

saint mary's press

LIVE JESUS IN OUR HEARTS

MORALITY AND GOD'S LOVE

BRIAN SINGER-TOWNS

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High School Framework Course 6

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Thanks and Dedication

A very special thank you to our student contributors: Mattias and Karla from Seton Catholic Preparatory School in Chandler, AZ; Victoria and Mike from Red Bank Catholic High School in Red Bank, NJ; and Demetrios from Our Lady of the Hills College Preparatory School in Kerrville, TX.

Dedicated to my parents, Mick and Trudy, whose moral compass has always been straight and true.

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UNIT 1

Foundational Principles
for Christian Morality

HOW DO
I KNOW
WHAT IS
"GOOD"?



LOOKING AHEAD

CHAPTER 1 Page 10

Moral Choices and God's Plan

CHAPTER 2 Page 34

The Law of God

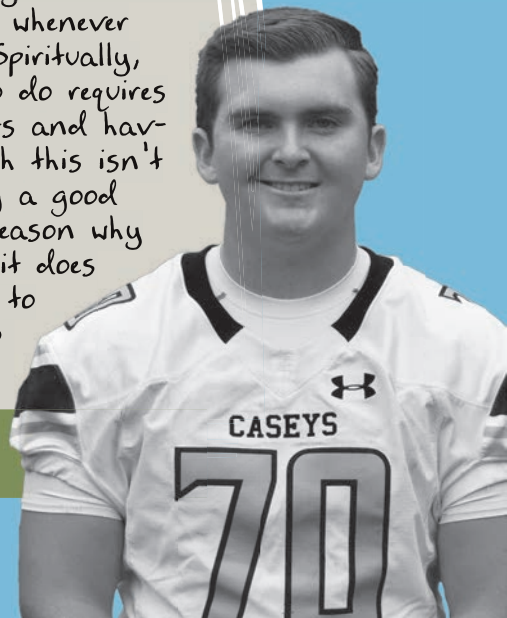
CHAPTER 3 Page 58

Sin and Its Consequences

The way I act, being good, determines my reputation. Your reputation follows you everywhere you go, so you must put your best foot forward whenever interacting with someone. Spiritually, knowing the right thing to do requires following the commandments and having strong morals, although this isn't always easy to do. Having a good reputation isn't the only reason why it matters how I act, but it does motivate me to always try to know what is good and to act the best I can.

MIKE

Red Bank Catholic High School



CHAPTER 1

Moral Choices and God's Plan

WHY DOES IT MATTER
HOW I ACT?

SNAPSHOT

Article 1 Page 11

Created for Love and Happiness

- Pre-read: Genesis 1:24–31

Article 2 Page 15

Genesis, Chapter 3: Freedom and Original Sin

- Pre-read: Genesis, chapter 3

Article 3 Page 20

The Beatitudes: New Life in Christ

- Pre-read: Matthew 5:3–12

Article 4 Page 26

Justification and Sanctification

- Pre-read: Romans 3:21–31, 5:12–21

Article 1

Created for Love and Happiness

Are you happy? Not just the momentary feeling you get when someone pays you a compliment or when you eat your favorite ice cream . . . but deep down are you at peace, a peace that would last even if you lost your cell phone? Are you filled with a love and gratitude that stays with you even when life doesn't go your way? Here's an important spiritual truth to base your life on: God made us to live in loving communion with him and with one another. Only by doing so will we experience true peace and happiness.

God's Revelation made known to us through Scripture and Tradition is based on one core truth: God created human beings to live in loving relationship with him. Stop and think about this for a moment. It is easy to take this amazing truth for granted. God, the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-knowing Mystery who is beyond anything we can understand or imagine, wants to be in loving communion with us for all eternity. We should never take this lightly or for granted; it is the reason the Psalms are filled with praise and thanksgiving: "So that my glory may praise you / and not be silent. / O LORD, my God, / forever I will give you thanks" (30:13).

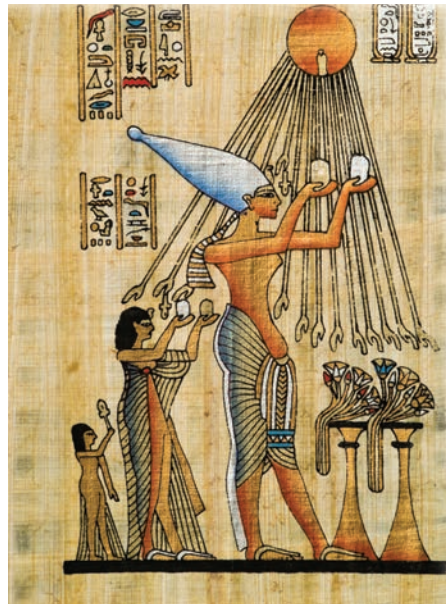
TAKE IT TO GOD

God, I've tried to change,
 over and over again with the same results.
 I end up in the same place I started
 only more discouraged than before.
 So I place myself in your loving hands
 and acknowledge that I am powerless to change without your grace.
 Give me the desire that I need to change my life
 to turn away from sin and turn toward you.
 For I trust that with your help all things are possible,
 even the conversion of my stubborn heart.
 All praise to you.
 Amen.

Let's explore this fundamental truth further with a thought experiment. Let's think about how different things would be if God had a different purpose in creating human beings. For example, some ancient people believed that the gods (they often believed in more than one god) created human beings for the gods' amusement. Or they believed that human beings were created to feed the egos of the gods by worshipping them. If this were indeed the reason human beings were created, what would it mean for how we live? It could certainly mean some of the following things, and you could probably come up with many other implications:

- We would be at the mercy of the gods' changing whims and desires. An action that might please your god today could change tomorrow and leave you doing the wrong thing.
- Because the gods' value system is self-centered, focused on feeding their own egos and desires, then we human beings would imitate those values and would focus on only our own egos and desires.
- We would be in competition with other people for the gods' attention and rewards.
- Our understanding of love would be fundamentally changed. Rather than being freely given and freely received, love would have to be earned. This would make love relationships open to manipulation and difficult to trust.

Living in such a world doesn't sound like much fun, does it? But some people reading this might say, "Wait, that's the world I live in!" The sad reality is that as a result of Original Sin, many people do not know the truth about God. And even when we know the truth, the effects of Original Sin make it difficult to live as God calls us to live. We see this in many of the false values in the world: greed, dishonesty, revenge. This is why idolatry, the primary sin against the First Commandment, is probably the most prevalent sin in our world. Our lips confess belief in the one true God, but our actions indicate that we are living the values of false gods, gods that do not exist.



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People in some cultures believed that they needed to keep their gods and goddesses happy through offerings and sacrifices.

But there's good news! Even though human beings lost the original state of perfect, loving communion that Adam and Eve enjoyed, God has been at work throughout history to restore us to full communion with him. The life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ are the fulfillment of God's saving plan. When we make choices to follow Christ, we participate in God's saving plan and will know true peace and happiness, a peace and happiness that the world cannot give.

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We are made in God's image with a soul, intellect, and free will. What does that mean for you?

Created in God's Image and Likeness

Another fundamental truth revealed in Genesis makes it clear what our relationship with him should be like: "Then God said: 'Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness'" (1:26). In making us in his image, God spiritually connects us to himself and destines us for eternal happiness. We are endowed with a soul that allows us to be in true, loving communion with him, both now and for all eternity. Let's look briefly at the nature of the soul and two of its faculties: intellect and free will.

At our conception, we are given a spiritual **soul**, a divine gift that is unique to human beings. Our soul is the innermost aspect of ourselves. It is immortal, and it is what animates our bodies and makes us human. The soul and the

soul ► Our spiritual principle, it is immortal, and it is what makes us most like God. Our souls are created by God at the moment of our conception. It is the seat of human consciousness and freedom.

body are not two different natures, however. Because the body and soul are completely united, they form a single nature—a human nature. Our soul will live on after our death until it is united with our resurrected body at the Last Judgment. Having a soul means that God has given us the ability to be in communion with him in a way that is not limited by time or space.

God also gives every human person the gift of **intellect**. Intellect does not mean having a high IQ. Having intellect means that we have the ability to see and understand the order of things that God has established. Our intellect allows us to distinguish between what is truly good and what only appears to be good. Having an intellect means that God has given us the ability to understand how to be in communion with him.

The gift of **free will** makes it possible for us to choose the good that our reason enables us to understand. Because of human freedom, our actions are not predetermined by instinct or DNA (although these and other factors do impact our decision-making ability). Because we have free will, we are each individually responsible for our actions and accountable for our moral choices. Having free will means that we have the ability to choose to be in loving communion with God or the opposite—that is, we can misuse our freedom and reject him. Our free will is a clear sign that God is not manipulative; he does not force us to love him. True freedom is a manifestation of the image of God present in every person.

Our soul, with its intellect and free will, gives us a special dignity and a special place in God's plan. They orient us toward God and make it possible for us to be in a loving relationship with him that is unique among all his creatures. But to paraphrase the comic-book hero Spiderman, "With great gifts comes great responsibility." Our intellect and free will also make it possible for us to turn away from God. Thus, we now turn to the tragic side of salvation history, the reality of Original Sin and our separation from God. We must understand our history so that we can learn from it. *

HMMMMM...

Why does having a soul, intellect, and free will also give us a unique responsibility for caring for creation?

intellect ► The divine gift that gives us the ability to see and understand the order of things that God places within creation and to know and understand God through the created order.

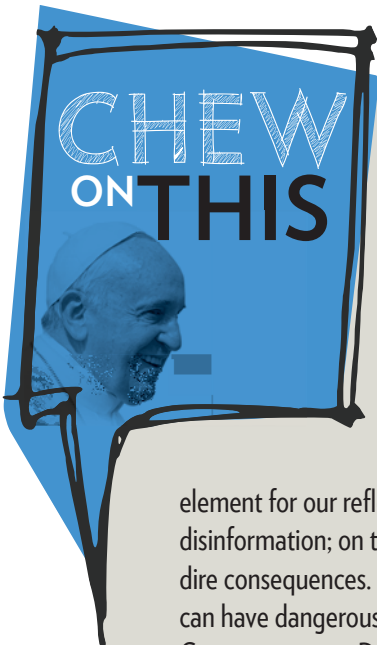
free will ► The gift from God that allows human beings to choose from among various actions, for which we are held accountable. It is the basis for moral responsibility.

Article 2

Genesis, Chapter 3: Freedom and Original Sin

Monique was struggling to understand the idea of Original Sin in her religion class. “So,” she asked her teacher, “you’re saying that because Adam and Eve disobeyed God thousands of years ago, we have to suffer for that too?” Her teacher smiled in understanding. “I get why this seems unfair,” he replied, “but don’t forget that this is a symbolic story told to teach us a spiritual truth, not a scientific reality. This spiritual truth is profound. It teaches that we are all connected to one another throughout time and space. The good and the evil that we do impacts others, even across great distances of time and space. It’s a mystery, but that first sin has the greatest impact of any sin in history. Doesn’t that kind of make sense?”

Although God wants each of us to live in perfect communion with him, he doesn’t force us to do so. Every person who has ever lived is free to accept or to reject God and his will for us. Adam and Eve, our first parents, exercised this freedom in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden (see Genesis, chapter 3).



We need to unmask what could be called the “snake-tactics” used by those who disguise themselves in order to strike at any time and place. This was the strategy employed by the “crafty serpent” in the Book of Genesis, who, at the dawn of humanity, created the first fake news (see Genesis 3:1–15), which began the tragic history of human sin. . . . This biblical episode brings to light an essential

element for our reflection: there is no such thing as harmless disinformation; on the contrary, trusting in falsehood can have dire consequences. Even a seemingly slight distortion of the truth can have dangerous effects. (Pope Francis, “Message for World Communications Day,” January 24, 2018)

They chose to go against God's plan for them to live in perfect communion with God, with each other, and with all of creation. Their decision to eat the forbidden fruit affects each of us, everyone who came before us, and all those who will come after us.

Human Freedom and Moral Choice

Adam and Eve experienced the same choice that all humans have had to face: whether to choose what is good or to choose what is evil. And if Adam and Eve had a tough time resisting their forbidden fruit, how much more challenged are we by the world we live in? Every day, we are surrounded by thousands of messages that tell us that true happiness is found in the number of friends we have, the kind of phone we use, the clothes we wear, and what our body looks like. The pursuit of popularity, pleasure, and wealth are temptations that distract us from the authentic happiness that comes from true, loving relationships with God and with one another.

But that's where our free will comes in. Unlike animals, whose instinct drives their actions, we can think about the moral aspects of our behavior both before and after we act. Our free will allows us to choose to act in ways that are consistent with God's plan for us to live in loving relationship with him and with one another. We can choose to resist those temptations that lead us away from God, because we are free to do so. Of course, freedom also means that we are responsible for the choices we make, especially in religious and moral matters. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand.

MAKE IT SO

Consider this scenario. Grace had never been popular with her classmates. She'd always been seen as just a little different. On the last day of the semester, the teacher needed to leave the room for a few minutes. There was a dish of candy on her desk that hadn't been there before. Several of Grace's classmates urged her to take some of the candy because it must be out for them—even though the teacher hadn't said that. They said they'd take some too, if Grace did. Grace liked the attention, and she also liked candy. But she doubted whether she should really take some without the teacher's okay. What might be limiting Grace's ability to choose freely? If you were there, what would you advise Grace to do? Why?

Certain factors may affect our freedom when making a moral decision. For example, we might be ignorant of a rare side effect that a prescription drug will have on our behavior. Psychological factors, such as fear, can drive us to do things we would otherwise never think of doing. Likewise, strong social pressures may lessen the moral responsibility for some of our actions. These are not excuses for acting badly, but they are a recognition that we are not always acting with perfect freedom when we make moral decisions. Although circumstances may weaken our ability to choose good over evil, our free will—and the responsibility that comes with it—cannot be taken away.

The Results of Sin

Read the consequences that God pronounced for the snake, Eve, and Adam after their sin, in Genesis 3:14–19. These verses are examples of the literary style **etiology**. Ancient peoples used etiologies to explain why things are the way they are. In this etiology, because of their sinful choices, the snake has to crawl on its belly, Eve will now suffer pain in childbirth, and Adam will have to work hard to grow food for survival.



The biblical authors used etiologies to explain why snakes crawl and childbirth is painful. What stories does your family use to explain family customs or behaviors?

etiology ► A story that explains something's cause or origin.

Do not expect biblical etiologies to be scientific explanations about the causes of things. Rather, they creatively illustrate spiritual truths, rooted in the deep faith of the ancient Israelites. In this case, the spiritual truth is that there are negative consequences for our lives when we choose to disobey God.

This truth applies all the more to the condition we call **Original Sin**, another consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God. We are all affected by Original Sin: "Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, number 417). Adam and Eve did not receive their state of **original holiness** for themselves alone but for all of human nature. Thus, when they sinned, their sin did not affect just them but also their human nature, which was passed on to all their descendants.



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God did not create human beings for death. How would you explain God's plan for humanity to someone who had never heard of Christ's saving work?

Original Sin ► From the Latin *origo*, meaning “beginning” or “birth.” The term has two meanings: (1) the sin of the first human beings, who disobeyed God's command by choosing to follow their own will and thus lost their original holiness and became subject to death, (2) the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world, except Jesus and Mary.

original holiness ► The grace given to Adam and Eve in their original state by which they lived in close friendship with God.

Because of Original Sin, our human nature is wounded. Our relationship with God was broken with the loss of the grace of original holiness. We no longer walk in the garden with God as a close friend. Even though God greatly desires our friendship, we struggle to find him and trust him. With the loss of this friendship, we lost the grace of **original justice**, which was the harmony within ourselves, with one another, and with all creation. In our intellect, we experience difficulty knowing and understanding things we should easily know, like God's Law. Moral decisions are more difficult and confusing. This is the wound of ignorance. Our will is weakened and we have an inclination to sin, called **concupiscence**. We also experience suffering and death as a result of Original Sin. What God had warned Adam about has come true: "From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17).

Thanks be to God that these effects of Original Sin can be overcome by our faith in Christ and the grace that is given through the sacraments. ✱

HMMMMMM...

Where do you see the negative consequences of sin in the world today?

original justice ➤ The original state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Due to their friendship with God, they were at harmony within themselves, with each other, and with all creation.

concupiscence ➤ The tendency of all human beings toward sin, as a result of Original Sin.

Article 3

The Beatitudes: New Life in Christ

If you have ever tried to make a positive change in your life, you probably discovered how hard it can be. Whether committing to spending more time in prayer, working harder in school, or getting more physical exercise, the majority of people give up on such commitments within a month! The effort required to change seems too much for us, and we give up.

Now think about God. After the Fall, he did not abandon humankind. The inspiring stories of the Old Testament reveal to us that after Adam and Eve's sin, God was at work to get human beings to turn away from sin and to turn toward him. He called Abraham to be the father of a Chosen People. Through Moses, he formed a sacred covenant with his Chosen People and gave them Divine Law to teach them how to live as a holy people. He gave them rituals and the priesthood so they could unite with him and with one another in prayerful worship. When the people failed to keep their covenant commitments, God called judges, kings, and prophets to lead them back to him. You might be justified in thinking that if anyone has reason to give up on us, surely it is God.

But God never gives up on humanity, both communally and individually. You have studied **salvation history** and the **Paschal Mystery** in other courses. You know how God the Father sent his only begotten Son as his ultimate saving act. You know how Jesus Christ saves us from sin and death through his suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. You know that those who believe in Christ have new life in the Holy Spirit. The battle against sin and death has been won. In light of this reality, every person in the world faces a question only he or she can answer: Will you answer Christ's call to place your faith in him?

salvation history ► The pattern of specific events in human history in which God clearly reveals his presence and saving actions. Salvation was accomplished once and for all through Jesus Christ, a truth foreshadowed and revealed throughout the Old Testament.

Paschal Mystery ► The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.



This is a painting from the Church of the Transfiguration on the top of Mount Tabor in Israel. The tablet that Moses is holding and the light around his forehead symbolize the divine truth provided by God's Law.

Called to Beatitude

Perhaps you have never thought about what your goal in life is. Lots of people don't give it much thought. We just go with the flow, doing whatever our family and friends are doing. Advertising and social media often guide what we want and how we act. And then one day, something happens that makes us wake up and ask: "What am I doing with my life? What is going to bring me true happiness?" Hopefully, we ask these questions sooner than later! Unfortunately, for some people, this doesn't happen until they've experienced a great loss or have gone into a deep depression. God doesn't wish this for us, of course. He'd much rather we seriously listen to the truths he has revealed when we are young. An important revealed truth is that the Beatitudes can help us find our purpose in life and become the people God wants us to be.

In calling us to place our faith in him, Christ calls us to an entirely new vision of life. This vision is expressed in the Beatitudes. You will find these in Matthew 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–26. If you haven't read them in a while, look them up and read them again. They present a vision of life that is radically different from the vision of life held by many people, both in Jesus' time and in our time. Just consider the meaning of the first beatitude in Matthew: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, / for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Being poor in spirit is the opposite of being self-centered or egotistical. It means putting other people's needs before our own. It means trusting in God, not

just in ourselves, for what we need. And living this way comes with a promise, that we shall be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, both in this life and for all eternity with God in Heaven.

The other seven beatitudes are just as radical in their implications. They illustrate the paradoxes of God's wisdom. It is only in looking to other people's needs that our deepest needs will be met. It is only in letting ourselves feel grief that we shall know God's comfort. It is only in being persecuted for doing what is right that we shall be worthy of Heaven. As we begin to understand the meaning of each beatitude, we start to see the incredible life that Christ calls us to as his disciples. That life we might call a life of **beatitude**.



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Which of the Beatitudes makes you feel most like you have found your purpose in life?

The Beatitudes teach us our vocation as Christians, the goal of our existence. We call this goal by different names: coming into the Kingdom of God, the beatific vision, entering into the joy of the Lord, being adoptive children of God (also called divine filiation), or entering into God's rest. By living the Beatitudes, we begin to experience on Earth the happiness that God has wanted human beings to know from the beginning of creation. A life of beatitude purifies our hearts and prepares us for the eternal happiness and joy that will come when we enter into perfect communion with the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

beatitude ► Our vocation as Christians, the goal of our existence. It is true blessedness or happiness that we experience partially here on Earth and perfectly in Heaven.

Living the Beatitudes	
Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12)	Modern Meaning
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Be humble; do not be attached to material possessions; trust in God to provide all that you need.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.	Be aware and supportive to other people's hardships and losses; do not ignore someone who is suffering.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.	Respect other people's freedom, and be gentle in your relationships; do not be pushy or manipulative.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.	Treat other people with respect, and work for justice for all people and the Earth itself; do not participate in unjust systems and structures.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.	Forgive yourself and others, even those who have hurt you the most; do not hold on to grudges.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.	Practice charity (loving kindness), chastity (sexual purity), and love of truth (orthodoxy); do not expose yourself to the things—especially the addictive things—that will harm your heart, body, and faith.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.	Be a peacemaker and a bridge-builder by listening to those with different ideas and opinions and seeking truth wherever it might be found; never let anger alone guide your actions.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Do what is right and speak the truth, even if it means some people, including your family and friends, will disagree with you or get upset.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.	If you do all these things, you will not be popular with everyone, but you will find true peace and true happiness, both in this life and in the next!

Living the Beatitudes brings meaning to our moral choices. For example, the Beatitudes promise that we will know happiness by embracing the hardships of life, not by avoiding them. They promise that we will know true joy by pursuing righteousness (or justice) and peace, not by pursuing wealth, fame,

CATHOLICS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Saint Martin de Porres (1579–1639) was born in Peru in the sixteenth century. His father was a Spanish nobleman, and his mother was a freed African slave. His family lived in poverty because Martin's father abandoned him and his mother. Perhaps worse, Martin was ridiculed and demeaned because of his mixed race. Because of Peruvian law at the time, he was not allowed to become a full member of the Dominicans, despite his deep desire to join this religious order. As a lay volunteer, Martin was assigned only the most menial tasks, which he did with love and grace. Eventually, he became a Dominican brother and was made head of the Dominican infirmary where he had an incredible healing ministry. Treating slave and nobleperson alike, Martin lived the Beatitudes of Christ by becoming one with those who endured poverty, grief, and persecution.



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The Holy Trinity: Our Compass and Our Strength

Through our Baptism, we are already on our way to living a life of beatitude. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, Original Sin and all personal sin are washed away, removing our separation from God. We die to sin and the false promises of Satan, which lead only to unhappiness and eternal death. We are reborn to a new life in Christ, which leads to true happiness and eternal life. As baptized people, we trust God to do for us what we cannot do by ourselves.

God provides us with what we need to live the Beatitudes. Through Scripture and Tradition, he provides the compass, showing us the way to live as disciples. Through the graces given in Baptism, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments, we are provided with the strength we need. Called by God the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and guided by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we constantly grow closer to the Holy Trinity

through our moral choices. God alone reveals to us that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central truth of the Christian faith. Through grace, we move toward the goal of Christian life, which is union with the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

Living the Beatitudes isn't the easiest way to live. Jesus himself acknowledges this: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13–14). At times, it will be tempting to give up trying to live a moral life. We can come up with a thousand reasons to justify a decision we know deep down is wrong. But even if we give in to temptation, God never gives up on us. Since Adam and Eve's sin, God has been at work, gently calling us to true happiness and joy. We must put our faith in Jesus Christ and never stop asking God to be our compass and our strength. *

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Scripture and Tradition provide the divine compass that shows us the way to live a life of beatitude.

HMMMMM... . .

Which of the Beatitudes do you find the most challenging to accept or to live out?

Article 4

Justification and Sanctification

Why should we be good? Do you do good things so that you can win the reward of Heaven? Or is being good a result of putting your faith in Jesus? Maybe you've had discussions on this question with someone who has asked whether you believe we are saved by our faith or by our (good) works.

In past centuries, these questions have been the cause of angry disagreement between some Christians. Thankfully, ecumenical discussions in the last few decades have resulted in greater clarity about these questions and in wider recognition of the truth that God has revealed: We are saved through God's work, not our own efforts. Our primary goal in Christian morality is to collaborate with God's grace, not to try to earn our way into Heaven.

Justified by the Grace of Christ

In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul spends a lot of time talking about how Christ saves us from sin and death. He argues that sin entered the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. Since then, every human being—except Mary—has been guilty of sin and is unworthy of sharing in God's holiness. The Old Law, rather than saving us, actually condemns us, because no one has been able to follow it perfectly; but it does help make us conscious of our sin. Our good works cannot save us because by themselves they cannot restore our holiness.

Read Romans 5:12–21. In this section, Saint Paul compares the sin of Adam to the gift of grace we receive through Jesus Christ. He uses an argument style common among Jewish teachers of the time: If some human action has a negative or positive result, God's response to that action is that much greater and more wonderful! Using this type of argument, Paul teaches that even though Adam and Eve's sin brought a great evil into the world, how much greater is the good that comes from God's response! In Paul's own words:

But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many. . . . For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace

and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all. (Romans 5:15,17-18)

The process by which God's grace frees us from sin and sanctifies us (makes us holy) is called **justification**. Think of it this way: through our faith in Christ and the Sacrament of Baptism, we become a new person, an adopted son or daughter of God who shares in Christ's righteousness. Through Christ's Passion and the sanctifying grace received at Baptism, Original Sin is erased. Though the consequences of Original Sin remain, we receive an even greater blessing than the original holiness enjoyed by Adam and Eve. Without the separation caused by sin, harmony with ourselves, with God, and with one another is again possible. God grants us this wonderful gift through Baptism because it is through our Baptism that we unite ourselves to Christ's Passion and share in his death and Resurrection.



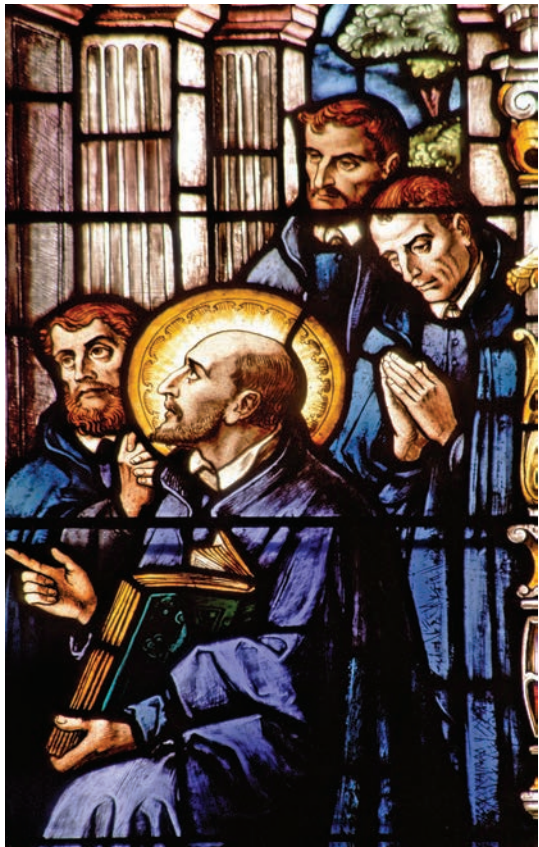
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How is Baptism related to the process of justification? Why is it such a joyful sacrament?

justification ► God's action of bringing a sinful human being into right relationship with him. It involves the removal of sin and the gift of God's sanctifying grace to renew holiness.

Our justification, being made right again with God, is entirely a work of his grace in us. The Holy Spirit is the one who prompts us and moves us toward conversion of heart. His grace justifies us in Baptism, freeing us from Original Sin and personal sins, and his grace continues to make us holy, or **sanctifies** us, as we cooperate with him to do good and avoid evil. We are nourished and healed from sin on our journey by prayer and by his grace in the sacraments. As we become more and more holy, we become more like Christ. We bring glory to God here on Earth, and after our death we shall continue to give him glory in Heaven.

Making these ideas a little more concrete might be helpful. Consider the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuit order. In his early life, Ignatius was determined to become a distinguished nobleman, and he was not considered to be particularly religious. He enjoyed the pursuits of young nobles: gambling, sword fighting, and chasing women. But at the age of thirty, all his noble pursuits came to a halt when he was struck by a cannonball, injuring both of his legs. This turned out to be an occasion for a special grace in his life.



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God's grace was active in Saint Ignatius of Loyola's life long before he was aware of it. Saint Ignatius allowed God's gifts of forgiveness and righteousness to bear great fruit in his life.



I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains this quote from Saint Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 297–373): “The Son of God became man, so that we might become god” (number 460). Of course, he did not mean that we literally become God, but that through grace we are able to be united with God. The Eastern Catholic Churches call this process *theosis*, or deification, and it is similar to justification. There are three stages in the process of deification:

1. The first stage is *katharsis*, or purification. In this stage, we remove sin from our lives so that we can focus on God.
2. The second stage is *theoria*, or illumination. In this stage, we come to know and experience what it means to be fully human through our communion with Jesus Christ.
3. The last stage of the *process*, *theosis*, comes from a Greek word meaning “divinization.” As we put into perfect practice the teachings of Jesus Christ, we become saints who are in the fullest communion with God that is possible in this life. Divinization will be fully realized only with our own resurrection.

During his long recuperation, Ignatius began reading about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. Thus began his conversion. Ignatius came to believe that modeling one’s life on the example of Christ was a worthy goal and eventually became convinced that such a life would be more satisfying than life in a royal court. He repented of his previous sins and was determined to change. A series of fortunate events led him to spend ten months living in simple circumstances while praying and studying the spiritual life. God had begun the process of justification in Ignatius’s life. The rest of his life would be marked by the desire to discover God’s will and to do it, despite numerous challenges and setbacks. Sanctified through the grace of God, Ignatius achieved true holiness. He was declared a saint in 1622. You can find more about the life of Saint Ignatius in a saints book or by asking a Jesuit priest or brother about him.

God's Work and Our Collaboration

The theological concept of **merit** is sometimes used to describe our standing in the eyes of God. In general, merit refers to the compensation owed by a community or to a community for the actions of its members. Merit can be a reward, or it can be a punishment. In the theological sense, having merit means that God sees us as justified persons, free from sin and sanctified by his grace. Or it can mean that God sees us in need of merit, that we have not accepted his forgiveness and grace.



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What is your answer to the question: Why be good?

It should be clear from all you have learned so far that “no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, number 2010). God takes the initiative for our salvation by freely choosing to share his love, his grace, and his forgiveness with us. God first initiates, and then we respond. If our response is the response of faith in Jesus Christ and the reception of Baptism, we become collaborators in God’s saving work. So, the merit we have in the sight of God is first and foremost God’s free gift to us and then we grow in merit through our active participation in his saving plan.

merit ► God’s reward to those who love him and by his grace perform good works. To have merit is to be justified in the sight of God, free from sin and sanctified by his grace. We do not “merit” justification or eternal life; the source of any merit we have is due to the grace of Christ in us.

This brings us back to the original question: Why should we be good? We should be good because that is how God made us. We should be good because God has given us a share in his life and his love. We should be good because God has given us his grace to justify us and to sanctify us so that we can live in perfect communion with him and all the saints for all eternity. Any other reasons, such as trying to impress others, trying to gain social status, or even trying to earn our way into Heaven, will eventually backfire because they put us at the center of our moral choices rather than putting God at the center. ✱

HMMMMMM...

Why do people shy away from the idea of becoming holy?



1. Why are human beings unique among all of God's creation?
2. Briefly describe the three God-given gifts that allow us to live in true, loving communion with God.
3. What are some factors that can diminish our freedom and lessen the moral responsibility of our resulting actions?
4. What is concupiscence?
5. Describe what it means to live the Beatitudes.
6. How does God provide us with the direction and the strength to live a life of beatitude?
7. Define *justification*.
8. How do we gain merit in the sight of God?



ART STUDY

Can you identify the symbolism in this painting of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

1. Why are Adam and Eve naked?
2. What do the animals in the painting symbolize?
3. What is the meaning of the body language between Adam and Eve?



Live, Jesus, in our hearts . . . forever!

—Saint John Baptist de La Salle



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