

1. Read (Seek) — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. Meditate (Find) — Now begin to reflect on the verses and ask God what it means and how he wants to speak to you through the passage. **God what are you saying to me through this?**

3. Pray (Ask) — Respond from your heart to what God has been saying to you. **What do you want me to know?** Write down your prayer to him or record whatever he says to you.

4. Contemplate (Taste) — Be quiet before the Lord enjoying His presence. **How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

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[1] Saint John Paul II, Homily Philadelphia, 3 October 1979

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 27

Quick Connect

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Gospel Reading – Matthew 22:15-21 – Roman Missal

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Spiritual Reading

From Saint John Paul II

The Declaration of Independence [contains] a solemn attestation of the equality of all human beings, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, expressing a "firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." These are sound moral principles formulated by your Founding Fathers and enshrined forever in your history. In the human and civil values that are contained in the spirit of this Declaration there are easily recognized strong connections with basic religious and Christian values...As citizens, you must strive to preserve these human values, to understand them better and to define their consequences for the whole community, and as a worthy contribution to the world. As Christians, you must strengthen these human values and complement them by confronting them with the Gospel message, so that you may discover their deeper meaning, and thus assume more fully your duties and obligations toward your fellow human beings, with whom you are bound in a common destiny. In a way, for us, who know Jesus Christ, human and Christian values are but two aspects of the same reality: the reality of man, redeemed by Christ and called to the fullness of eternal life...It is then in Jesus Christ that every man, woman and child is called to find the answer to the questions regarding the values that will inspire his or her personal and social relations...These values are strengthened: when power and authority are exercised in full respect for all the fundamental rights of the human person, whose dignity is the dignity of one created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26); when freedom is accepted, not as an absolute end in itself, but as a gift

that enables self-giving and service; when the family is protected and strengthened, when its unity is preserved, and when its role as the basic cell of society is recognized and honored. Human-Christian values triumph when the system is reformed that authorizes the exploitation of any human being; when upright service and honesty in public servants is promoted; when the dispensing of justice is fair and the same for all; when responsible use is made of the material and energy resources of the world – resources that are meant for the benefit of all; when the environment is preserved intact for the future generations. Human-Christian values triumph by subjecting political and economic considerations to human dignity, by making them serve the cause of man – every person created by God, every brother and sister redeemed by Christ.

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness – Lesson and Discussion

"Whose image is this?"

Does government exist to serve the people or do people exist to serve the government? We would think that the government exists to serve the people. The government like any institution consists of individuals. Each individual is responsible not to serve “the people” but “the person.” When people are served rather than the person, the dignity of the human person can be lost. In the life of Mother Teresa we see an individual not serving “the people” but “the individual person.” Blessed Mother Teresa was known to hold out her hand and pointing to each finger would say, “You did it to me.” Each finger reminded her of each word. When Mother Teresa saw a person she had no question as to, “Whose image is this.” She knew that when she encountered each individual Jesus was saying, “You did it to me.” Mother Teresa lived out the words of Saint John Paul II. “Human-Christian values triumph by subjecting political and economic considerations to human dignity, by making them serve the cause of man – every person created by God, every brother and sister redeemed by Christ.” Government should not serve the cause of “the people” but rather “the person,” keeping in mind the dignity of the individual and the image they are made in.

In the early 1990’s, Cannon had the slogan “Image is everything”. Jesus’s teaching is centered on image. **What image are we serving? Are we concerned about our image and preserving and promoting our image? Are we concerned about the images on our material things, the endorsements and icons of popular culture? Are we concerned with the image of God, imprinted on each individual?** We have to wonder if politicians are more concerned with serving their own image, rather than the image of God found in each individual. In campaign ads, the image of the candidate is highlighted and the image of the opposing candidate is trashed, while the image of God in each person is completely ignored.

What does image mean to the world? What does image mean to God? Image is so important to the world that billions of dollars are spent each year on advertisement, logos, trademarks, etc. The name

“LEGO” is so important to the company that every piece and even the smallest piece has “LEGO” printed on it. If companies care this much about their name, how much more so does God care about His name and image? Man is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore, God is written on the hearts of each person. (Romans 2:15)

Which of the inalienable rights should be the top priority? A youth asked a bishop this question in a catechesis session during World Youth Day 2008. The bishop, similar to Jesus in the Gospel, answered the question by asking a question. He asked the crowd what inalienable rights human beings were endowed with. The crowd said, “Life, Liberty and Happiness.” The bishop went on to explain that the priorities need to be in that order: Life, Liberty, and Happiness. He also explained that in our modern society many people vote based first on what will bring them happiness, issues like the economy, taxes, jobs and other self-interests. Second, people vote on what will bring them security, issues like border security, military, etc. Lastly, people vote on life issues, the dignity of the human person. The bishop said these priorities should be reversed and people should consider first life, then liberty and lastly the pursuit of happiness.

What is the reality of man? First, Christ redeems man. Second, man is called to the fullness of eternal life. “In a way, for us, who know Jesus Christ, human and Christian values are but two aspects of the same reality: the reality of man, redeemed by Christ and called to the fullness of eternal life...”[1]

What does it mean that Christ redeems man? One thing it means is that man is fallen, every man. Every man is equal in at least one thing, and that is that they are fallen. A second thing that this means is Christ offers redemption to all men with no exception. God redeems the world by redeeming each individual. Each person is worth redeeming, no one is disposable and no one is unnecessary.

What does it mean that man is called to the fullness of eternal life? Man is called to live life to the full, a fullness that does not consist only in a temporal life, but an eternal life as well. The material goods we have, the ideas and agendas that we hold should help man live life to the full, now and later. Ideas and goods should be at the service of both the temporal and the eternal. Most of all ideas and goods should not be an end in themselves but a means to the most important end, “fullness of eternal life.”

How do we know that man is called to the fullness of eternal life? “The desire of God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”[2]