November 14, 2018, <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/an-ignatian-framework-for-making-a-decision?repeat=w3tc>

The sixth step involves writing down all reasons for (advantages) and against (disadvantages) each alternative in the proposal. Before doing so, a short prayer is said to ask God for enlightenment to see clearly what God wants in the issue and what will give the best service and honor to God, neighbors and self. All reasons are listed without prejudging their merit since they will be evaluated in the next step: all advantages and disadvantages are formally evaluated.

The seventh step begins with prayer for openness to God, a deep faith and love for Him, and freedom from disordered attachments. Then, the following questions are asked for evaluating pros and cons:

- Which reasons are the most important? Why?
- What values are preserved or realized by each option? (Many advantages and disadvantages may be pointing to the same value.)
- Which option *more* evidently leads to God's service and *better* serves the growth of your *true* self in the Holy Spirit?
- Which option seems more consistent with your own faith journey and history with God?⁹²

The eighth step is to observe the direction of the discerners' wills when pros and cons are examined. Their desires will be influenced by the Holy Spirit, which means they will be more inclined toward one option and less toward another. Inner movements need to be considered and prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit should be exercised. Their will may eventually focus on one of the alternatives.

The ninth step is to ask God for feelings of consolation about a preferred option. Discerners' thoughts (advantages and disadvantages) and desires (will) are to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so feelings of spiritual consolation – such as joy, enthusiasm, deeper faith, greater hope and trust, love, courage, and confidence – may be experienced.

⁹² Manney, *11 Steps*.

The tenth step is to trust in God and to make a decision even if the discerners are not completely certain, so long as there is clarity and sufficient insight.

The eleventh and final step is confirming the decision that must be lived with for a while to examine whether the discerners' thoughts, desires and feelings still support it. If not, new information is required, and the process must be redone.⁹³

According to David Fleming, Ignatian spirituality will help us to discern God's will, and to follow Jesus Christ we need to make good decisions.⁹⁴ To reach these goals three things must be done. First, "What do we want?" It is necessary to be clear about what we are looking for. What we choose are not the ends, but the means to help us reach our targets. For example, we discern to be a priest, a consecrated person, a married person; to choose a career; to start a business and other choices are means or ways to deepen our relationship with God, that is, our end.

Next, when the end is clear in our sight, the complexities of decision-making may be tackled using an analytical approach: listing pros and cons in two columns on a sheet of paper and, if something is still unclear, consulting others for their thoughts. A decision then needs to be made, and it is offered to God for God's blessing; we ask God for peace as God's gift to us. This type of decision-making is called a "third-time" choice by Ignatius. The "first-time" and "second-time" choices are guided by the reasoning hearts (discerning the meaning of different emotions and feelings), not by the reasoning intellect. Ignatius calls this the "greatest gift to us about decision making." The decision, the "first-time" choice, sometimes is clear, such as the conversion of Saint Paul (Acts 9:1-19) and the call of Matthew (Mt 9:9-13); however, sometimes

⁹³ See Manney, *11 Steps*.

⁹⁴ See David L. Fleming, *How Ignatian Spirituality Gives us a Way to Discern God's Will*, at Ignatian Spirituality, accessed November 7, 2018, <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/an-approach-to-good-choices/how-ignatian-spirituality-gives-us-a-way-to-discern-gods-will>

it is not clear when situations have unclearly preferred choices (“second-time” choice). With alternatives, when attending to the inner movements of our spirit, we can make the right choice. The signals of right choices are feelings of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. They must be carefully assessed since satisfaction and smugness about a decision can be disguised as consolation.

The last thing required in the Ignatian method is to trust our feelings. According to Ignatius, the world is permeated by God and God contacts us in this world, and we use the methods of Ignatian contemplation through imagination. Besides, our Christian choices often go beyond the merely rational or reasonable. Accordingly, discernment leads us to decisions that make us closer with Christ and to work with him in the world. What makes discernment possible is contemplating Jesus in the Gospels. When contemplating who Jesus is, how he acts and how he decides, we are guided to the decisions that bring us closer to God.⁹⁵

Discernment is one method we can use to be holy, that is, to take good care of ourselves by making right decisions. People today have many problems such as unawareness of sin, lying, indifference to others’ needs, divorce, abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and the like. Pope Pius XII said, “Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin.”⁹⁶ These problems require each and every human being to discern carefully and make the right decisions to solve them. The solution based on discernment starts from individuals and communities, and then compasses the whole world. When we wish to solve these problems, it is the time we repent.

⁹⁵ See Fleming, *How Ignatian Spirituality Gives us..*

⁹⁶ Pius XII, *Radio Message of his Holiness Pius XII to Participants in the National Catechetical Congress of the United States in Boston*, (26 October 1946), at The Holy See, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/speeches/1946/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19461026_congresso-catechistico-naz.html

3. Conversion

There is no conversion when one thinks that one is self-sufficient and does not need God. Conversion takes place only when one finds oneself a sinner who needs God's mercy and forgiveness. The tax collector in the Parable of the tax collector (Lk 18:9-14) realized that he is a sinner and needs God's mercy and forgiveness. In addition, no one needs to return home if one is already at home. In other words, those who live in God's house (who are good in God's sight) do not need to repent. Because of sin, one has gone astray from home, that is, God. The second son in the parable of the prodigal son returns to his father's house when he is away from home (Luke 15:11–32).

No one repents and believes in the Gospel, if one has neither heard of the Gospel nor is challenged by any religious ways of life. We think that our human life is good. However, when God's word reaches our ears and confronts us, we may think it over because, as the apostle John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us" (1 Jn 1:8). Saint Paul asks the Romans "how can they [everyone] believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? And how can the message be proclaimed if the messengers are not sent out?" (Rm 10:14-15).

Throughout the history of salvation, we see that God has sent messengers in every age and every place to tell humankind the divine message. Saint Bernard stated that, "None may escape the appeal of the Divine voice, which, whether a man will or no, brings the soul face to face with itself."⁹⁷ What matters is whether listeners dare to change their old ways and values to God's.

⁹⁷ St. Bernard, *St Bernard of Clairvaux of Conversion*, tran., Watkin Williams, (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), 4.

For Gordon Smith, salvation is God's work, and what God is doing on earth is to obtain salvation for humankind. Conversion is about God's call for salvation and human response to the saving work of God.⁹⁸ Conversion always goes hand-in-hand with repentance because "there is no conversion without repentance...."⁹⁹

In order to inherit eternal life Jesus calls all human beings to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mk 1:15). This is a call to conversion: We change our sinful lives and turn to God. Christian conversion consists of a person's total submission to God whom Jesus Christ revealed. It is an ongoing process of self-submission to God in Christ.¹⁰⁰ It means that when we return to God, we no longer do our own will, but God's totally. This process takes place gradually till reaching a state of total transformation. It not only covers spiritual aspect of life but all aspects of our human lives: work, relaxation, psychology, health, will, mind, heart, etc. Richard Gula affirms that continual conversion involves a change of heart and will that reaches the depths of our self.¹⁰¹

To be a saint, we need transformation which is "maturity in Christ."¹⁰² How can we transform our life into the maturity of Christ? Changing our lives to become saints or to inherit eternal life requires that we do God's will according to what Jesus taught in the Gospels, especially to love God and others (Mt 22:36-40; Jn 13:34). Particularly, Jesus tells Nicodemus to be born again to see God's kingdom (Jn 3:1-8). It is a Baptism that Jesus mentions to Nicodemus. Saint Paul advises that, "Do not submit ourselves to the world, but transform according to the Spirit. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God

⁹⁸ See Gordon T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 21.

⁹⁹ Smith, *Transforming Conversion*, 135.

¹⁰⁰ See O'Keefe, *Becoming Good*, 27.

¹⁰¹ See Gula, *The Call to Holiness*, 187.

¹⁰² Smith, *Transforming Conversion*, 89.

transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect” (Rm 12:2).

For William Harmless, there are four stages of conversion. First, persons are attracted to Christianity by evangelization. Their experience is different and informal. Second, they leave their old ways and values behind and are committed to the journey of conversion. Third, they are enlightened by teachings, exorcisms, and other spiritual preparations, experiencing belonging to the Christian community. Lastly, they speak of the meaning of their baptismal rite and experience after having just become a Catholic.¹⁰³

For Michael Dick, seven characteristics show the different views of conversion in the Bible. First, conversion commonly invites or renews a personal relationship with God. It is a personal relationship even in the setting of covenant. Second, all human faculties such as reason, will, and emotion are involved in conversion. Third, conversion signifies a mysterious interaction between humankind and God. Conversion is completely God’s gift, and the response totally depends on human beings. Fourth, the imperative to convert is generally collective and addressed to the Israelites and the Church. Each person is called to be the people that were established by the covenant of Sinai and the community of the new covenant. Fifth, conversion is morally required in the Bible. The new relationship requires the converted to change their conduct. To turn away from sin is the same as turning toward God. Sixth, conversion is not a state or event, but a continuous process or a journey. Lastly, conversion consists of symbolic acts: prayer, fasting, sprinkling of water, or baptism of water.¹⁰⁴

The seven characteristics of conversion in the Bible as presented above cover crucial aspects of conversion that we should undergo when we turn away from sin and return to God.

¹⁰³ William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁰⁴ See Michael Brennan Dick, “Conversion in the Bible,” in *Conversion and the Catechumenate*, ed., Robert Duggan, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 44-45.

We are reconciled with God through Jesus' blood and redemption (cf. Rm 5:8-9, 17). Jesus' blood and redemption do not work if we do not cooperate. If we wish to have God's grace, it is always available. For example, coming to the Sacrament of Penance, we are forgiven from sins and reconciled with God.

When we are reconciled with God, we live in peace, not only with God but also with ourselves, others, and nature because "Conversion also means the just and loving dedication of one's life to one's neighbor called for in the Gospel. And today, when some Christians hear this call as a demand to work for liberation of the oppressed through the transformation of unjust social, economic, and political structures...."¹⁰⁵ This shows that conversion helps to transform unjust problems of society. It brings just development for society.

Still, turning from evil requires virtues; otherwise the turning bears no meaning, and penitents may return to their former ways in a short time for they have nothing to do to replace their evil deeds. For example, parents love their children and take care of them rather than hire a worker to do so. Children honor and love their parents by obeying their words. Students respect and follow their teachers' teachings. In *Gaudete et Exsultate* Pope Francis calls humankind to holiness by avoiding contemporary Gnosticism and Pelagianism, following the steps of saints, and practicing the Beatitudes, fidelity to God, perseverance, patience, meekness, joy, a sense of humor, boldness and passion, prayer, vigilance, and discernment.¹⁰⁶ Saint Paul, who tells the Ephesians to give up bad sayings and habits and practice virtues, says,

Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you. Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ. (Eph 4: 29, 31-32)

¹⁰⁵ Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §§ 36-56, 65-99, 112-157.

One does not turn away from sin with only mind or heart, but rather with the whole person. One submits totally to God: body, spirit, mind, heart, feelings, thoughts, plans, and other possessions. In addition, no one follows God only for a short period of time and then returns to one's former way. No, one must follow God all the days of one's life. Jesus responds to a person who wants to follow him that, "Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62).

Each member of a community does good, which surely influences the whole community. Then, the community turns to God and does good things before God. In doing so, we become one in God since where unity is, there also is holiness. Jesus prays for his disciples and other believers in order that they may become one as the Father and Jesus are one (cf. Jn 17:21). We profess our faith through the Creed that the Catholic Church is one.¹⁰⁷

Conversion means to be ready to follow Christ wherever he goes. The summit of following Christ is suffering and death on the cross. Heinrich Arnold says, "Part of the experience of true conversion is the willingness to suffer with Christ, the suffering One. I do not believe that true conversion is possible without this."¹⁰⁸

Lastly, conversion leads us to become Jesus' disciples. Jesus calls those who want to become his disciples to forget themselves and take their cross (Mk 8:34). To forget themselves means to make Jesus' teachings their own. It is Jesus who lives in them. Being Jesus' disciples will be discussed in the next part.

4. Discipleship

After turning from doing evil and returning to God, we are called to be disciples of Jesus, which means to follow him. One thing Jesus commands his disciples and those who believe in

¹⁰⁷ See CCC, §§813-816.

¹⁰⁸ Heinrich Arnold, *Discipleship*, (Farmington, PA: The Publishing House, 1994), 19.

him to do is follow him (Jn 21:19, 22). Being Jesus' disciples, learners or followers, we have no other way to go except to follow him. To respond to Jesus' call is "the act of obedience." To follow Jesus is to obey the call.¹⁰⁹

"Discipleship means adherence to Christ."¹¹⁰ Students always need a teacher. However, the teacher does not need to have students since without students the teacher is still a teacher. Likewise, "Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."¹¹¹

The first step to follow Jesus is to leave everything behind. To leave everything behind requires the disciple believe that faith makes things possible.¹¹² After leaving our former ways and things behind, we start to live a new life, which is Jesus's life. This life requires full fellowship with him. "Discipleship means complete dedication. It demands everything – the whole heart, the whole mind, and the whole of life, including one's time, energy, and property – for the cause of love. Half-hearted Christianity is worse than no Christianity."¹¹³

The greatest and only one lesson that Jesus explicitly tells his disciples to learn from him is to be humble and gentle of heart (Mt 11:29). Jesus is the Master and Teacher of his disciples, but washes their feet (Jn 13:1-17). He is divine, but gives up everything to be human except sin (Phil 2:6).

To follow Jesus means to be with Jesus and to live as he lived. Jesus lived in a village called Nazareth for 30 years. This period shows that Jesus may want to be with human beings. That village had nothing good. Nathanael asked Philip, "Can anything good come from

¹⁰⁹ See Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 57.

¹¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

¹¹² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 62.

¹¹³ Arnold, *Discipleship*, 19.

Nazareth?” (Jn 1:46). Still, Jesus is so poor that he has nothing to lie down and rest (Lk 9:58). To be with Jesus, we are able to learn, know, and experience how to be his disciples.

To follow Jesus means to listen to his teachings. Jesus’ disciples should learn and master what Jesus teaches. Jesus planned to go to Jerusalem, and die and rise after three days, but Peter prevented Jesus from doing so. Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “get behind me, Satan” (Mt 16:23). Peter acted as if he were Jesus’ teacher. By doing so, he is called Satan.

To follow Jesus means to do what he did. Here are some examples of what Jesus did in his life. Jesus prayed (Lk 6:12-16, 9:18-20, 11:1-4, Jn 11:41-42), taught in the synagogue (Lk 4:15), healed the sick (Lk 4:23-25), cast out demons (Mt 8:28-34), and was tempted (Lk 4:1-13). Telling the truth – speaking of God to humankind – is Jesus’ mission (Jn 18:37).

One of the things Jesus did in his public ministry was rendering mercy and compassion to sinners, which is totally different from Jewish teachers at the time. Jesus showed compassion to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11). According to Mosaic Law those who commit adultery are stoned to death (Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22-24), but Jesus taught about truth with love. He loved sinners, but hated sin. He did not condemn her, yet told her, “Go, but do not sin again” (Jn 8:11). If Jesus had kept the Mosaic Law strictly without compassion for sinners, he would have told them to stone her according to law. Jesus really loved her; however, when she committed sin, he quickly forgave her, but required that she sin no more. This is the amazing way of teaching that Jesus gives to human beings, especially sinners.

To follow Jesus means to go wherever he went. It does not mean that we have to live in Israel and go to Jerusalem to die with him as he did. The toughest place Jesus decisively goes is Jerusalem, where he takes the cross (Mt 16:21). Barnabas Lindars says, “Thus the center of interest has been shifted from Jesus’ personal ‘going’, i.e., the passion, to the ‘going’ of the

disciples, which is the Christian way of life.”¹¹⁴ Walter Kasper says that Jesus is the way we must follow. This way is experienced through the cross and the darkness of Calvary to the light and new life of the resurrection. Our pilgrim Church cannot always win, but we keep hoping for our final goal. There is no reason to be troubled. In such a way, Jesus is our way, truth and life, not our plans, good intentions, work, or merits.¹¹⁵

Paterson articulates well the meaning of following Jesus the Way in the following: To follow Jesus implies that we enter into a way of life that is given character and shape and direction by the one who calls us. To follow Jesus means picking up rhythms and ways of doing things that are often unsaid but always derivative from Jesus, formed by the influence of Jesus. To follow Jesus means that we can't separate what Jesus is saying from what Jesus is doing and the way that he is doing it. To follow Jesus as much, or maybe even more, about feet as it is about ears and eyes.¹¹⁶

“Discipleship must always be related to one's brothers and sisters.”¹¹⁷ We become Jesus' disciples not by ourselves, but through a community. Discipleship requires being in Jesus' community to learn from and be faithful to him. Establishing strong relationships with those who share Jesus' vision and mission helps us to be faithful to discipleship. We are called to go beyond where we presently are, to expose ourselves to God's inclusive love – a love for all humankind, and to live as friends. Also, we disciples live our lives according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived such a life. However, it is dependent upon us to apply the details that fit present situations, needs and problems. Discernment is needed in order that our moral character will fit with the call of discipleship and our recent demands.¹¹⁸

After Jesus' disciples stayed with him and learned to be like him, Jesus gave them power to drive out evil spirits and heal the sick (Mt 10:1-15). After rising from the dead, Jesus

¹¹⁴ Barnabas Lindars, *The New Century Bible Commentary*, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 472.

¹¹⁵ Walter Kasper, “Centro Conferences Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2001: I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life,” in *Ecumenical Trends* 31, no. 6 (June 2002): 95.

¹¹⁶ Eugene H. Peterson. *The Jesus Way*. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 22.

¹¹⁷ Arnold, *Discipleship*, 18.

¹¹⁸ See Gula, *The Call to Holiness*, 200-201.

especially sent them all over the world to make disciples, baptize them in the name of the Trinity, and teach them all that Jesus commanded (Mt 28:18-20).

We cannot do or imitate exactly what Jesus did in his life because “Trying to transpose everything that Jesus did into our own day is anachronistic and reductive. It commits us to mimicry and even misplaced and inappropriate behaviors. Mimicry is the death of faithful, creative discipleship.”¹¹⁹ Creativity is needed to apply discipleship in our present day.

Following Jesus today is not easy. Therefore, we need much courage, energy and grace to get along with Jesus. On the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocation, Pope Benedict XVI said that to follow Christ today is not less challenging because we have to keep our eyes on Christ, grow close to him, give ears to his word, and meet him in the sacraments.¹²⁰

In particular, when doing Jesus’ work, we need to treat others with compassion, as Jesus did with the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11). Jesus’ saying is still sounded in our ears, “Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her” (Jn 8:7). Accordingly, we are called to love all people no matter who they are since we are sinners, and thus should not stone others. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8,10). However, we sinners are required to love one another, but hate sin. Our personal promise or advice to others must be “do not sin again” (Jn 8:11). We continue to help each other stand up every time we fall. Do not be a stone for others to be stumbled or die. Do not let others get lost when they follow Christ.

¹¹⁹ Gula, *The Call to Holiness*, 193.

¹²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Called to Holiness*, ed., Pietro Rossotti, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 78.

5. Purity of heart

The Beatitude “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8) calls for living a pure life so we may see God. The Psalmist asks, “Who has the right to go up the Lord’s hill? Who may enter his holy Temple? Those who are pure in act and in thought, who do not worship idols or make false promises” (Ps 24:3-4).

What does purity of heart mean? Purity of heart means, “Detachment from whatever may lead to sin, avoidance of all deliberate venial sin, and even of any willful resistance to grace.”¹²¹ Purity of heart does not mean that the pure of heart do not do anything, but rather they uphold virtues: Poverty in spirit, mourning, meekness, longing for God’s justice, mercy, peace-making, and suffering. This Beatitude embraces all other virtues of the Beatitudes. A pure heart is “a heart free of possessions, a heart capable of mourning, a heart that thirsts for what is right, a merciful heart, a loving heart, an undivided heart.”¹²² Clement Henry Crock states that purity of heart “includes all virtues, the entire Sermon on the Mount, and the entire Decalogue.”¹²³ He argues according to most scholastic commentators that this Beatitude is put in the sixth place of spiritual perfection, mirroring the sixth day of creation when God created human beings in divine image and likeness. This image was damaged by sin, but now is purified. Purity of heart includes other virtues of blessed life.¹²⁴

How can one have purity of heart? Pope Francis suggests that a heart that is able to love does nothing harmful, weakening or dangerous for such love. He argues that we need to guard our heart with all vigilance and that the pure in heart are those who love God and brothers and

¹²¹ *The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary*, ed., Albert J. Nevins, (New York: Dimension Book, 1965), 474.

¹²² Jim Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 89.

¹²³ Clement Henry Crock, *The Eight Beatitudes*, (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1953), 95.

¹²⁴ See Crock, *The Eight Beatitudes*, 95.

sisters.¹²⁵ “The gift of understanding develops the virtue of faith more completely. This new movement of grace clears the way for purity of heart.”¹²⁶

Jesus is God’s Word (Jn 1:1) and light that shines in darkness (Jn 1:5, 9). He lights our way so we do not stumble. He is the way (Jn 14:6). God’s word brings understanding. “Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path” (Ps 119:105). The simple get understanding and light from the revelation of God’s words (Ps 119:130). Based on God’s word, Jesus explained his death and resurrection to two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and they were enlightened by his words (Lk 24:27).

The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of understanding so we may understand God’s word. The Holy Spirit, who is like an inner teacher, moves the soul and guides the mind to go through the mysteries of faith happening in life. The heart gets this light and grasps the truths of the faith authentically. The radiance of this light helps the heart see more clearly.¹²⁷ Through the gift of understanding we are able to know what belongs to God and what belongs to Caesar.

We grow through the gift of understanding. This gift first helps us understand what we learn. Then we perceive intellectual understanding of God and his revelation. This knowledge will shape the way we live now. We grow through it.¹²⁸

The gift of understanding goes beyond natural reason and leads us to the everlasting truths. God reveals divine truths to us through parents, teachers, priests, and the created world. However, God’s truths are not easily understood. It is through faith that we better understand them.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ See *Gaudete et Exsultate*, §§ 83-86.

¹²⁶ Brian Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, (Boston: Pauline Book & Media, 2011), 204.

¹²⁷ See Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, 204-205.

¹²⁸ See Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, 206.

¹²⁹ See Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, 208.

The gift of understanding and the virtue of faith will help us to have the purity of heart. These virtues cleanse us of anxieties, wrongdoings, and sins. Purity of heart is the only valid choice opposite promiscuity and licentiousness. It denies pleasures of the world and human appetites.¹³⁰ It prefers to pleasing God rather than the world, belonging to God, not to the world. The pure in heart always say yes when they mean yes, and vice versa. They do not seek pleasure in doing evil. They refer to pure life or single-minded heart that calls us to say yes to God always.

Purity of heart cannot endure for some days or years, but for life. Purity requires endurance. It is God who gives us such a capacity and motivates us to pursue purity. The world fails to fulfill what it promises. Only God can fulfill what he promises.¹³¹ Jesus taught his disciples that he will suffer, be persecuted, die, and rise after three days (Lk 9:22), which he did (Lk 24:7). Endurance is necessary for purity since purity of heart must endure all the days of our lives; it should not last only for some period of time. We are God's children for life, not for some days or years.

Those who do wicked sins such as adultery, worshiping idols, stealing, greed, slander, etc., cannot inherit God's kingdom. Saint Paul ensures this when he writes:

Surely you know that the wicked will not possess God's Kingdom. Do not fool yourselves; people who are immoral or who worship idols or are adulterers or homosexual perverts or who steal or are greedy or are drunkards or who slander others or are thieves—none of these will possess God's Kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).

Before God's holiness, Moses was asked to take off his shoes (Ex 3:5). Committing sins may be similar to wearing sandals. Through taking off sandals that is a metaphor for removing sin, we are able to encounter God. We all are told to take off what makes us sin. Before God everything is transparent, no matter how hard one tries to hide from God.

¹³⁰ See Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, 208-209.

¹³¹ See Bransfield, *Living the Beatitudes*, 209.

The excellent purpose of purity of heart is to see God. For Soren Kierkegaard, “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” that is, God, the Eternal.¹³² “To see God is to enter into the great joy of God’s love, the dialogue of love within the holy Trinity.”¹³³

When living our human life on earth, we cannot see God clearly. “My dear friends, we are now God’s children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps himself pure, just as Christ is pure” (1 Jn 3:2-3).

What the world today lacks is the mutual trust that is built only through purity. A pure heart must create sincerity and mutual trust in society. This work starts with individuals, then educators, journalists, lawyers, doctors, and politicians.¹³⁴ This shows that we are treating each other without sincerity and trust. Satan tries to lead human beings away from God by saying “Do not worry. Everybody is doing this,” as when the snake tried to convince Eve to eat the fruit in the middle of the Garden Eden.

Those who have a “double-minded” heart are not stable and cannot receive anything from God (Jam 1:8). They tend to be inconsistent with what they think, say or do. They cannot decide anything and are like a wave in the sea that is moved in and out by the wind. However, those who are single-minded will have a good relationship with God and others. Purity of heart does not seek God alone but also others since it is not a private, but communal virtue. The pure in heart do nothing harmful to themselves and others. Their way is straight, and their heart is pure. They do not have a double-minded heart in anything. “Never do to anyone else anything that you

¹³² Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, tran., Douglas V. Steere, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956), 29.

¹³³ Forest, *The Ladder of the Beatitudes*, 105.

¹³⁴ Bernard Haring, *Blessed Are the Pure in Heart: The Beatitudes*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), 76.

would not want someone to do to you” (Tob 4:15). They are always doing good for themselves and common welfare.

Chapter III: To Relate to Others

If one accepts that one's existence is limited and consists of both personal and communal relationships, one opens oneself to God and others and thus finds one's real self. The process of becoming one's full self depends upon one's relationship with God, self, and others; therefore, the relationships with God, self, and then others are interrelated. "We can only see in others what we see in ourselves; so when there is no self, there is also no other."¹³⁵ We relate to others individually and collectively. Metz states that meeting other human beings deepens our relationship with God since when we see our neighbors we see God. The image of God reflects in the face of our neighbor, who is in God's own likeness.¹³⁶

Human beings are created in God's image and likeness; our dignity is not only a gift from God but also a responsibility. Based on this, we are invited to take responsibility for what we receive. What we receive freely in the Spirit is to be freely given. Jesus commands his disciples, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (Jn 13:34).¹³⁷

Jesus Christ shows us how to fully become human beings by becoming poor. He is God, but he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2:5-8). He is rich, but becomes poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9). We are called to empty ourselves and reach out to others. This is the main point of the following paragraphs.

In this chapter we will proceed through three stages: first by reflecting on the need to be poor in spirit; then to turn to the call of forgiveness; and, finally the call to go and do likewise.

1. Poverty of spirit

Jesus Christ shows us how to fully become human beings by becoming poor. He is God, but he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil 2:5-8). He

¹³⁵ Bernadette Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 193.

¹³⁶ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 32.

¹³⁷ See Gula, *The Good Life*, 19.

is rich, but he becomes poor for our sake so that we may become rich through his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). We are called to empty ourselves and reach out to others as Jesus did.

Although one is created in God's image and thus inherits the absolute dignity of being human, it does not mean that one is a super-hero without any relationship with God, but rather a human being with complete submission to God. Metz defines the human being as follows:

To become human means to become "poor," to have nothing that one might brag about before God. To become human means to have no support and no power, save the enthusiasm and commitment of one's own heart. Becoming human involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God.¹³⁸

This means that before the transcendent God, humans are nothing; they have neither support nor power. It is not easy for humans to accept this because human beings tend to be like someone else rather than be completely poor. The history of human beings shows it clearly. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God; they ate the fruit of the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3:4-6). Brothers James and John wanted to sit at Jesus' left and right hands (Mk 10:37). Many young people tend to imitate some idol. If this idol has a tattoo or a nose ring, the young people may also have one. Becoming human does not mean becoming someone else, but becoming who we are.

To become human means to follow the footsteps of Jesus and to give our property to the poor. This indicates that we have nothing for ourselves. Everything is for God and others. Doing so helps us find our true selves. This is the reason Jesus teaches, "If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for my sake, you will find it" (Mt 16:24-25). Metz states the same idea as Jesus': "To be able to surrender oneself and become 'poor' is, in biblical theology, to be with God, to find one's hidden nature; in short, it is 'heaven.' To stick to

¹³⁸ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 10.

oneself and to serve one's own interests is to be damned; it is 'hell.'"¹³⁹ Our poverty of spirit is preserved through our relationship with brethren, and we become fully human through our willingness to sacrifice.¹⁴⁰

Biblically, by being with God we are able to surrender ourselves and become poor, and to find our hidden nature in God. Besides, meeting other human beings deepens our relationship with God since when we see our neighbors we see God. The image of God is reflected in the face of our neighbor, who is in God's own likeness.¹⁴¹

We are so poor that our poverty does not belong to us, but is God's mystery. However, the precipitous depths of our poverty are revealed through prayer only.¹⁴² Our complete existence is found in God's eternity.¹⁴³ We rely on God's support and power. Saint Paul experienced this, saying, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

It is not easy to give up everything and follow Jesus. A rich man came to Jesus and asked him the same question as the teacher in the Good Samaritan parable asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told him to keep the commandments of the Law, sell what he has and give it to the poor, and come to follow him (cf. Lk 18:18-22). Keeping God's teachings and taking care of the poor are two conditions to enjoy the gift of salvation. The rich man theoretically kept God's teachings easily, but selling what he had was not easy. Consequently, he left Jesus because he had many possessions (cf. Lk 18:23). Of course, God does not intend us to be materially poor because he created the world and let us serve it. However, God wants us to share what we have with others.

¹³⁹ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 32.

¹⁴⁰ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 33.

¹⁴¹ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 32.

¹⁴² See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 51.

¹⁴³ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 45.

That the man in the parable had many possessions does not mean that he had only material wealth, but also the pride of his religious holiness, self, capacities, etc. All he had let him be unable to follow Jesus. His possessions so bind his feet and self that he cannot open himself to the world of fraternity. What he has does not help him enjoy the gift of salvation, but hinders him from following Jesus and coming to others. He is not able to become poor.

However, nothing is impossible for God (Lk 18:27). The story of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Mt 4:1-11) shows that Jesus became totally poor. He took his humanity and detached his divinity. He did not take humanity theoretically. He accepted being human without any conditions and supports, and utterly trusted in God the Father.

Jesus absolutely became human like us. Because of that, he was challenged to take his divinity. He completely trusted God, but he accepted being fully human so that he perfectly shared our humanity. Satan always tries to prevent Jesus as well as us from becoming completely poor because, as Metz states, Satan really fears God's powerlessness and self-renunciation that Jesus is taking.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, the devil wants to make Jesus strong and stress the spiritual strength of human beings and our divine character. Satan has used the following slogan from the beginning: "You will be like God."¹⁴⁵ Satan tries to convince Jesus to be like God when Jesus feels hungry. Jesus no longer needed to experience hunger or insecurity by taking short-cuts such as turning stones into bread or asking an angel to guard him. One thing Jesus must take into account when he feels hungry is to take his divinity. However, Jesus did not make any decision to be like God, but remained fully human.

By joining hands with Docetism and Monophysitism, Satan wishes God to keep on being simply God, wanting that Jesus incarnates, but is not totally involved in the incarnation. The

¹⁴⁴ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁵ Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 11.

devil wants the earth to exclusively belong to Satan and humankind,¹⁴⁶ and that Jesus would leave the desert and our human misery. However, when refusing to accept Satan's suggestions, Jesus said yes to our poverty and detached from his divinity.¹⁴⁷ In the same way, Peter wanted to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem, suffering and dying; accordingly, Jesus rebuked him severely, saying, "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature" (Mt 16:23).

The poverty of human existence that Jesus experienced is deeper and more excruciating than any other person's.¹⁴⁸ The most powerful evidence that Jesus took our human poverty is his death on the cross. At his death, Jesus suffered and felt abandoned, even by his Father (cf. Mt 27:46). The suffering that Abraham endured is less than Jesus's because the angel of God appeared and stopped Abraham from killing his son, Isaac (cf. Gen 22:11-12).

Poverty of spirit requires Jesus to empty himself and reach out to humankind. Jesus emptied himself and became truly human. He lived the virtue of poverty of spirit radically. We are called to live this virtue as Jesus did.

Because we have a tendency to think that we can be like God and keep what we have for our own interest, we may cause others much suffering and misery. To heal the wounds of others, as well as ours, reconciliation and forgiveness are necessary. Our sins are forgiven by God; therefore, we must forgive those who have trespassed against us.

2. Forgiveness

Human beings are imperfect when living on Earth. When one has acted badly, one seeks forgiveness. Without forgiveness, we cannot live in peace with God and one another. Jesus teaches that when one has done something wrong against brethren, one is called to reconcile with

¹⁴⁶ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ See Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 13.

the other before going to offer a gift to God (Mt 5:21-24). We are unable to approach God unless we reconcile with one another. This means that we have to forgive one another's sins before we worship. Jon Sobrino concludes, "And without forgiveness there can be no reconciliation, there can be no community, there can be no kingdom of God."¹⁴⁹

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the relationship with God, self, others and nature was broken. The brokenness needs to be healed, so one lives these relationships harmoniously as God created from the beginning (cf. Gen 1:31). Forgiveness is one of the good remedies that can heal the brokenness, for forgiveness always involves a relationship between giving forgiveness and receiving forgiveness among people or communities.

For Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm, there are four kinds of forgiveness. The first is exculpatory forgiveness, which seeks removal of moral condemnation. The second acknowledges wrong actions and promises to do them no more.¹⁵⁰ The third is negative forgiveness, which seeks liberation from bitterness and hatred, guilt, a wrong living style, and punishment.¹⁵¹ The last, positive forgiveness, looks for the restoration of personal relationships and a moral community.¹⁵² The four kinds of forgiveness reveal that one seeks not only liberation from the offense, wrong deeds or words through forgiveness, but also to build a better communal relationship.

Before bestowing forgiveness upon others, one first learns to forgive oneself after doing something bad. When one makes a confession appropriately and rightly, one's sins are forgiven. No matter what sin one committed, one must entrust God's mercy and move forward to a new start with God and others. If one cannot forgive oneself, one may not grant forgiveness to others.

¹⁴⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Latin America: Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness*, ed., Casiano Floristán and Christian Duquoc (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 54.

¹⁵⁰ See Carl Reinhold Brakenhielm, *Forgiveness*, trans., Thor Hall (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 31.

¹⁵¹ See Brakenhielm, *Forgiveness*, 27.

¹⁵² See Brakenhielm, *Forgiveness*, 30.

We are unable to give what we do not have. Scott Hurd states, “By not forgiving ourselves, we become consumed by shame and guilt, and we are burdened with regrets over past choices.”¹⁵³ If we fail to forgive ourselves, we are conflicted selves. Doing good is the best way to feel good, and it can help us forgive ourselves.¹⁵⁴

The spirituality of forgiveness consists of various aspects. Structurally, the act of forgiving relates to erasing sin and forgiving the sinner. The task of erasing sin is historically that of liberation. It is usually said that we must hate sin and love the sinner. However, hating sin is not enough; we must erase it. Objectively, erasing sin will hurt the sinner, and liberating the oppressed also leads to the destruction of the oppressing person. Hence, it is difficult and dangerous to do this task, but it can be done with a great love for the sinner. Through love, the sinner is welcomed, and forgiving is possible. Because of this, it is impossible to return to one’s former deeds that dehumanize others and oneself.¹⁵⁵

To seek forgiveness is not always easy for those who have offended others. The offender may have to overcome hindrances to plead for forgiveness. Elliot Dorff presents five impediments of seeking forgiveness. First, one must forget one’s self-image of being morally innocent and other defenses. Second, one must abandon all moral claims of being superior when arguing. One’s status and power will effectively be diminished. Third, one acknowledges one’s wrongdoing and negative evaluation of the wrongdoing. Fourth, a general admission of doing wrong is not enough; one must openly admit to the offended, which can be humiliating. Lastly, trusting the offended is necessary since the offended might have to overcome obstacles to

¹⁵³ R. Scott Hurd, *Forgiveness: A Catholic Approach*, (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2011), 70.

¹⁵⁴ See Hurd, *A Catholic Approach*, 71-72.

¹⁵⁵ Sobrino, *Place of Sin and Place of Forgiveness*, 52.

forgive. However, unless forgiveness is granted, the offender feels guilty and angry.¹⁵⁶ Without overcoming these hindrances together with others, the offender may withdraw from asking forgiveness. If, however, the problems are eliminated, one may seek forgiveness.

Still, to forgive is not always easy for the offended either. To do so, the offended need to overcome some obstacles. For Elliot Dorff, there are three obstacles to forgiving. First, it is hard to grant forgiveness because the offender owes the offended something, wanting to take revenge. However, justice cannot be claimed since the Lord requests that one love a neighbor as oneself and not take vengeance (Lev 19:18). Second, feelings of vulnerability must be conquered. Finally, it is not easy for the offender to cease harming the offended and others. No ironclad guarantees against hurting again are made.¹⁵⁷ Yes, to forgive is tough since human beings tend to love the ‘eye-for-an-eye’ style of living rather than swallowing resentment and vulnerability. Through forgiveness, hatred and vengeance are eliminated in both the oppressor and oppressed. Let hatred and vengeance end in the oppressed; otherwise, they will dominate both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Although forgiveness is difficult, it is feasible. The first reason one forgives is love. It seems that no one bestows forgiveness upon the wronged party if love does not exist in oneself. Forgiveness is an act of love for oneself and others. It helps one leave resentment behind and look forward to a happy and reconciled world. The following are Elliot Dorff’s four factors to forgiving. First, each member of a community who is as fallible as others wants to be forgiven. Second, forgiveness restores a relationship. One who never forgives the offended will never have any friends. Third, to continue one’s life, offenses must be put behind. Lastly, forgiveness is the

¹⁵⁶ See Elliot N. Dorff, *The Elements of Forgiveness: A Jewish Approach*, ed., Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation, 1998), 31-32.

¹⁵⁷ See Dorff, *The Elements of Forgiveness*, 33-34.

right thing to do. It is an act of moral rule and a way of imitating God.¹⁵⁸ Experiencing hindrances and broken relationships with God, self, others and nature can help one live better. Forgiveness restores relationships and offers a new start in life.

There may be other ways that help us render forgiveness. Hurd suggests the following. To do good can help us to forgive ourselves.¹⁵⁹ Prayer is necessary for forgiveness.¹⁶⁰ Broken people need broken bread to heal their brokenness.¹⁶¹ It is the Eucharistic Sacrament that we are called to celebrate and live. Celebrating the sacrament reminds us to forgive others as Jesus did on the cross (Lk 23:34).

Love is the great motivation for forgiveness. One forgives others if one loves them, and vice versa. Although forgiveness is not a virtue, it is an expression of love. One of La Rochefoucauld's maxims is that one forgives when one loves.¹⁶²

God always loves and forgives our sins. In the Old Testament, Moses asked God to forgive the Israelites when they sinned and rejected God. Specifically, they abandoned the commandments God gave them to follow and worshiped a golden calf. Because Moses asked God on behalf of the Israelites, God did not punish them (Ex 32:7-14). In the New Testament, God also forgives us all our sins out of love, which is shown in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). The father did not consider what the second son did. The only thing the father cares is welcoming him home, and restoring his dignity and right.

We need to treat others in the same way Jesus behaved toward the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), that is, with compassion. Jesus' saying still sounds in our ears, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her" (Jn 8:7). Accordingly, we are

¹⁵⁸ See Dorff, *The Elements of Forgiveness*, 34.

¹⁵⁹ See Hurd, *A Catholic Approach*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ See Hurd, *A Catholic Approach*, 53.

¹⁶¹ See Hurd, *A Catholic Approach*, 65-66.

¹⁶² See Brakenhielm, *Forgiveness*, 44.

called to love all people no matter who they are since we are sinners, thus resulting in not stoning others. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1: 8, 10). However, we sinners are required to love one another, but hate sin. Our personal promise or advice to others must be, as Jesus told the woman, “Do not sin again” (Jn 8:11). We help each other stand up every time we fall. Do not be a stone for others to be stumbled over; nor let others get lost when they follow Christ.

God always forgives us unconditionally. When we repent and return to God, God never rejects us. God always forgives us when we make a confession. Still, we owe God so much that we cannot pay, as revealed in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35). The debt we owe we never pay, but Jesus pays the debt (our sins) he never owes. Love makes forgiveness unfair. We are called to forgive one another seventy times seven (Mt 18:22), which means to forgive one another at all times. God’s condition for forgiveness is to forgive others as Jesus teaches in the our Father prayer (Mt 6:12).

Many times Jesus teaches his disciples and the Israelites about forgiveness: in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35), the our Father prayer (Mt 6:9-13), and praying for those who persecute (Mt 5:44). Jesus carries out what he taught. On the cross, Jesus prayed to his Father, saying, “Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

The world in which we live is a broken one—with broken relationships with God, self, others and nature. Jesus comes to heal this brokenness so that we may live relationships in harmony. Richard Gula writes that Jesus’ very mission is to forgive sins, and that forgiveness is a main element of obtaining justice in the community, first by fostering a conversion of heart that

promotes the true possibility for good in others and allows them “to move from self-centeredness and fear into the self-forgetfulness and freedom that builds bonds of friendship and community.”¹⁶³ When Jesus visited his house, Zacchaeus changed and repaid what he had taken. He told Jesus, “I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much” (Lk 19:8).

We must show mercy to others as God shows mercy to us (Lk 6:36). If we love those who love us, pagans can do the same. We are called to love our enemies (Lk 6:32-36). God always loves and forgives us our sins in Jesus Christ, and we are invited to do the same.

3. Go and do likewise

Through the question “What should I do to inherit eternal life?” which the teacher of the Law in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) asked Jesus, we know what pertains eternal life. That is, to love God and others, not as ourselves, but as Jesus commanded: to go out and help others in need. Accordingly, our spiritual and physical wounds are bandaged.

The teacher of the Law in the parable justifies himself by asking Jesus “Who is my neighbor?” It seems that for him, the priests and the Levites, their neighbors are only Jews while Samaritans, sinners, tax collectors, and the sick are not his neighbors. Samaritans were traditional adversaries¹⁶⁴ of the Jews. Jews had nothing in common with Samaritans (Jn 4:9). However, Saint Bonaventure explains the meaning of the word ‘neighbor’ by kinship (Ps 37:12), as a brother (Ps 34:14), by religion (Sir 15:4), by compassion (Lk 10:36-37), by natural assimilation (Sir 13:19).¹⁶⁵ And for Augustine, “Everyone is your neighbor.”¹⁶⁶ In addition,

¹⁶³ Gula, *The Good Life*, 112.

¹⁶⁴ See Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Blackrock, Ireland: The Columba Press, 2010), 311.

¹⁶⁵ See Saint Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, trans., Robert J. Karris (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 979-980.

¹⁶⁶ Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine, Sermons III*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 452.

‘neighbor’ is not a generic someone, but we are neighbors of others. Michael Mullins comments, “Neighbor is not a theoretical category but a person in need. It is not to be defined in terms of the other but in terms of the self. I am the neighbor to the other, especially to the other who is in need, irrespective of who that person happens to be.”¹⁶⁷

The teacher of the Law, priest and Levite are considered religious people. They know the Law well and keep it carefully. For example, God said to Moses, “People of Israel, be sure that you do everything that the LORD your God has commanded you. Do not disobey any of his laws. Obey them all, so that everything will go well with you and so that you will continue to live in the land that you are going to occupy” (Deut 5:32-33). If they do not observe the Law, they will face disasters, devastations, and other problems (Deut 31:29). The prophet Isaiah warned the Israelites that if they go off the road to the right or the left, God’s voice will echo behind them, “Here is the road. Follow it” (Is 30:21). The way of God is holy; no sinner will walk in it, and no one can mislead those who follow it (Is 35:8). David asks God to lead him in the right way, “Teach me, LORD, what you want me to do, and lead me along to a safe path, because I have many enemies” (Ps 27:11). Accordingly, any Jewish people who want to be good people in the sight of God keep God’s words carefully.

Daurieutort explains how the way, the route or the path is a common feature in Hebrew language. It is also used in religious and moral life because the ancient Semites lived a nomad life and thus ‘the way’ is an important part of their lives. Accordingly, Daurieutort uses two images to refer to the way: The exodus and the Law. The former image shows the outstanding example of the Israelites who experienced walking with God and entering a covenant with God. God takes good care of God’s people as a father looks after his little boy (Deut 1:31) by going before them, marking the route with a cloud and column of fire (Ex 13:21), and correcting them

¹⁶⁷ Mullins, *The Gospel of Luke*, 312.

when they disobeyed God (Deut 8:26). The feasts of exodus, such as Passover and Tabernacle, remain deep in the Jewish mind, and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem profoundly shows the idea of the holy way that leads to the rest given by God. The latter image, the Law, is the true way that one has to go since it is the way of God.¹⁶⁸ Hence, the priest and Levite in the parable could not want to go out of the way of the Mosaic Law by touching a foreigner with blood which causes them to become ritually unclean.

Keeping the Law carefully makes their mind and heart distant from others and ties their hands from extending to help the half-dead person. Accordingly, both the priest and Levite in the parable saw the victim and “walked on by the other side” (Lk 10:31-32), which could mean they did not walk on the way of Jesus, but on the way according to a certain way of understanding what is written in the Law. It is similar to the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who was “sitting by the road” (Mk 10:46) before he knew Jesus. He was out of the way of Jesus. However, after being healed by Jesus, he followed Jesus “on the road” (Mk 10:52).

Moreover, the teacher, priest, and Levite in the parable clearly know the double command of love for God and neighbors according to the Mosaic Law. They act based on what is prescribed in the Law. The Law does not allow Jewish priests to be involved in the funeral ceremonies except of a close relative: “No priest is to make himself ritually unclean by taking part in the funeral ceremonies when a relative dies, unless it is his mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or unmarried sister living in his house” (Lv 21:1-3). Accordingly, they love God by keeping the Law carefully, which is good. However, there is no doubt that the priest and Levite did not involve themselves in helping the victim.

¹⁶⁸ See André Daurieutort, “Way,” in *Dictionary of Biblical theology*, (2nd ed.), ed., Xavier Leon-Dufour, trans., Joseph Cahill, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 647-648.

The teacher of the Law in the parable knows God's words, but often does not know his neighbors. The only person he knows may be himself. It is similar to the priest and the Levite in the parable who did not know the victim. They saw what happened to the victim, but thought that helping the victim was not their job. Their only job was to know God and serve God in the temple.

Whatever the reasons, I am convinced that at every time and every age, one offers 101 reasons to refuse helping others. This is individualism, which occurs in any society. One tends to care for oneself and one's family rather than others and their families.

However, loving others as one loves oneself (the Mosaic Law) is no longer appropriate with Jesus because, loving others is not only based on what one thinks and does for oneself. If one thinks of others positively and objectively, it could be good. However, if one fasts severely, one does not allow others to be fed well. The principle of loving others is no longer based on oneself, but on Jesus, the Good Samaritan, who has compassion for the injured person. Jesus is the new Moses who gives the new law of loving others and explains the Law for two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:15, 27). Jesus is the way (Jn 14:6) of life and the living way of loving others.

Perhaps, the Samaritan sees the image of God in the victim rather than any discrimination of race, religion or social status. This could be a great message for us today when we love others, who bear God's image. Without seeing God's image in others, we may pass by as the priest and Levite did.

In addition, the priest and Levite know the Law well, but they do not the will of their heavenly Father (Mt 7:21). John says that how happy are those who know God's truth and put it into practice (Jn 13:17). For Paul and James, listening to the word does not make people right

with God, but doing it justifies (Rm 2:13; Jam 1:23). The Samaritan practices the Mosaic Law by showing compassion to neighbors.

The Samaritan is generous by using his own money to care for the victim by giving two silver coins to an innkeeper. He will pay whatever the innkeeper spends to care for the victim (Lk 10:35). He too will be robbed, stripped and beaten like the victim whom he is looking after. Joel Green explains, “In order to care for this stranger, he enters an inn, itself a place of potential danger; and he even enters into an open-ended monetary relationship with the innkeeper, a relationship in which the chance of extortion is high.”¹⁶⁹ Perhaps the Samaritan also is afraid of being robbed, but risks to help the victim. Because of that, he tends to care for others rather than himself.

The virtue of charity must be practiced continually. The Samaritan did not help the victim, sent him to an inn-keeper for care, left the job for the keeper, and never came back. No, the Samaritan will come back, look after the victim, and pay what the keeper spent.

Jesus the Good Samaritan not only taught mercy but also practiced it. As Bernard Haring affirms, “Jesus Christ round whom we gather not only speaks of the blessedness of mercy, he personifies it as its absolute and final embodiment, the great sacrament of the Father’s mercy.”¹⁷⁰ Jesus showed mercy to every person such as the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-26), the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), Matthew the tax collector (Mt 9:9-13), and his executioners (Lk 23:34). Moreover, Jesus took the risk to live among human beings. He was rejected by his own people (Jn 1:11, Lk 4:24). Finally, he was persecuted and died because of loving his neighbors.

Assisting the victim in the story does not make the Samaritan as well as other helpers ritually impure, but helps them become compassionate people, practice the Mosaic Law with

¹⁶⁹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 432.

¹⁷⁰ Bernard Haring, *The Beatitudes*, (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1976), 50.

Jesus' clarification, and thus live as disciples. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, all human beings are called and required to love God and others as the Samaritan did.

The Samaritan used his oil, clothes for bandage, coin, donkey, time, and energy to help the victim. He could use his properties appropriately. We also are invited to use our belongings appropriately.

Chapter IV: To Relate to Nature

From the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth that had neither form nor matter (Gen 1:1-2). From then on, the creation of God is in order. Everything has its place and function. God separated light from darkness (Gen 1:4) the firmament from water above and below (Gen 1:7), water from land (Gen 1:9), day from night (Gen 1:14), water creatures from sky ones (Gen 1:20), and male from female (Gen 1:27).

Everything God created is good (Gen 1:31). God blessed human beings and made them stewards over the earth, giving this task only to them (Gen 1:26-28). The universe given by God to human beings belongs to everyone. All have the responsibility to look after it.

Human beings are created from the earth, breathe the air, and live on it. We have a close and significant relationship to God, the Creator, others and nature. However, the world today is no longer the same as when God created it, and sometimes it seems that it has no connection with its Creator. It has many problems. Human beings misuse our God-given power over nature. Wolhart Pannenberg comments, “The intellectual mind-set of the twentieth century has become accustomed to assuming that no relationship or connection can be validly affirmed between the God of the Christian faith and the understanding of the world in the natural sciences.”¹⁷¹

If we fail to fulfill our task of taking care of nature, we will become like the unfaithful and unwise servants who have not delivered food for others at the proper time. Accordingly, we will be punished (cf. Lk 12:41-49). It means that we can neither be holy nor enter God’s heavenly Garden when failing to care for what God entrusted us to steward.

We will proceed in three stages: the call to holiness that calls us to love the world; the summons to stewardship; and, finally, an extended reflection on the instruction of *Laudato Si’*.

¹⁷¹ Wolhart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, ed., Ted Peters (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 50.

1. Being related to God who saves us, we follow God's call to holiness by loving others and the world

God is sufficiently one and does not rely on anything. God shows God's love for us by creating the heavens and the earth. Six days of creation (Gen 1) offer significant meanings for us to live our relationship with God, others and nature.

On the first day of creation (Gen 1-5), God created light and separated it from darkness. God is the light. John also confirms that Jesus the Word is the light shining in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it (Jn 1:4-5). During his public ministry, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness" (Jn 8:12).

Without God's light, we are unable to know what is morally right and wrong; God's light means that God is the truth. John endorses that the Father is full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14). God who is the truth guides us to know and keep it. The eighth commandment God gave to the Israelites is "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Ex 20:16). Truth is the command, the principle, and the way we relate to others.

Jesus also says, "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6). And the Catholic Church teaches, "In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest."¹⁷² Truth refers to the fulfillment of the Old Law: What Jesus does when he incarnates verifies what is written of him.¹⁷³ This saying truly corresponds with John 1:17: The law is given through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

The principle to relate to God, others and nature is based on God's truth. The Spirit of truth when he comes will guide us every truth (Jn 16:13). It is unlike Herod who heard John the

¹⁷² CCC, 2466.

¹⁷³ See John MacEvilly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of St. John*, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1889), 17.

Baptist repeatedly saying, “It isn't right for you to marry your brother's wife!” (Mk 6:18). Herod heard this and became greatly perplexed (Mk 6:20). Being a leader of Jerusalem, Herod was confused by the saying, which means he does not seem to know that marrying his brother’s wife is wrong.

On the second day (Gen 6-8), God made a firmament and water. The firmament is in the midst of water from above and from below. The firmament is the sky or space, which means the atmosphere that God provides for human beings as well as other living creatures to breathe. Atmosphere and water are two essential elements for sustaining living creatures. Without them, no living creature survives.

Atmosphere, wind or breath could refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathes on his disciples and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22). The movement of the wind is not consistent. It goes wherever it wishes (Jn 3:8).

There are several meanings that water symbolizes: life, renewal, purity, transformation. To prepare for the coming of Messiah, John the Baptist proclaimed repentance and receiving baptism with water for the forgiveness of sin (Mk 1:4-5). Human beings are spiritually and physically clean by water.

Separating water from above and under could mean that there are two different locations. Water from above belongs to heaven, and that from below belongs to earth. They are like the City of God and of human beings. Two sides are totally different, but also one – water. One is asked to return to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God (Mk 12:17), which means justice that human beings must have to relate to God, others and nature.

On the third day (Gen 1:9-13), God made sea and land with their creatures. God organized everything in its order. God separated water from water, gathering them into their

respective location: seas and land. The phrase “according to its kind” (Gen 1:11-12) repeated three times shows that God makes every plant with intentionality and in its specialty. That God let sea, land, and every kind of plants appear means that God brought forth life for them. God’s command for them is to be fruitful. God does not stop any creature from living and progressing.

On the fourth day (Gen 1:14-19), God created the sun and the moon including the stars to rule the day and night respectively. These creations give light upon the earth. The sun gives light so that every creature may have life. Earthly life does not come from earthly creatures, but from the sun, God’s creation. Without the sun, no earthly creatures survive. This shows that God loves and sustains earthly creatures. And the moon and stars guide humankind to walk as in daylight without stumbling, especially in the moments of darkness of life. We do not know where to go or we lose our sense of direction. Without God’s light, no human beings are able to know the truth. For instance, while going to Bethlehem to worship Jesus the newborn King, the Magi lost the way. They inquired their way from King Herod. While they continued going, the star was going ahead of them (Mt 2:1-10). Through the guiding star, they found where the newborn King was. Then the star disappeared. Jesus became their guiding Star. After worshiping Jesus, their lives were changed; they took another road for their country (Mt 2:12).

On the fifth day (Gen 1:20-23), God created birds of the sky and fish of the sea and other living swimming creatures according to their kind.

On the sixth day (Gen 1:24-31), God made all kinds of living creatures according to their kind on the earth and human beings, males and females. God created them in God’s image; they are spiritual creatures that are different from the rest of created creatures.

At the end of every working day of God, everything God did is good. God gave Adam power over God’s creatures (Gen 1:26, 28) by allowing him to name all of God’s living creatures

(Gen 2:19-20). Hence, God really gives Adam freedom. Through the privilege of naming all living creatures, God allows human beings to be God's co-creator and co-worker in God's creation.

In another account of creation in Genesis 2, God made every tree in the Garden of Eden. Two of the trees in the midst of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9), are considered the most important for human beings. Bonhoeffer states that human destiny is related to these two trees. The tree of life is the life coming from God. That the life in the middle of the garden is the same as God is the center of living creatures. Adam is not the center of the garden, but rather the tree of life – God, who is the center of human existence. God gives life to human beings directly, which is different from other creatures.

The fruits of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil of which Adam and Eve are not allowed to eat the fruit also stand in the middle of the garden; if God's command will be transgressed, they will die (Gen 2:17). Bonhoeffer explains human existence with limitations as follows:

The human being's limit is at the center of human existence, not on the margin; the limit or constraint that people look for on the margin of humankind is the limit of the human condition, the limit of human technology, the limit of what is possible for humanity. The boundary that is at the center is the limit of human reality, of human existence as such.¹⁷⁴

The limit of human beings is God's grace. God does not tempt anyone. God keeps human beings from the abyss of nothingness because Adam does not have the knowledge of good and evil; only God knows what it is.¹⁷⁵

From the creation story, Denis Edwards also explains that the relationship between God and creation is described as “an ongoing relationship between a Creator and creatures.”¹⁷⁶ If God

¹⁷⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 86.

¹⁷⁵ See Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 87.

created the universe without sustaining it, it cannot exist. God always sustains every creature. God does not relate to creatures as a clockmaker or as someone who creates a machine and lets it run automatically. God, who freely and graciously creates by word, relates to every creature in terms of a relationship that builds on commitment and trust. And, creation is the source of happiness for the Creator, which expresses that God is happy with what God created because everything God created was good (Gen 1:31).¹⁷⁷

We see that all God created is organized and good and that there is a close relationship between God, the Creator, and God's creatures, as well as between human beings and other creatures. Edwards believes that the whole creation as well as every creature is sacramental, which embodies and shows something about God. God's abundance is revealed in the diversity of creatures. Each creature consists of God's presence; hence the Creator's power allows the creature to be and become. Edwards calls this understanding the "intrinsic value" of creatures.¹⁷⁸

We are living in the world and are made part of the world (God made us from dust [Gen 2:7]); we must love it and be responsible for it where we are living. It is the same as when loving someone, we should love what belongs to him or her. Hence, loving God means loving God's creation, and destroying it means disrespecting its Creator.

The universe and human beings that God created are good and organized, and God blessed them all and told human beings, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28). God plans for us to take care of the earth and develop it as much as possible. With that in mind, we move to the next section.

¹⁷⁶ Denis Edwards, *Creation, Humanity, Community*, (Goldenbridge, Ireland: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), 19.

¹⁷⁷ See Edwards, *Creation, Humanity, Community*, 19-20.

¹⁷⁸ Edwards, *Creation, Humanity, Community*, 52.

2. Stewardship of God's creation

The stewardship of human beings is over God's non-human creatures, which is also mentioned in Genesis 2:15, "the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it." Both texts of Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 show that human beings have to work and look after it. What does stewardship mean? Why and how can human beings take good care of God's creation? This section answers these questions.

The Greek word for 'steward' is '*oikonomos*' consisting of two words: '*oikos*' (a house) and '*nemein*' (to manage). So those who are stewards manage the household of their master. They totally take care of all family affairs: purchasing supplies and supervising children's education. In biblical times, they were even given a job to look for a wife for their master's son.¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, "to have dominion" (Gen 1:28) does not mean to control God's creation as we wish, but to take care of it. To take care of it is not an initiative of any human being, but rather God's command. Hence, it is not a general stewardship, but Christian stewardship that "involves a new way of looking at our relationship with God and our fellow men, and a deep commitment of all we are and have to the cause of Christ."¹⁸⁰

God created creation, which means that everything belongs to God. God is the Master of creation, and human beings are the stewards of God's creation. We are not the masters of the earth. Nothing on the earth, including our own life, belongs to us. If we are the masters of the earth or of our own life, we have rights to use it for our own interests. The 24th Psalm begins, "The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his (Ps 24:1). Likewise, for Hugh O'Connell, stewardship means "the practical recognition that a man is not the absolute master of himself or his possessions. He has received every gift of nature and of

¹⁷⁹ See Hugh J. O'Connell, *Stewardship: Call to a New Way of Life*, (Ligouri: Liguorian Books, 1969), 9.

¹⁸⁰ O'Connell, *Stewardship*, 5.

grace from God. He must use them in a responsible manner to promote the interests of God and to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men.”¹⁸¹

Human beings enjoy the goodness of God’s creation, but we have to take responsibility to care for it because the stewards of a household have household tasks while its landlord has rights, which means that we have no rights to use it according to our own will. We have rights to use it only according to the will of the landlord.

To be responsible for God’s creation, Pope Benedict XVI suggests four key words that build our attitudes to take care of God’s gift of nature. Each word consists of a call for that purpose. First, *environment* needs *awareness*. Second, *ecology* enjoins *responsibility*. Third, *economy* asks for *justice*. Lastly, *ecumenical* calls for *unity* in terms of all nations and intergeneration.¹⁸² This shows the holiness that we live in a good relationship with God, others and nature. Although we have different viewpoints of life, we are aware of the present problematic conditions of the environment, join hands together to protect the environment, and promote unity. That is holiness because where unity is, there also holiness is.

Additionally, in the story of the faithful or unfaithful servant (Lk 12:41-49), Jesus proposes two important virtues for being a good steward of God’s household: faithfulness and prudence. If we remain faithful to our vocation as God’s stewards, God will put us in charge of all God’s property. If not, as in the case of Adam and Eve, we will be punished and driven out from the garden (cf. Lk 12:46, Gen 3:24). Stewards also must know when and how to provide food for other stewards of God in a proper time (cf. Lk 12:43), which reveals that we are both the stewards of God’s property and of other stewards. Prudence helps stewards manage God’s work appropriately and rightly. For James Keenan, prudence integrates the virtues of justice, fidelity,

¹⁸¹ O’Connell, *Stewardship*, 5.

¹⁸² See Benedict XVI, *The Environment*, ed., Jacquelyn Lindsey (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2012), 5.

and self-care. It is vigilant all the time, looking toward the future, and seeking the fulfillment of the other virtues.¹⁸³ If the virtue of faithfulness is destroyed, no matter how prudent stewards are, stewardship becomes vain since we will only do our own work, but not the work God faithfully entrusts us.

The parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) will help us have a better understanding of the stewardship of God's creation because this story is similar to the story in the Garden of Eden. In the parable of talents, a man is about to leave his home and puts three servants in charge of his property. Each person has different capacity to manage God's creation: one with five thousand gold coins, another two thousand, and another one thousand, which means that we are not potentially equal. We should neither complain to God nor be jealous of those who owe much more than us because those who are given much will be required much. We should be content with what we have. Whether we are bestowed five, two or one talents, we all have to invest what God gives us.

God provides everything for us to invest as God gave everything God created to human beings. How we join God's business is our own effort: take God's talent, go out and invest. After Jesus took five loaves and two fish, prayed and thanked God, and gave them to the disciples, the disciples distributed them to the people. Five thousand men excluding women and children were fed. The leftover was twelve baskets (Mt 14:19-21). The task of the disciples is to give food given by Jesus Christ to others. When we cooperate with Jesus' work, a great number of people have enough food to eat when they are hungry. As God's stewards, we should be neither bad nor lazy (cf. Mt 24:26). We try our best to use God's talent for God's glory and the benefit of common good.

¹⁸³ See Keenan, "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," 728.

Similarly, the money two servants earn through investment does not belong to them. They turn it to the Master (Lk 17:10). Servants' job is doing their Master's business. We have to do what we are supposed to do since we are ordinary servants.

We need the virtues of faith and trust in God's word and talent when God tells us to invest God's gift. Without these virtues, we cannot willingly and freely go out and make a business. The ones who receive five and two thousand gold coins have faith and trust in God and go out to invest God's talents, and they succeed. Their stewardship is successful. Their success depends on their work.

Human beings tend to think that what I have belongs to me and I have rights to use it as I wish, which may lead to misusing God's properties. No, all we have is God's. The more we have an intimate relationship with God, the richer we become because we learn that we have nothing, but God owes everything. This also means that we are poor when distancing from God and refusing to invest God's talents that we are given.

The one who receives one thousand gold coins thinks that the Master is not good. Hence, he returns the money. He says, "Sir, I know you are a hard man; you reap harvests where you did not plant, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed. I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground. Look! Here is what belongs to you" (Mt 25:24-25). Similarly, Adam and Eve thought that God was not good to them when commanding them to keep distance from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as if God was afraid that they could become like God (Gen 3:4-5). We may have the same tendency, doubting God's gifts; thus we do not take a risk to invest. If we are lazy and hide God's talents like the one who is given one thousand gold coins, all we have will be taken away and we will be cast outside in the darkness

(Mt 25:29-30). And if we are responsible for what is entrusted to us and become God's faithful and wise stewards, we will share God's happiness (Mt 25:21, 23).

In a similar way, we can continue to reflect on protecting the earth. Martin Holdgate suggests nine principles to care for the earth.¹⁸⁴ The first is to respect and care for life. This is the foundation for sustainable creatures. The second is to recover the value of human life. Many developments make humans better. The third is to safeguard the liveliness and variety on the earth. Pollution should be avoided. The ecosystem of the earth and all kinds of species should be preserved, and biological resources used within their limits. The fourth is to preserve the limited capacity of the earth. The limits of the earth are different from region to region in terms of people, biosphere, food, water, energy and raw materials. The fifth is to minimize the shortage of non-renewable resources such as water, oil, gas and coal. The sixth is to change our personal attitudes and practices, promoting moral values. The seventh is to encourage communities to protect their own environments. The eighth is to require a national framework that promotes the whole development and preservation of the earth. And the last is to foster an international cooperation.

These are nine principles for taking care of God's creation. To have a good relationship with God, we must have faith in God and love God and believe that God is the Creator of the universe and we are the stewards of God's creation. Obedience and faithfulness to what we are called to be and do are needed. If we are faithful in a small matter, we will be entrusted a larger amount (cf. Mt 25:21). We always hope and pray to God that a new earth and heaven will take

¹⁸⁴ See Martin Holdgate, "Conservation Grows a Human Face," in *Environmental Stewardship*, ed., R.J. Berry (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), 236-239.

place (cf. 2 Pet 3:13). Pope Benedict XVI states, “The relationship between individuals or communities and the environment ultimately stems from their relationship with God.”¹⁸⁵

Yes, to have a good relationship with God will help us to take good care of the environment. It is necessary for us to discern what we should do for God, self, others and nature. When we see that the world where we are living is gradually getting worse than earlier, we should repent and protect it. In some case, restoration will be feasible. We return to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. As Jesus’ disciples, we should learn and follow him, our Teacher, who worked hard to proclaim God’s kingdom. In other words, Jesus tried to redeem human beings and the world as God created it from the beginning.

We are called to live the Beatitudes, especially the first and the sixth Beatitudes. Poverty of spirit helps us to empty ourselves for the benefit of others and nature, and purity of heart makes us stop doing harm to God, self, others and nature. Taking good care of God’s creation is a good way of letting others become richer and richer and keeping our heart pure.

3. The Instruction of *Laudato Si’*

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis presents many and various aspects related to ecology. Each chapter of the encyclical has a special topic. Here, the main points of each chapter will be discussed. In this section, the numbers in parentheses point to the passages in the encyclical letter.

The name of the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*, taken from the canticle of Saint Francis of Assisi, shows that the earth, Mother Earth, is our common home where we all share life with her; she is like our sister who sustains, directs and gives us her various fruits (1). Human beings and the rest of creation are from dust. We all share the same resources of air, water, and light, thus

¹⁸⁵ Benedict XVI, *The Environment*, 41.

are interconnected with one another. Human beings are not different from other creatures except being made in God's image and likeness.

Together with Saint John XXII (3), Blessed Pope Paul VI (4), Saint John Paul II (5), Pope Benedict XVI (6), Patriarch Bartholomew (8-9), and Saint Francis of Assisi (10-12), Pope Francis (13-16) calls all humankind to respect and care for our planet because:

This sister [Mother Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. (2)

Francis calls each and every person to shape the future of our planet (14, 160). He believes, "everything in the world is connected" (16).

Chapter 1 shows what is taking place on our Mother Earth. There are problematic matters that are happening to our common home today. The first problem is pollution and climate change. Pope Francis argues that change is good, but it should not cause anxiety and harm to the world and the life quality of humankind (18). The causes of pollution, such as hundreds of millions of tons of waste and landscapes covered with rubbish, come from different areas (21). This culture is called "a throwaway culture," in which unused things are thrown away and cannot be recycled (22). And global warming results from these and other factors such as greenhouse gases and deforestation for farming purposes (23).

The second problem concerns water, which is indispensable for all living life. Water is abundant in some countries, but scarce in others. Many parts of Africa have no safe drinking water; water causes diseases and death (28). Working activities such as mining, farming, detergents, chemicals, and other uncontrolled deeds lead to pollution and affect underground water (29). The poor are most affected by this lack of clean water (30).

The third problem is loss of many species. Thousands of plant and animals vanish each year, and next generations will have no occasion to know them since they will be extinguished (33).

Fourth, the quality of human life has declined, and society is broken down. Many cities nowadays are unhealthy to live in because of pollution, “urban chaos, poor transportation, and visual pollution and noise” (44). Some ecological areas exclude outsiders from living there to ensure artificial peace (45). Modern technologies affect global change: “employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity” (46). Real interaction with people appears to be replaced by internet communication (47).

The fifth problem is international inequality. Justice needs to be included in any environmental debate. The cry of the earth and of the poor must be heard together (49). Poverty is caused by many factors. Some think that the only cause of poverty is birth rate. Others think that the problem is food consumption: “approximately a third of all food produced is discarded” (50). Foreign and ecological debts also affect poverty rate. Poor countries owe a foreign debts; this can be one of the ways they are controlled by other powers (52).

The last problem is a weak response. Although some communities and countries are caring for the world, it is not enough. Some problems that lead to self-destruction include: “trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen” (59).

Chapter 2 is about the Good News of creation. Every person is called to seek liberation for nature and vulnerable people. Having faith in God leads to respect the Creator and the world

(64). As stated earlier, what God created was good (Gen 1:31), and God commanded human beings to till the earth and keep it (cf. Gen 2:15). To till and to keep are defined as follows:

‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. (67)

What God created has its own value and significance (76), and God is present in every being (80). We are responsible for nature (78) since we can come to God through created things (77). The destiny of creation is in God. Human beings are called to take care of the earth and lead it back to its Creator (83).

Each creature has its own aim (84). All creatures connect and interdepend on one another since “no creature is self-sufficient” (86). Every living creature has the Spirit of life, who invites us to unity. To know this presence helps us cultivate the “ecological virtues” (88).

To care for the earth with tenderness, compassion and concern also encompasses the care of human beings (91). There is a universal communion with everything and every person. Hence, human dignity excludes any cruel act against creatures (92).

The fruits of the earth are created for all human beings (93), and the poor have the same dignity as the rich (94). All must be responsible for the natural environment (95). Jesus took care of the creation by working with his hands so perfectly that when he performed miracles, people wondered, “Isn’t he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters living here?” (Mk 6:3).

Chapter 3 considers why human beings cause the ecological crisis. Human beings have continually intervened in nature. On the one hand, we take our hands to receive God’s gifts, but on the other hand, we lay our hands on nature (106). Technology is the main theme in this

chapter. Nowadays, technology has discovered many modern devices, which human beings can enjoy (102). We use them wisely to improve the quality of living and to beautify the world (103). However, the development of technologies must go along with responsibility, values and conscience (105). “There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm” (111). We should use our freedom to direct technology for good (112).

Human beings need to understand our right position in terms of respect to nature as stewards over God’s creation. Human beings and nature are interrelated. Failure to acknowledge the dignity of a poor person leads to failing to hear the cry of the earth (117). “A misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle” (122). Two main problems of technology today are the replacement of machines with human labor for immediate financial benefit (128) and wrong or excessive application of biological technologies (133).

Chapter 4 focuses on the integral ecology, which is also the center of this encyclical. Pope Francis provides a new paradigm for ecology that “respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings” (15). We can examine different fields such as designing houses, housing, moral law, transportation, communities, cultures, common good, and other areas, in different ways; these fields come together to respond to the ecological crisis of our time. We are different, but related to one another. Humankind and nature are not considered separate from each other, but “we are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (139). “Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (142).

Every sign has its meaning. The environment where we are living shows us how we are dealing with it. Our identity is expressed through the environment in our homes, offices, and neighborhoods (147). Our identity is revealed by words and deeds in the community where we are living and working.

Human ecology and the common good are connected (156). The basic and inalienable principle of the common good is that human rights are necessary for one's integral development (157). The common good of nature is used for both present generations and the next ones. "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (160). This question is also the center of *Laudato Si'*, which shows the purpose of human and social life.

Chapter 5 presents different kinds of dialogue to protect our common home because ecological crises cannot be solved by single countries, but by the whole world. It is important for all countries to participate in environmental agreements (164). Pope Francis evaluates, "recent World Summits on the environment have not lived up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment" (166).

Policies to protect the earth must be based on the common good (177) and long-term development (178). The policies are agreed upon through dialogues, since each country has different problems (180). The agreed policies are maintained throughout governments: they cannot be changed when government is replaced (181).

Decisions on the environment need discernment and transparency to bring "genuine integral development" (185) for "the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which

fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate” (182), and “particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (188).

Dialogue between politics and economy is also necessary for human fulfilment. The former must not be subordinate to the latter, and vice versa (189). Pope Francis offers this example of a dialogue for productive growth:

It could generate intelligent and profitable ways of reusing, revamping and recycling, and it could also improve the energy efficiency of cities. Productive diversification offers the fullest possibilities to human ingenuity to create and innovate, while at the same time protecting the environment and creating more sources of employment. Such creativity would be a worthy expression of our most noble human qualities, for we would be striving intelligently, boldly and responsibly to promote a sustainable and equitable development within the context of a broader concept of quality of life. (192)

Dialogue to correct the malfunctions and misapplications of the economy and its goals is essential (194). Additionally, politics needs to be far-sighted and able to have “a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis” (197).

Dialogue between sciences and religions is also needed because “Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world,” while “religions will be better equipped to respond to today’s needs” (200). Collaboration of various sciences, religions and different ecological movements will bring benefit for human life and our common home.

The last chapter of *Laudato Si’* calls human beings to ecological conversion; to examine our present lifestyle aims to create a new lifestyle (203-208). Pope Francis invites us to care for the earth for the sake of other people and to overcome individualism and this will help us form “a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society” (208).

Education plays an important role to address the ecological crisis, taking place in different settings: schools, families, media, churches, political offices, social groups, and other

places. “Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (210).

The individual and collective conversion to promote sustainability needs certain attitudes to nurture our care and compassion. The first are gratitude and gratuitousness since everything we have is from God. The second is loving awareness that we are part of the world. Third, conversion helps us to have a better creativity and enthusiasm for dealing with the world’s problems. Fourth, faith is needed to entail responsibility (220).

In addition, we must be moderate and avoid pleasure of dominion and accumulation. We should be content with what we have (222). The virtue of humility stresses that we depend on God and are part of the world; it will erase domination over the nature (224).

Interior peace leads to care for the environment and to promote the common good. An integral ecology means that we take time to redeem harmony with creation, which shows our lifestyle and ideals, and our contemplation of our Creator who is present among us (225).

Another attitude is the serene attentiveness which means that we are always willing to help others without considering what happens next, just as Jesus was totally present to all human beings and things (226).

When we care for the earth, we are able to live together in communion, which is “a universal fraternity” (228). We need one another, sharing responsibility for others and the world (229). “Social love is the key to authentic development” (231).

Finally, God the Father is the Creator; all things were created through the Son, and the Spirit is present in the universe (238). We encounter and discover God in all things (233).

Moreover, in liturgy, Christians worship and give praise to the Trinitarian God and are called to embrace the world (235).

Laudato Si' shows that God and God's creation are connected. When caring for the Mother Earth, we reveal our love to God the Creator and to others, especially the poor, who bear God's image.

The major theme of *Laudato Si'* is that everything is interrelated. It is discussed more than thirteen times¹⁸⁶ in the encyclical. Particularly, the relationship with God, self, others and nature is emphasized. The relationship with God, others and nature is ruptured by sin (66). Without cultivating and preserving the relationship with others, the relationship with self, others, God and the earth is ruined (70). Together, environmental education helps to redeem these four relationships (210). More details of this interrelatedness are in the following conclusion section.

¹⁸⁶ *Laudato Si'* §§16, 42, 66, 70, 91, 92, 111, 116, 138, 162, 210, 220, and 240.

Conclusion

The introduction and four chapters presented above prove the primary objective of this study: to investigate our relationships with God, self, others and nature. These relationships for human beings are completely connected. Human beings and other creatures cannot exist without God's sustenance. Moreover, human beings cannot inherit eternal life by ourselves no matter how many good things we do. Still, to be fully human, we must embrace and care for the relationships with God, self, others and nature. However, God does not need any of these relationships to be God. God exists alone and needs nothing to be. Still, God chooses to be in relationship with us!

From the beginning, human beings were holy because they lived in harmony with God, themselves, others and nature. We are called to keep these relationships well. However, after human beings disobeyed God by eating the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, these relationships were broken. Accordingly, each and every person has been invited to be holy by redeeming the relationships with God, self, others and nature so that the original state God created human beings can be restored.

It is God who made human beings and called us to be holy as God is holy. God does not call animals or plants to be holy, but human beings only. Those who live a life of holiness keep themselves *from* the profane and *for* doing God's work. Human beings are invited to be holy because we are created *in* God's image and *for* God, ourselves, others and nature. God made us co-creators with God who created the universe.

The most important relationship of our human life is to live with God because to relate to self, others and nature will be possible if the relationship with God is well-kept. Based on our relation to God, all relations will be established. Moreover, our relationship with God will be

developed through living the theological virtues, obedience, faithfulness and prayer. Through faith in God, we are able to love God, obey God's commands, and remain faithful and connected to God through prayer.

As God's image, we develop the relationship not only with God but also with ourselves; Thomas Merton wrote, "For me, to be a saint means to be myself."¹⁸⁷ To be ourselves, we should know who we are. The more we know God, the more we know ourselves because God is our Creator. Discernment helps us to better know God and ourselves. We need to examine and discern our words and deeds: what is of God and what is of the world so that we may make right decisions and go toward right direction that God plans for God's creation. When we know that we are sinners, we ought to acknowledge our sins, repent from doing evil, turn to God, and do God's works. Our existence is for doing good as all of God's works are good. What Jesus did in his human life, we, as Jesus' disciples, are called to follow in his steps. Finally, we are invited to make our lives pure so that we may "go up to God's hill" (Ps 24:3-4).

When we love God, we also have to love others as ourselves. That is the double commandment of God: Love God and our neighbors. We relate to others individually and collectively. We become poor and humble so that others may become rich. All God created is for God and others. Particularly, living together in the world, we sinners ought to forgive one another's sins so that we may live in harmony. This is a condition for us to be forgiven. Because we are wounded by sin, we are sent to go out and bandage one another's wounds, especially those of the poor and vulnerable as Jesus, the Good Samaritan, came and healed our sinful wound.

God created creation and is the Master of creation. Every creature belongs to God. We discover the Trinitarian God present in all creatures because they are sacramental and

¹⁸⁷ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, 26.

interconnected. Human beings are also part of this creation. God commands us to care for God's creation. Hence, we, God's stewards, should manage God's creation well. However, looking at God's creation today, Pope Francis sees that there are many ecological problems such as pollution, climate change, lack of clean water, loss of different species, decline of the quality of the human life, and global inequality. He calls every person and country all over the world to care for Mother Earth, where we are living. He suggests different attitudes and kinds of dialogue to redeem the earth and to better stewards of creation.

Pope Francis states several times in *Laudato Si'* that everything is interconnected. When we care for the earth, we respect God the Creator and also care for others, especially the poor. Therefore, the relationships with God, self, others and nature are also interrelated.

Faith helps us trust God and obey God's teachings. Without faith, we cannot love God, self, others and nature with our whole strength, mind, soul, and heart. God always respects our freedom, but we are called to follow God's commands.

To love human beings, Jesus emptied himself and became human like us except in sin so that we may become rich and be saved. He came to restore our relationship with God, one another, and nature. To love God, others and the earth, we are called to empty ourselves so that other human beings and the environment may become rich and have life abundantly. Loving God entails loving self, others and nature. In return, when loving ourselves, others, and nature, we also love God.

The relationships with God, self, others and nature have been broken, but Christians hope that one day a new heaven and earth will be established. It is the virtue of hope that enables us remain faithful to our human vocation as God's human beings and keep fulfilling our responsibilities as God's stewards. No matter what happens in life, we must remain faithful to

God and our human vocation. Those who are faithful to God until the end will be saved (Mt 24:13).

In short, the best way to be fully human is to live the relationships with God, self, others and nature well. The best way to be holy is also to live these relationships well. We live these relationships not for some years of life, but our entire life. Accordingly, to be holy is to be fully human.

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